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DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*

(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

Dé Máirt, 10 *Bealtaine* 2011.

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 10 *Bealtaine* 2011.
Tuesday, 10 *May* 2011.

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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Ceisteanna — Questions

Commemorative Events

1. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide details of official commemorations which are either scheduled or under consideration to be held during the next three years. [8194/11]

2. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the official commemorations under consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9265/11]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 and 2 together.

Further to my response on this subject on 12 April, I have recently written to party leaders regarding the re-establishment of the Oireachtas consultation group in relation to the commemorative programme for the centenary anniversaries in the period to 2016. Subject to the responses received, I hope the group will be re-established in the coming weeks. I am aware of the keen interest in the Oireachtas and of members of the public in the development of the commemorative programme.

In addition to the centenary programme, commemorations of other notable events will be organised or assisted by my Department. These include the annual Great Famine commemoration in May by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the annual Daniel O'Connell commemoration in May in association with the Glasnevin Trust and the annual July Somme commemoration in association with the Royal British Legion. Prominent among the possibilities under consideration are the centenary of the *Titanic* voyage in 2012 and the millennium of the Battle of Clontarf in 2014. I would be grateful to receive suggestions from Deputies with regard to other occasions of national significance they would recommend for consideration.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Department of the Taoiseach is, by and large, the lead Department for commemorations. A significant distinction has been drawn between permanent State commemorations such as that at Arbour Hill and once-off programmes such as the Famine and 1798 commemorations. Our commemorations have been successful because they have not

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

been partisan or tribal but have commemorated broad national movements. I am sure it is the Taoiseach's intention to maintain this policy and approach. The 1916 and National Day of Commemoration events are valuable. Recent events have demonstrated the significant degree of public interest and engagement in such commemorations. The 90th anniversary of the 1916 Rising is a good illustration of such interest.

My party has received correspondence from the Taoiseach on nominees for the consultation group. We have made a decision in the matter which we will forward to the Taoiseach. Has he considered the possibility of handing over responsibility for the entire commemoration agenda to the Oireachtas for it to work and deliberate on?

I do not propose to comment on the millennium of the Battle of Clontarf other than to suggest Deputy Finian McGrath will have an informed perspective on ongoing battles in Clontarf.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The Deputy is welcome to Clontarf any time.

The Taoiseach: I confirm to Deputy Martin that it is the Government's intention and the intention of my Department that these commemorations should first be discussed in a broad sense, should be sensitive and should be co-operative, where that is appropriate. I look forward to receiving responses from other party leaders as to who they wish to nominate to the consultative group. I assure the Deputy it will be as broad and generous as can be. I have no particular aversion to Deputy Finian McGrath, himself a well-known veteran of battles of Clontarf, being able to assist in respect of renewed energy in 2014 and I shall convey the Deputy's interest in that regard to him.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It has been mentioned previously in the House that because of the sensitive nature of some of the aforementioned commemorations in the context of an all-island dimension, interests from Northern Ireland should be involved in the consideration of how to go about commemorating a number of significant events in the history of the island, the anniversaries of which are falling due. Contact should be made, perhaps through the Oireachtas consultation committee and other means, with a variety of interests from different traditions on the island of Ireland to have their input on the shape and design of such commemorations. For example, the centenary of the *Titanic* offers a useful opportunity for an all-island approach.

The Taoiseach: Yes, I will give consideration to an appropriate appointment in respect of Northern Ireland. Obviously, the Ulster centenary committee consultation report was published and there were invitations to be associated with that. There may be a number of commemorations in which there might be a genuine willingness to have a joint commemoration and were that the case, that is fair enough. Others may seek individual commemorations to take place in a different way but the Government will take on board all the points from the different parties in the hope of putting together a series of appropriate, relevant and sensitively arranged commemoratives ceremonies. I believe that covers the point raised by the Deputy.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Fáiltím roimh ath-eagrú choiste an Oireachtais do chomóraithe stairiúla chun comóradh céad bliana a dhéanamh ar féin rialú a bhaint amach. Tá mé an-sásta leis sin agus fuair mé litir an Taoisigh maidir leis. Tá a fhios againn, ar ndóigh, go bhfuil an gnó sin fós le baint amach. I welcome the re-establishment of the Oireachtas consultation group on centenary commemorations. I seek further detail on what form the consultations to which the Taoiseach referred will take. Will this be truly national? Will there be an all-island or all-Ireland input? Will such events include the Ulster Covenant of 1912, the 1913 lockout in Dublin

and Waterford or the Proclamation yet to be achieved? Will the Taoiseach raise these matters with the First and Deputy First Ministers?

I am sure the Taoiseach will have noted that the elections have just taken place in the North and will wish to join in commending all the parties, the Sinn Féin party in particular, on their success in that area. Will the Taoiseach put in place arrangements to involve representatives from the Assembly, civic society and the diaspora in the consultation group? It is not enough simply to commemorate all these events. Many of them were glorious failures or defeats. At some time, someone will commemorate the bailout——

An Ceann Comhairle: Perhaps we could have a question.

Deputy Gerry Adams: ——and how the Government lost that battle. I seek to examine these past events to gain an understanding and appreciation for the future because these events, particularly those which are part of the radical republican national tradition, are all about the future and we should learn lessons and move forward on that basis.

The Taoiseach: Tá a fhios agam go raibh an Teachta gnóthach le cúpla lá leis na toghcháin ó Thuaidh agus nach raibh sé i láthair anseo. As the Deputy said when he asked me the question whether there would be all-Ireland representation, he has not been behind the fence, at least on this occasion, in saying he represents an all-Ireland party. On the last occasion the previous Taoiseach nominated the Minister for Defence as chairman of the consultation group which included Deputy Jimmy Deenihan, the new Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Joe Costello of the Labour Party, Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh from Sinn Féin and Deputy Michael Lowry as an Independent. At the time the Green Party was satisfied that the Minister for Defence would ably represent its views on the consultation group. From that point of view, all of the issues raised by Deputy Gerry Adams and the range of incidents or events that should be commemorated can be discussed by the consultation group. We put in place a strategy to deal with this. On the last occasion, when dealing with the restoration of the *Asgard*, renovations at Arbour Hill and Glasnevin, the refurbishment of St. Enda's Park and the Military Archives, there was a co-ordinated, full and generous response from the members of the consultation group. I hope those nominated on this occasion will do the same in respect of the many events that have to be commemorated in the coming years.

Cabinet Sub-Committees

3. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Taoiseach the sub-committees of the Cabinet he has set-up; and the membership of each such sub-committee. [8289/11]

4. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if any Cabinet sub-committees have been set up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8365/11]

5. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the status of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Infrastructure [10461/11]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 3 to 5, inclusive, together.

The Government has established the following Cabinet sub-committees: economic recovery and jobs, social policy, climate change and the green economy, European affairs, economic infrastructure, Irish and the Gaeltacht and public service reform. The convenors of these Cabinet sub-committees are as follows: economic recovery and jobs — the Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation; social policy — the Minister for Social Protection; climate change and the green economy — the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government; European affairs — the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade;

[The Taoiseach.]

economic infrastructure — the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport; Irish and the Gaeltacht — the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; and public service reform — the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Government economic management council has also been established with the status of a Cabinet sub-committee. I am a member of the council, with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. For the information of Deputies, I am circulating in the Official Report a list of the Cabinet sub-committees and their membership.

Cabinet Committee	Membership
Economic Recovery and Jobs	Taoiseach (Chair) Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Convenor) Minister for Finance Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Minister for Education and Skills Minister for Social Protection Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Minister of State Perry (Small Business) Minister of State Sherlock (Research and Innovation) Minister of State Cannon (Training and Skills)
Social Policy	Taoiseach (Chair) Minister for Social Protection (Convenor) Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government Minister for Justice and Equality Minister for Health Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Minister of State Penrose (Housing and Planning) Minister of State Shortall (Primary Care) Minister of State Lynch (Disability, Equality and Mental Health)
Climate Change and the Green Economy	Taoiseach (Chair) Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Convenor) Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister for Finance Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Attorney General Minister of State O'Dowd (NewERA) Minister of State Sherlock (Research and Innovation) Minister of State Kelly (Public and Commuter Transport)
European Affairs	Taoiseach (Chair) Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Convenor) Minister for Finance Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Minister for Education and Skills Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government Minister for Justice and Equality and Minister for Defence Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Attorney General Minister of State Creighton (European Affairs) Minister of State O'Sullivan (Trade and Development)

Cabinet Committee	Membership
Economic Infrastructure	Taoiseach (Chair) Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Convenor) Minister for Finance Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government Minister of State Penrose (Housing and Planning) Minister of State O'Dowd (NewERA) Minister of State Kelly (Public and Commuter Transport)
Irish and the Gaeltacht	Taoiseach (Chair) Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Convenor) Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Minister for Education and Skills Minister of State McGinley (Gaeltacht)
Public Service Reform	Taoiseach (Chair) Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Convenor) Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister for Finance Minister for Education and Skills Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government Minister for Justice and Equality and Minister for Defence Minister for Health Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Minister of State Hayes (Public Service Reform)

An Ceann Comhairle: Before inviting Deputies to ask supplementary questions, I remind them that they may not inquire about discussions at the Cabinet or its sub-committees. I call Deputy Joe Higgins.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: He is speechless.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Joe Higgins: The Ceann Comhairle has left me speechless.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is unusual for the Deputy, but that is what stated in Standing Orders.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I know, much to the delight of the benches opposite. What exactly is the role of the sub-committees? I have not yet had the benefit of seeing the membership lists, but is there a crossover in membership of many or most of them? How often will they meet? How will they relate to the Cabinet and the Dáil and will the Taoiseach report to the Dáil on their workings?

The Taoiseach: To answer the Deputy's question, quite a number of personnel are on each of the Cabinet sub-committees, depending on the range of subjects they follow. The Deputy will receive the list when it is circulated. The issues to be discussed are not for discussion here because they carry the same level of confidentiality as Cabinet meetings, but, in general, the sub-committees will focus on individual sectors to enable more focused or concentrated discussion of particular issues by the relevant Ministers. Conclusions arrived at by the Cabinet committees are then brought before Cabinet for final approval.

When the Deputy sees the full list and the range of personnel thereon he will see that there is clearly significant representation from different Ministries, as there should be, on the Cabinet committees we have set up.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I have heard about a sub-committee related to the financial services sector. Is there any such sub-committee and, if so, is the Taoiseach involved in it? I believe the previous Government had one.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That was not a sub-committee.

The Taoiseach: I have not reconstituted any such Cabinet committee. There are seven sub-committees covering a broad range of sectors with which the Cabinet will have to look at. This is a matter that can be considered directly by the Cabinet if required. It could perhaps be dealt with under the area of public service reform or economic recovery and jobs.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Taoiseach faoin economic management council. It is my understanding that this council will take some of the key economic decisions that will affect citizens. How does the Dáil hold that committee to account? Will we be given reports and, if so, how often? Will we be able to ask questions about decisions of the committee? Who is on the committee apart from the membership named by the Taoiseach?

The Taoiseach: The Cabinet committee comprises the four members I have mentioned: the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, and myself. Each Cabinet committee draws on particular personnel depending on the matter under discussion. The economic management council, which has met 12 times to date, deals with the main agenda of economic issues that go through for discussion and conclusion by the Cabinet in its plenary meetings. From that point of view, the decisions of the Cabinet are a matter for discussion here. These decisions become public and Members of the Oireachtas are entitled to debate them and put their views for or against as the case may be. It is a matter of streamlining the main areas of economic discussion that need to be attended to rather than having these issues deliberated upon in open session *ad nauseam* at Cabinet. The economic management council can bring a greater focus on these issues, after which they can go back to the Cabinet for final decision in a shorter time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In the past, sections dealing with the public service, economics and infrastructure had an independent existence within the Department of the Taoiseach independent of servicing a Cabinet committee. I wish to clarify that this remains the case. I am concerned that the Standing Orders of the House may allow a situation to develop in which the Taoiseach would not have to answer questions about the general work of his Department under those headings. I ask the Taoiseach to confirm that he does not intend that to be the case and that the work of his Department will not be hidden behind Cabinet confidentiality.

I have raised in the Dáil on a number of occasions the fact that Ministers and spokespersons have been able to make detailed statements about the agendas of the Cabinet and its sub-committees. For example, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Varadkar, briefed newspapers about the agenda of the economic infrastructure sub-committee. I ask this basic question: Why should the Dáil be limited by Cabinet confidentiality in what it can discuss while no such limit is placed on Ministers and advisers in regard to the agenda and issues to be discussed by these committees?

The Taoiseach: There is no change in the situation. As the Deputy is aware, Article 28.4.3° of the Constitution refers deliberately and specifically to Cabinet committees. For example, it states:

> The confidentiality of discussions at meetings of the Government shall be respected in all circumstances save only where the High Court determines that disclosure should be made in

respect of a particular matter — (i) in the interests of the administration of justice by a Court, or (ii) by virtue of an overriding public interest, pursuant to an application in that behalf by a tribunal appointed by the Government or a Minister of the Government on the authority of the Houses of the Oireachtas to inquire into a matter...

There is no change in that.

I think the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, made his comment before the committee was set up.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He spoke about the agenda and what it will do.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: That is in the programme for Government.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We cannot discuss it here. That is the point I am making.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The Minister has been going to too many night clubs

The Taoiseach: Obviously, they can be referred to here only in a factual nature. We do not have to answer questions no more than the Deputy did previously about issues that were discussed at Cabinet committees. The situation is the same in so far as confidentiality is concerned.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is not.

Deputy Finian McGrath: He has been going to too many night clubs.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: On the issue of Cabinet sub-committees, has any consideration been given to setting up a sub-committee to deal with the issue of drugs and alcohol given that more than 500 deaths annually result from drug abuse alone excluding those related to alcohol abuse? That issue should be a priority for any Government, with which I am sure the Taoiseach would agree. Has he any plans to set up a sub-committee to deal with that issue?

The Taoiseach: The issue of drugs is a matter for the Government and is of serious concern to everybody around the country. We do not have a Cabinet committee dealing specifically with drugs but obviously in regard to justice, health and social policy, these issues are all quite likely to be discussed at one committee or another.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The constitutional article is as it is set out, as the Taoiseach quoted, but the reality is that Ministers and their advisers and spokespeople can talk freely about the agendas of Cabinet sub-committees but Opposition spokespeople are not in a position to discuss those in any way. That is the reality of the situation.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is possible to table a question to the line Minister on any issue.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I accept that. I am talking about the agenda of Cabinet sub-committees. I have been told that we cannot discuss it on confidentiality grounds, yet, as we know from the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, and others, they can talk openly about it and so on. That is the reality as we see it. It is absurd and perhaps it is something we should collectively address in terms of what can and cannot be discussed. If Ministers, advisers and spokespeople can discuss it, surely Members of the Oireachtas should be in a position——

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: ——to discuss the agenda of Cabinet sub-committees and the general direction, at least, of the issues being discussed. Regular briefings are being given about this committee and that committee as we know. Has the Taoiseach considered establishing a Cabinet sub-committee on health?

The Taoiseach: No, I did not give consideration to a specific Cabinet committee on health. The Minister for Health attends by virtue of the fact that, for instance, the committee dealing with social policy will have the Minister for Health thereon and a number of others dealing with public service reform where issues of health can be raised. We did not give consideration to a specific committee on health. The Minister is very occupied on this. In any event, as the Deputy will be well aware, to find the time to convene and chair committee meetings dealing with a broad range of issues is an adventure in itself.

State Visits

6. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach if he will report, in detail, on the plans for President Obama's visit to Ireland. [8324/11]

7. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach the issues he plans to discuss with President Obama during his visit to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10477/11]

8. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has had any success in including a trade and economic investment forum event in the schedule of the US President Barack Obama during his visit here. [10716/11]

9. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if US President Barack Obama will make a public address during his visit here. [10723/11]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 6 to 9, inclusive, together.

The forthcoming visit of President Obama will be an historic occasion for Ireland and a very significant event celebrating the strong ties between the peoples of Ireland and the United States. I know he will receive a very warm welcome to our shores.

Plans for the President's visit are currently nearing finalisation. Consultation with officials in the US Embassy and the White House are ongoing and senior US officials will travel to Dublin in the coming days to agree the final details. The programme will include a meeting with President McAleese in Áras an Uactharáin and a bilateral meeting with myself. It is also expected that President Obama will pay a visit to Moneygall and that he will make a public address at an event in Dublin city.

The public address in Dublin will be part of a major entertainment event. The programme and the venue have yet to be confirmed. Entrance will be free of charge with tickets available to the general public and it will be designed as a welcome to the President and the First Lady of the US.

Organising an event on this scale will involve working closely with many public agencies as well as businesses and citizens. I appreciate that people will experience some disruption as a consequence and I want to thank everyone who will be affected both for their patience and their forbearance. This is an historic opportunity to put our capital and our people on view to a potentially huge audience around the world.

The full details of the overall programme will be finalised and announced as soon as they are available.

I expect that I will discuss a range of issues with President Obama during the course of his visit and I will emphasise how much the Irish people value our relationship and the enduring friendship with the United States. It is likely that our discussions will also cover the global economic situation and Ireland's determination to overcome the difficulties that we face. I will be stressing that we are open for business and will emphasise the many advantages to doing business here in Ireland.

The President's visit comes just after the historic visit of Queen Elizabeth. It is anticipated that up to 1,000 international media representatives will cover both visits. Taken together these visits will highlight Ireland and its people and will instil confidence and hope in a brighter future.

Deputy Clare Daly: That is not an answer of any great detail. Given that the visit is imminent, I would have expected a little more in the Taoiseach's reply. Does the Taoiseach intend to give the House the full schedule of events when he receives them?

While he dealt a little bit with the content of some of the discussions he intends to have with the US President, Mr. Obama, he was somewhat silent on several other issues. Will he enlighten us as to whether he intends to ask if it is the US President's intention to implement initiatives for undocumented immigrants in the United States, many of whom are Irish? Does the Taoiseach intend to fight their corner?

In light of the assassination of Osama bin Laden in the past week, will the Taoiseach raise the issue of the incursion of the United States into Pakistan? Will the Taoiseach ask the president if it is US policy to act as judge, juror and executioner of those accused of such crimes or whether it would be better off to leave these matters come to trial?

The Taoiseach: I cannot give Deputy Clare Daly any more details of the plans around Mr. Obama's visit to Ireland because I do not have them. When the American President pays a visit to any country, members of his Administration travel there beforehand to discuss with the authorities the actual detail of where the President, and in the case of this visit to Ireland the First Lady, will travel.

The event to be held in Dublin city centre has not yet been agreed because the US personnel involved must look at the sites in question and give their views on the range and extent of the numbers which might turn up. Accordingly, I cannot give the Deputy the finalised detail because it has not yet been agreed.

I raised the matter of the undocumented Irish with the President and his Administration in the White House on St. Patrick's Day. As Deputy Clare Daly is aware, politics in Washington has changed with the Democratic Party in control of the US Senate while the Republican Party now has control of the House of Representatives. Accordingly, the much sought after comprehensive legislation to deal with immigration in the US will not happen in the short term.

Arising from recent events, however, a package of enforcement measures concerning homeland security in the US may have to be brought forward soon. If that were the case, the process will begin in Congress which will make a swathe through it.

The appropriate time to make an amendment to that would be some time during that process and the appropriate amendment would be, in Ireland's case, to seek access to the E3 visa system, which is a renewable visa system. This would provide some relief and release of pressure in respect of undocumented Irish people. Senator Schumer from New York will be the author of whatever documentation goes through that process.

When in New York last week, I met with the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, which is well aware of the process by which legislation and amendments in that regard go through

[The Taoiseach.]

Congress and the Senate. In that regard, Senator Schumer is in a powerful position. He has much contact with the Irish community and as such is well aware of the extent of the problem. Given the scale of this problem in the United States, of which the Deputy is aware, the legislators are encountering difficulties in terms of putting through Bills that would give legislative effect to comprehensive reform. I met a number of undocumented Irish people, some of whom have been in the United States since before 9/11 and have a degree of difficulty. They are members of the community who pay their social security and taxes and who, in most cases, have families and businesses they look after but they are undocumented, a position not dissimilar to that of many other nationalities. Those experiencing problems range from people who recently went to the United States and have over-stayed their welcome to those who have been there for much longer periods and are also having difficulties. In that regard, the Deputy can take it the Government is focused on this issue and that on each occasion a Minister or Minister of State goes to the United States he or she will seek to build up relationships on behalf of the Government and, therefore, the people of Ireland with Democratic and Republican personnel. Whatever change has to be made will have to go through Congress and the Senate and this will require connections and discussions on a regular basis.

As regards the other global matters raised by the Deputy, while the issue is not down for specific debate the question of global terrorism has affected us here, either through direct deaths resulting from 9/11 or the consequences and impact of global terrorist activities in other parts of the world.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Boyd Barrett.

Deputy Clare Daly: A Cheann Comhairle, the details——

An Ceann Comhairle: There are four other Members who wish to ask questions. I will come back to the Deputy.

The Taoiseach: They will be published as soon as we know them.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It has been reported — the Government has not contradicted this — that the combined cost of the visits of President Obama and the Queen may run to approximately €25 million. We still cannot get a straight answer as to whether this is the case. Given those reports and the growing number of experts and commentators internationally and domestically who are saying that our economy is ruined, the constant protestations of Ministers that they have no money for anything because we are in the straitjacket of the IMF and that the much vaunted jobs budget, now a jobs initiative which will be fiscally neutral, is looking certain to be a damp squib to beat all damp squibs because we are not allowed——

3 o'clock

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy must ask a question about the President's visit.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The question is coming, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is not the only damp squib.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Given that we are not allowed to put any serious money into the economy to create jobs, would it not be better to spend that €25 million on the creation of jobs, the construction of a couple of new schools or a hospital or, perhaps, to reverse some of the cuts to special needs which are affecting the most vulnerable in our country?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy must stick to the question.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is a question. Would it not be better to save this money——

An Ceann Comhairle: Not the question the Deputy should be asking.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is a question.

An Ceann Comhairle: The question is what issues the Taoiseach plans to discuss with President Obama.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Would it not be better to save the millions being spent on these visits and spend it on things that would put people to work and provide——

An Ceann Comhairle: We do not want a speech at Question Time. Please ask a question.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is very clearly a question.

An Ceann Comhairle: What question, exactly?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I said, "Would it not be better to spend the money on something more useful——

An Ceann Comhairle: That is not a question.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I do not know why you are interrupting me, a Cheann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: Because your question is about President Obama's visit.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Would it not be better to spend the money that will be spent on President Obama's visit on something that would provide jobs, help the vulnerable or build a couple of schools or a hospital?

Deputy Ray Butler: Or buy Deputy Boyd Barrett a jacket.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Could the issues the Taoiseach said he would discuss with President Obama not be better discussed in a telephone call, which would be cheaper?

If the Taoiseach insists on going ahead with this visit, will he ask President Obama if he thinks it appropriate that his Treasury Secretary, Mr. Tim Geithner, interfered with the negotiations over the debt burden of this country and vetoed plans to burn bondholders? Will the Taoiseach raise that issue with President Obama?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Boyd Barrett, please resume your seat and allow the Taoiseach to answer the question, that is, the question you placed on the Order Paper.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Deputies on the other side do not want to hear these questions because they are embarrassing.

The Taoiseach: I cannot recall anyone who is as disillusioning as Deputy Boyd Barrett, whatever he says. There are bright days in Ireland and good things happen in our country. I have never heard him mention the valuable works done by communities, even in his own constituency.

[The Taoiseach.]

He wants a straight answer to a straight question.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I want some money for those communities.

The Taoiseach: He put out a figure that is not real.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: What is the figure?

The Taoiseach: I could ask Deputy Boyd Barrett if he can tell the House what he will spend on the next general election campaign, and he would not be able to answer me.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: €15,000.

The Taoiseach: Protests in which Deputy Boyd Barrett has been involved, which are perfectly legitimate, have accrued costs which might have gone towards providing computers in some of the schools he mentioned.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: All funded by donations on the day.

The Taoiseach: Be that as it may, this is an opportunity for real investment. Voted money goes through the Cabinet each year for particular Departments, including the Department of Justice and Law Reform. It is entirely appropriate and normal when visitors with the global reach of Queen Elizabeth and the President of the United States come here that they would be properly protected. In this case, with two global personalities visiting within a short space of time, we have a brilliant opportunity to present our country and its people in the very best light, internationally. This will reap enormous returns in tourism spin-off. People in Deputy Boyd Barrett's constituency and throughout the country will benefit from overseas visitors coming here as a consequence of the visits of Queen Elizabeth and President Obama.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I thank the Taoiseach for a comprehensive reply, given the constraints under which he is working regarding the visit of the President of the United States. Would the Taoiseach agree that this is a most important and welcome visit to Ireland? We have outstanding historical relationships with the United States on the level of family and kinship, of economics and of humanitarian assistance to Africa and other parts of the world. For example, we have a joint programme with the department of the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, to improve early childhood nutrition in Africa. We have a broad range of engagement with the United States.

Would the Taoiseach agree that President Obama has proven himself to be——

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Is this a question or a statement?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I did not realise Deputy Boyd Barrett had aspirations to be the Ceann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Boyd Barrett, you will take a walk in a minute if you are not very careful.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Would the Taoiseach agree that President Obama has been a very thoughtful and strategic leader, who has given a new status to the concept of multilateralism in the conduct of international relations that is in sharp contrast to previous United States

policies? Would he agree that the visit is not just about the issues to which I have alluded? Does he agree that we should not forget that in addition to the thousands of jobs Irish people create in the United States and that United States companies create in Ireland, the United States is a very important market, which is repeatedly in the top three in terms of US citizens buying goods and services that are manufactured by Irish manufacturers as well as services produced by Irish people? In that economic context, I ask the Taoiseach to ensure, if he can, that the US-Ireland research programme which is substantial and an area to which President Obama gives high priority in his own economic renewal programme, gets due recognition during this visit, and that some facilitation of this could be organised around the visit.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy Martin for his comments. I agree this is a very important visit in its own right and it gives Ireland the opportunity to present itself as being a traditional friend of the United States, with many links through social, cultural, political and business activities. For example, I hope to have the opportunity to open the €300 million extension to the Coca Cola plant in Wexford before too long, Intel is spending €500 million on an expansion of its plant at Leixlip and there was the announcement yesterday of the joining of Elan and Alkermes in respect of the siting of the new Alkermes headquarters in Athlone.

I met quite a number of business and investment interests in New York last week and was enthused by their dedication and commitment to this country. Some results will come from that in the time ahead. This is a critical market for Ireland and the extent of trade, as the Deputy is aware, that crosses the Atlantic either way between Europe and the United States, including between Ireland and the United States, is very extensive.

I will ensure that there is appropriate reference to the US-Ireland research programme. I am aware of its activities over the years and know it played an important part in keeping Ireland up there in terms of awareness when times were not so good. It is an important element of the professional connection between our two countries.

Deputy Gerry Adams: With regard to the undocumented Irish, I appreciate the work the Taoiseach has done. I know he raised this issue during the St. Patrick's day visit, as I did, and I point out that this visit gives a particular opportunity to raise the issue once again.

Nuair a bhí an Taoiseach sa Teach Bán, bhí an tUachtarán Obama ag caint faoi fear gorm as na Stáit Aontaithe darbh ainm Frederick Douglass. Frederick Douglass was an escaped slave, a freedom fighter and a human rights activist in the USA. During the St. Patrick's day visit event for the Taoiseach hosted by President Obama, the President spoke about Frederick Douglass, who came to Ireland in 1845 and was described as the black O'Connell of America. There are plans to unveil a statue to this activist in Cork and there is a request that President Obama would perform that ceremony. Given the Taoiseach said the final details have not been agreed, will he tell us whether this is part of the consideration?

One of the reasons this man came into such public consciousness was not just because of his life's work but because he published a book, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, which the Taoiseach may be interested to know will be republished and launched this Thursday in Glasnevin Cemetery museum.

The Taoiseach: As I understand it, President Obama will not visit Cork on this occasion. I am aware of his interest in Frederick Douglass and of Mr. Douglass's life and times. I had the opportunity when I was at the White House to present to President Obama a book in respect of Daniel O'Connell detailing references to Frederick Douglass. In fact, President Obama referred to people from Ireland who had received Congressional medals of honour for various

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deeds of valour, including one John King from Ballinrobe, a bust of whom was unveiled by Senator Chris Dodd last year.

With regard to the life and times of Frederick Douglass, I made the point to White House staff and to President Obama that the waters that divide us as countries were those that brought the Africans to the United States for slavery purposes and the Irish to that country for freedom. On St. Patrick's Day, remembering St. Patrick, too, was a slave, President Obama showed he fully understood the history his own people endured. He might have liked to have been able to go to University College Cork on this occasion but his schedule does not permit it. One hopes in the years ahead there will be other opportunities for the President to return to Ireland.

An Ceann Comhairle: That concludes Questions to the Taoiseach.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: On a point of order——

Deputy John Halligan: Concerning pension subsidies——

An Ceann Comhairle: That concludes Questions to the Taoiseach.

Deputy John Halligan: Some of us have had our hands up for about 15 minutes.

An Ceann Comhairle: Excuse me——

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: On a point of order, a Cheann Comhairle——

An Ceann Comhairle: What is your point of order?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I wish to ask about the difference in standards applied——

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

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is a point of order.

An Ceann Comhairle: You are not entitled to question the Chair. Will you please resume your seat?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: On what basis——

An Ceann Comhairle: Please resume your seat.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: A Cheann Comhairle——

An Ceann Comhairle: You are questioning the Chair.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I want an explanation as to——

An Ceann Comhairle: You will not get any explanation from me.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: ——how a question submitted on the Order Paper can be——

An Ceann Comhairle: I reiterate you will not get any explanation. Please resume your seat or I will ask you to leave the Chamber.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That is an abuse of your core position.

An Ceann Comhairle: I beg your pardon. You had better withdraw that remark or else leave the Chamber.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: No.

An Ceann Comhairle: Leave the Chamber, Deputy, please.

A Deputy: He is only looking for publicity.

A Deputy: He is looking for attention.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Ceann Comhairle never has anything constructive to say.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Take 100 lines as well.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett withdrew from the Chamber.

Priority Questions

Expenditure Reviews

36. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection if, in view of her recent press briefings regarding projected spending for 2011, she is alleging that false assumptions were made; and if she will detail the nature and extent of same. [10526/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Revised Estimates volume, published by the previous Government in February, provides for total expenditure on social welfare schemes and services of €20.615 billion in 2011. This sum incorporates the effect of a range of savings measures announced in budget 2011.

The estimate for jobseekers' payments contained in the Revised Estimates volume was based on a weekly average live register of 405,000 in 2011. If current trends continue, the live register will outturn at an average higher than provided for in the Estimate. If this turns out to be the case, additional expenditure over and above that provided will be incurred. The weekly average live register in the year to date has been 441,482. The jobs initiative announced today will play an important role in getting people back to work or into education, training and internship and off the live register, so it is too early to quantify any overspend.

The social welfare package in budget 2011 was designed to achieve total savings of €873 million. The measures included reductions in weekly rates of payment for all working age recipients and in monthly child benefit. Savings were also to be achieved through the continuation of spending restrictions under the treatment benefits scheme, administrative savings and a range of activation measures. Budget 2011 also provided for €30 million in savings through achieving efficiencies in the electricity and telecoms elements of the household benefits package. My officials are currently in discussions with the relevant providers with a view to achieving these savings. Savings of €60 million in the rent supplement scheme were also included in the budget figures. However, no specific measures were decided upon to achieve €50 million, or in that region, of this saving.

In addition, it was announced that approximately €49 million would be saved through various other measures. No measures were publicly announced. However, this €49 million was allocated across a range of schemes, with specific amounts deducted on a scheme by scheme basis, in both the Estimates published on budget day and the subsequent Revised Estimates volume,

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both of which were approved by the previous Government. It is my understanding from my officials that the then Minister intended to bring forward a range of measures to achieve these savings in the context of an early social welfare Bill. However, events overtook this.

My colleagues and I are currently considering the issues and options arising in the context of the financial targets set in budget 2011.

Deputy Barry Cowen: Further to her answer, will the Minister outline whether in the context of the overall spend of her Department throughout the year on these demand-led initiatives the figures provided are those of her officials? Are they based on the normal assumptions such as the projected growth rates and unemployment predictions etc. for demand led schemes? Will the Minister confirm that provision has been made this year, as it is any other year, for a supplementary allowance to be made available in the event that when the figures crystalise there is an underspend?

Deputy Joan Burton: The Estimates for budget 2011 were prepared by the previous Minister and Government.

Deputy Barry Cowen: It was officials.

Deputy Joan Burton: As I recall, the former Minister was Deputy Ó Cuív and the Government was made up of Fianna Fáil and the Green Party. The critical issue was the provision in the Estimates for an expectation of 405,000 people on average to be on the register during 2011. As I stated, for the year to date the weekly average live register has been 441,000.

Later today, my colleague, the Minister for Finance, will announce a series of jobs initiatives and measures which we hope will reduce the number of people on the live register. However, those are the figures and the previous Government factored in an assumption of 405,000 which turned out to be significantly different to the experience to date in 2011.

Deputy Barry Cowen: I am somewhat puzzled. The officials available to the previous Minister were the same as those available to the current Minister. The figures are those of the Minister's officials. The supplementary provision is in place as always. If the provision is to be out by 1% in the context of a €20 billion budget, then why, on the basis of those two points, this extraordinary, cynical, politically motivated comment that the figures are massaged? When the Minister makes such commentary, as per the recent *Sunday Business Post* article on 24 April, she alleges that a false projection has been portrayed by the Minister's officials.

Deputy Joan Burton: The reality is that when I came into the Department, the Department's estimates, which were the estimates of the previous Minister in the Department and the Minister for Finance in the previous Government, projected an unemployment figure of 405,000 in 2011. The actual figure has turned out to be 441,000 on average in the year to date. This is the major reason for the difference. The second reason is that savings were targeted across a series of headings amounting to €49 million and were provided for in the departmental Estimates but not announced. In addition, savings were targeted which were the subject of announcements in respect of savings in the rent supplement scheme. How €50 million of the €60 million savings would be found was not identified.

I understand the previous Minister intended to bring forward detailed proposals of these estimates. The previous Minister signed off all these estimates and measures as did the previous Government. The previous Minister intended to bring forward these measures but events, in

the shape of the general election and a change of Government, overtook what the Minister, presumably, intended to do.

Employment Support Services

37. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps she will take to ensure that Tús serves as an effective activation measure and to ensure the most suitable people are selected for participation in Tús. [10537/11]

Deputy Joan Burton: The then Minister for Finance announced the introduction of a community work placement initiative for up to 5,000 people in the Budget Statement to Dáil Éireann on 7 December 2010. The initiative, known as Tús, was launched on 21 December 2010 and work on developing the necessary implementation structures has been underway since then.

Tús will provide short-term, quality work opportunities for those unemployed for more than one year. The work placements will be offered by the not-for-profit, community and voluntary sectors. The initiative will contribute to the range of activation measures being developed by the Government. It is different to other initiatives such as community employment, in that it does not have compulsory training or progression elements. Its focus is on providing those unemployed for more than one year with a work placement opportunity.

The initiative will be delivered locally by each local development company and by Údarás na Gaeltachta in Gaeltacht areas. Some €30 million has been provided in my Department's Estimates in 2011 to fund the rollout of the initiative. Following the launch, my Department conducted two successful trials to develop the delivery mechanisms for Tús. One trial was based in the Coolock area of Dublin and run by the Northside Partnership with the other based in Mullingar, County Westmeath. A total of 119 people were randomly selected from the live register and offered the opportunity to participate. The results of both trials have been evaluated and have informed the development of the initiative. Internal procedures for the selection of people to participate have been finalised and are being issued to local office managers and staff to enable the selection of participants to commence in the coming weeks.

Promotion of Tús to potential work placement providers has been underway for some weeks as part of a process of identifying suitable work placements. Local development companies are currently recruiting supervisory staff which will provide for a phased rollout during the coming months with the full 5,000 placements to be made available by the end of quarter one, 2012. The target is to have 1,000 of these placements filled by the end of June.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Minister is aware that the scheme is not voluntary and, in its current guise, people will be forced to participate for fear of losing their jobs. A wide range of community employers are set to participate. However, is it really acceptable to force people to work in this way especially when there are scores of people who would be very keen to apply or avail of the opportunity? For example, some of these employers work with children and vulnerable adults. Have we learnt nothing from the major child protection investigations or the media exposure of elder abuse?

Would the Minister not agree that jobseekers should be entitled to apply for a place in Tús or, at a minimum, that a profile should be created? The Minister referred to the selection procedure. However, a profile could be created for each person on the dole which could then inform the selection of appropriate candidates. Will the Minister make these changes? If not, how will the Department ensure the appropriate people are selected if it has no profile of people on the live register? When will the guidelines governing the selection to which the

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Minister referred be produced and circulated to the partnership groups? Are they available to Deputies to determine whether they stand up to the required scrutiny?

Deputy Joan Burton: I refer to the selection of people for this initiative. The only detailed information I have is the response to the two pilot studies that were undertaken. The Deputy might be interested to know that of 119 people, 100 of them, or 84%, replied to the invitation to participate. Only one person left the live register and 71% of those contacted expressed an interest in participating. This confirms what we all know: the vast majority of people on the live register are anxious to participate in work or education. This is designed to assist those who have been more than a year on the live register to do that. Of those people, 58 were deemed suitable for placement immediately, 13 people did not show up for interview when called and 28 were deemed, as we would expect, to be more in need of educational assistance.

This is an opportunity. It does not impact on the existing CE places, or on other schemes managed by the Department. It is an additional initiative of 5,000 places. I have met many of the companies and there is a serious level of interest. This is an opportunity for a one year placement with the same sort of top-up that applies in CE. Interviews are being carried out for supervisors and the interest shown so far is very positive.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: What is the top-up? I thought it was €20 per week, which would not even cover travel. Is there any intention to introduce a travel allowance for participants?

Deputy Joan Burton: The scheme, as I inherited it, and provided for in the budget for this year, has an expenditure of €30 million. That makes provision for both the employment supervisors and for a top-up of €20 per week. I wish our financial circumstances allowed for a greater level but within the constraints of the budget that is all that has been made available. I am, however, encouraged by the level of interest and positivity that has been shown by individuals and by organisations.

Social Welfare Benefits

38. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the specific cuts to child benefits, disability allowances and other social welfare payments signalled in the draft deal with the EU/IMF and in view of the latest research which indicates that 620,000 persons or 14.1 per cent of the population are already at risk of poverty and the expert belief that this figure would be much higher if it were not for social welfare payments, the way she will implement further cuts whilst simultaneously attaining the target set out in the current national agreement Towards 2016 of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016 [10714/11]

Deputy Joan Burton: The challenge for this new Government is unlike any faced before. The priority of this Government is to get our economy moving, restore confidence, fix our banking system and support the protection and creation of jobs. The success of our economic plans will lay the foundation for the rest of our agenda for change and the jobs initiative being announced today is the first step in this regard. It is important to state that the most recent memorandum of understanding with the EU-ECB-IMF does not provide for specific cuts to child benefits, disability allowances and other social welfare payments. The overall aim of the memorandum is to ensure that public finances are sustainable and, to this end, the State must pursue a determined deficit reduction strategy. This will impact on current expenditure across all Departments, including the Department of Social Protection.

The Government is committed to tackling Ireland's economic crisis in a way that is fair and balanced and which recognises the need for social solidarity. This is explicitly reflected in the commitment in the programme for Government to maintain social welfare rates.

I am fully aware of the key role the payments made by the Department play in the social and economic life of this country and in preventing poverty. This is illustrated in the annual survey on income and living conditions carried out by the Central Statistics Office. The latest available report shows that in 2009, more than 91% of the average gross household income of households in the lowest income decile was made up of social transfers. The percentage of gross household income made up of social transfers remained above 50% up to and including the fourth decile where 65% of gross household income was made up of social transfers. In addition to reducing poverty, these social transfers enable households to purchase goods and services in the local economy thereby sustaining jobs and economic activity at a higher level than would otherwise be the case.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

While the payments made by my Department have these very positive economic and social effects, there is an ongoing necessity to curtail expenditure in 2012 and in later years. This is necessary for many reasons, not least so that we can continue to make social welfare payments at appropriate levels, sustaining social cohesion and treating people with dignity. Any changes to the wide range of schemes and services operated by my Department will be considered in a budgetary context later this year. This consideration will be informed by the comprehensive review of expenditure currently under way, which will be completed by September.

Deputy John Halligan: The Minister has one of the largest portfolios and there are many questions on the agenda today that affect many people. I am absolutely appalled the Minister is the only Government Deputy present today. I hope the media will take that into consideration.

New research by Social Justice Ireland shows that poverty in Ireland is at an all time high. Since 1987 the income of the top 10% high earners has increased to the detriment of the least well off in society. One in ten children now lives in consistent poverty, a scandalous figure. That figure increased by half last year under the Fianna Fáil Government, largely as a result of its social protection policies.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy only has six minutes. He must ask a question.

Deputy John Halligan: I will not need six minutes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The six minutes are for all contributors.

Deputy John Halligan: Will the Minister make a commitment today that there will not be any more cuts in welfare benefits, jobseeker's allowance, disability pensions and carers' allowances to ensure the less well off will be protected? In opposition, the Minister opposed all cuts to social welfare payments and advocated the protection of the less well off. Will she give a commitment to the hundreds of thousands who will not be able to afford breakfast in the morning and who will send their children to school without proper clothes, heating or food in their bellies that there will be no further cuts in social welfare?

Deputy Joan Burton: I thank the Deputy for his remarks and I share his concerns about children who are experiencing poverty; all Members share that concern. I reiterate the commitment in the programme for Government on social welfare rates by both parties but resources are constrained. Before the budget for 2012, there will be a poverty impact study by the Depart-

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ment and in addition, a comprehensive review of expenditure is under way and it is to be completed by September. That will contribute to the decisions made in the budget for 2012.

Deputy John Halligan: When the Minister was on the Opposition benches, she spoke about eliminating poverty by 2016. The elimination of poverty is about increasing welfare payments for the least well off, but it starts with not reducing those payments any further. I listened intently to the Deputy in opposition when she was an advocate for the less well off. I would like her to stand by that now for the sake of those worst affected by the economic downturn who are suffering horrendously on social welfare so at the very least, their income will not be further reduced.

Deputy Joan Burton: The most important anti-poverty strategy the country has ever had will be to get people who are unemployed through no fault of their own back into a job. There are those in every town and village in Ireland who never expected or wished to be unemployed but who have lost their jobs or businesses. The primary job of this Government is to ensure people get back to work. That is the strongest anti-poverty measure any Government can put in place.

Employment Support Services

39. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will elaborate on her recent comments that if persons object to a number of reasonable offers of employment, they could face having their payments cut; and if she will outline these new rates. [10527/11]

Deputy Joan Burton: The jobseeker's 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 the jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance is that a person must be available for and genuinely seeking full-time work.

To satisfy this condition, it is necessary for the person to demonstrate that he or she has taken some positive action and is making genuine efforts to secure employment. If a person fails to satisfy this condition his or her claim will be disallowed. In addition, an unreasonable refusal to accept an offer of suitable employment may also lead to disallowance.

A key objective of the Government is to offer a high level of appropriate employment support and to prioritise the provision of more intensive support for those on the live register who are identified as being most at risk of long-term unemployment. This will be achieved through the use of proactive approaches and modern case management systems.

The national employment action plan, NEAP, is the main activation measure for jobseekers and provides for a systematic engagement of the employment services with unemployed people. The national 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.

As one pillar of this overall approach, reduced rates were provided for by the previous Government in the Social Welfare Act 2010, which will encourage jobseekers to improve their skills to avoid the risk of becoming long-term unemployed and help them to progress into sustainable employment on a long-term basis. The intent of the reduced rates is to ensure compliance with the activation processes. Basically, there is a right to a payment but also a matching responsibility on the unemployed person to engage with the system.

The reduced rates, which apply to personal jobseeker's payments, may be implemented where a jobseeker refuses an appropriate offer of training by an officer of my Department; refuses, or declines to avail of, an offer of training from FÁS; declines an intervention under the national employment action plan; does not attend NEAP meetings with a FÁS officer; drops out of the NEAP process.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House:

The relevant legislation provides safeguards for the social welfare recipient in terms of the reasonableness of the intervention being offered. In common with many social welfare provisions, the new measures allow for discretion on the part of a deciding officer, as an offer of training, education or employment must be viewed in the context of a person's circumstances. Where a customer has been subject to the reduced rate, the normal rate of payment will be restored from a current date when the person subsequently engages with the NEAP process or takes up offers of training that were made.

Deputy Barry Cowen: I am glad the Minister supports this provision of the Social Welfare Act 2010. The Minister's briefing document states that administrative arrangements are currently being put in place with a view to introducing these rates very shortly. What is meant by "very shortly"? When will she make an announcement on this? This legislation was enacted in 2010 and arrangements are being put in place. It is up to the Minister to decide on these rates, when they are to be introduced and how it will work.

Deputy Joan Burton: With regard to the first part of his question the relevant legislation came into force in January 2011. However, for operational reasons the application of the provisions commenced in April 2011. I understand that currently a very small number of claimants are subject to the provisions. The number of people who have been affected so far amounts to seven. I remind the Deputy that people are made reasonable offers with regard to a placement, training or education or engagement with the process. The Department is seeking to assist people to become active in a sphere of appropriate interest to them. In the case of a person who fails to engage or to respond, the claimant's personal rate for the jobseeker's allowance will reduced from the full rate of €188. The Act made provision for the rate to be reduced by €44 and in the case of supplementary welfare allowance by €42.

Deputy Barry Cowen: That answers my question. As the Minister says, the rates have been established.

Deputy Joan Burton: Yes, the rates were established by the previous Minister when the legislation was introduced. I wish to be clear on this matter. The vast majority of people who are registered as unemployed are anxious to find work and to return to work. However, it is equally important that, for instance, a very young person does not regard being on social welfare as a lifetime option. It is not good for them nor for their children and it is usually not very good for their community.

Deputy Barry Cowen: The transfer of FÁS to the social protection area is welcome. How might this improve the situation? What measures has the Minister taken to make this integration happen quicker and be more visible?

Deputy Joan Burton: I have been a public representative for nearly 20 years, having been a volunteer and activist knocking on doors. People have always raised the point about a one-stop-shop which would allow them go to one location to access the full range of their entitlements. The community welfare officers and the employment services division of FÁS will be integrated into my Department. In this way we can build a one-point of access service which

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is integrated. People will not be required to go to three different offices in pursuit of entitlements and signing the register will happen in tandem with thinking about how to get back into employment. This is the system in Scandinavia where there is no delay in offering back to work training or education. This is my vision for the Department and this is my work plan.

Social Welfare Code

40. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will amend the means test rules for disability allowance and secondary payments to extend eligibility for these to wards of the courts whose funds were depleted at an exceptional rate during the period of 2007 to 2009 while under the care of the State as to do so will go some way towards compensating the wards for the loss of units which cannot be recovered and which was outside of their control. [10538/11]

Deputy Joan Burton: In determining entitlement to disability allowance, the social welfare code provides that the first €50,000 of capital is disregarded in the means assessment. Thereafter, weekly means are assessed at €1 per week for each €1,000 of capital between €50,000 and €60,000; at €2 per week for each €1,000 of capital between €60,000 and €70,000 and at €4 per week for each €1,000 of capital above €70,000. These arrangements are more generous than those which apply to other social assistance schemes in recognition of the fact that persons in receipt of disability allowance may not have had the opportunity to accumulate savings or other income through participation in employment and this disability may hamper a person's ability to live independently.

The Deputy will be aware that funds which are held for the benefit of wards of court are private funds under the control of the Courts Service. These funds, which amounted to approximately €1.137 billion at 30 September 2010, are managed in a fiduciary capacity by the Courts Service on behalf of more than 18,000 beneficiaries, of whom some 2,300 are wards of court. It is my understanding that while court funds were impacted by the turbulence on world financial markets, particularly in 2008, very few actual losses were incurred in individual cases and that all funds have fully recovered to pre-financial crisis levels.

Where the position of an individual has been impacted upon, it is open to that person, or his or her representatives, to apply for disability allowance or to have the level of payment reviewed in cases where he or she is already in receipt of the allowance.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Wards of court are, by definition, vulnerable and the State owes them an enhanced duty of care. The State, through the Courts Service, is responsible for the administration and investment of funds which many wards of court depend on for their living expenses. The fund is not a realisable asset in the sense of a means test. At the beginning of the economic downturn these funds lost significant value and consequently the length of duration of the award. Considering their special status and the State's responsibility to them, I have asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to compensate the wards of court for these losses in an effective manner. He has denied that the loss exists.

The Minister, Deputy Burton, has repeated that denial to some degree by claiming that the value of all funds has since recovered. That is a misrepresentation of the facts, however, because units of the funds need to be sold when money is needed to make payments to wards of court. When the value of the funds decreased between 2007 and 2009, there was a dramatic increase in the number of units that had to be sold to generate the same income. That diminished the number of units in the funds at an exceptional rate and prohibited true recovery. As a result, the funds cannot possibly provide for wards of court for the duration that was originally intended.

While I accept the Minister for Justice and Equality is directly responsible, I ask the Minister, Deputy Burton, to intervene by making a compensatory gesture to the adult wards of court on behalf of the State. I suggest she should make a disability payment available to them from now on. Such a payment would supplement and stretch their funds and thereby ensure they last for the intended period of time.

There is a precedent for looking for exceptions in means test rules. For example, compensation and awards, and the income arising from the investment of such moneys, are not taken into account when people in certain groups are means tested. I refer, for example, to those who contracted hepatitis C or HIV from blood products, to those with a disability arising from the thalidomide disaster, or to those who received awards from the Residential Institutions Redress Board. I ask the Minister to consider making a similar exception in the case of wards of court to compensate them on their losses. As such a measure would affect a small number of people, a major cost would not accrue to the State.

Deputy Joan Burton: Court funds that are held for the benefit of wards of court are private funds under the control of the Courts Service. Through its offices in the High, District and Circuit Courts, the service has responsibility for the management and investment of funds in court. The courts are subject only to the Constitution and the law and are independent in the exercise of their judicial functions. It is not open to me as Minister to comment in any way on the operation of the courts. However, I want to point out that the Courts Service operates a fairly conservative investment policy. Despite the impact of the credit crisis, all funds have fully recovered to their levels before the financial crisis.

I reiterate that if a ward of court wishes to apply to the Department of Social Protection, he or she is welcome to do so. If a ward of court is at a financial loss and consequently qualifies for a higher rate of payment — or if he or she qualifies for disability allowance for the first time because his or her means have been reduced — the appropriate level of disability allowance will be paid to him or her. My Department is responsible for that aspect of the matter. As the Deputy will appreciate, the courts themselves are independent in the operation of their functions.

Other Questions

Social Welfare Benefits

41. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average time it is taking to process carer's allowance applications; the number of applications awaiting decision; if there is a plan to reduce delays; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10413/11]

Deputy Joan Burton: The average time taken to award a claim for carer's allowance in the first quarter of 2011 was 12 weeks. A total of 3,815 applications were registered in the first quarter of 2011 and 3,883 were processed in the same period. Some 4,509 applications are awaiting a decision at present. Approximately 51,000 carer's allowance claims are in payment. I acknowledge that the time taken to process carer's allowance claims is not satisfactory but I am satisfied that the Department is taking appropriate steps to resolve the situation. It recently commenced a major service delivery modernisation project to improve the efficiency with which it processes applications from clients for carer's allowance. This involves the development of information technology functions and associated business process reorganisation.

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

It is anticipated that the new system will introduce significant processing efficiencies and a quicker and more responsive service to the customer. Accordingly, the project is being given high priority. It involves a significant level of time and commitment from the relevant staff in the Department. This has had a short-term negative impact on claim processing times. I am pleased to say the modernisation project is on target. The first tranche of new carer's allowance claims will be processed under the new system from July. Although the new systems and processes will facilitate a significant improvement in overall processing times, individual claims may continue to take some time to process. Entitlement to carer's allowance is based on satisfying medical, means and residency conditions. In determining entitlement to the allowance, in certain cases unavoidable time lags are involved in making the necessary investigations and inquiries to enable accurate decisions to be made. Delays can also arise if those applying for the allowance are not in a position to supply all the necessary information in support of their claim.

The staff and other resources available to the Department are regularly reviewed with regard to the workload. The Department monitors available resources against workload on an ongoing basis with a view to ensuring claims are processed as quickly as possible. The action taken may include providing for flexibility in the application of staff resources in accordance with seasonal or temporary fluctuations in workload and using overtime where appropriate. The position is being kept under continuous review. In the meantime, if a person's means are insufficient to meet his or her needs while awaiting a decision on a claim, he or she can apply for a means tested supplementary welfare allowance payment from his or her community welfare officer.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: My understanding of the monitoring of information systems is that when the term "business process reorganisation" is used, the entire process is thrown out and a new one is introduced. Is that what is taking place in this instance? The Minister suggested that there is an overlap between one processing system and another. The key issue is what the ideal time will be. That is one of the questions I have. I accept that if a person does not provide sufficient information, it is not possible for his or her claim to be dealt with within the ideal time. There can be variations. Does the Minister envisage that an ideal time for making a decision will be determined? She is aware that if one encounters uncertainty when leaving work to care for somebody with a sudden illness, it can take a long time for one to deal with such matters, which can be very stressful.

It appears to me that the refusal rate is quite high. Having heard anecdotal evidence and discussed this with some of my Independent colleagues, it seems that there is a high level of success on appeal. Has the Minister examined that in her Department? Can she ascertain whether there is a variation between the approach to carer's allowance and the approach to other kinds of allowances provided by the Department?

Deputy Joan Burton: In 2010, the average time it took to award a claim for carer's allowance was eight weeks. Some 18,212 applications for carer's allowance were made and some 16,629 claims were processed in that year. The main reason for the deterioration in the processing time is that major modernisation work is ongoing. That work will be completed and the new system will be started by July of this year. My experience of the Department of Social Protection is that investment in the modernisation of information technology facilities achieves results such as improvements in processing times.

The Deputy asked about levels of refusal. Some 16,574 new claims were received in 2009. Some 5,776 claims were refused in that year. That represented a refusal rate of 34.8%. As I

said, some 18,212 new claims were made in 2010 and 6,972 were refused. That represented a refusal rate of 38.2%.

One of the reasons for delays in processing all social welfare applications, including for carer's allowance, is the provision of insufficient or inaccurate information. As the Deputy noted, owing to changing circumstances people often make applications while under pressure and it may take time to obtain all the relevant information and present it properly. I am optimistic that when the new system is operational, we will be able to achieve the previous processing times and perhaps improve on them. The process would be facilitated if people had more complete information when they made an application.

4 o'clock

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Does the Minister accept that greater use should be made of the review process as opposed to the excessively arduous appeals process? Many of those who apply for carer's allowance do not understand the documentation or the requirement to include details on the level of care they provide. Does the Minister agree that waiting times, especially for appeals, are unacceptably long across all schemes? I do not know if she is aware of today's missive from the Minister without Portfolio, Deputy Brendan Howlin, which indicates that the Department of Social Protection will be allocated an additional 22 staff by the end of the year. This figure does not take account of the transfer of community welfare officers from the Health Service Executive. Does the Minister agree that 22 additional staff will not be sufficient to address the delays in processing social welfare applications?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: What is the average processing time for an appeal? What difference will the review process make? If an appeal is successful, the relevant payment will be backdated to the date on which the application was submitted and the Exchequer will not make any savings. In many cases, people are being put through the wringer unnecessarily.

Deputy Joan Burton: I expect completion of the information technology modernisation programme will significantly improve processing times from July onwards.

I did not hear the announcement made today by the Minister, Deputy Brendan Howlin. I accept that an additional 22 staff is small in the context of the number employed in the Department, which currently stands at approximately 5,000. However, since my appointment I have signed in nine additional appeals officers.

We had a discussion previously at Question Time on the need for better quality information in processing applications and to use reviews rather than full appeals. Last week I met senior staff and many other employees in the appeals section, including inspectors and staff manning the telephones. I am aware that the section is of particular concern to Members of the House. Given the condition of the economy, staff in the office must contend with providing testing and exacting services for members of the public. Nevertheless, everybody in the appeals structure is determined to give citizens the best possible service. As I indicated, the additional nine appeals officers should produce a significant improvement and reduce processing times.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: What is the average processing time for an appeal?

Deputy Joan Burton: I do not have detailed information on appeal times, but I will send it to the Deputy.

Departmental Schemes

42. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps she will take to ensure that participation in Tús involves training; and if she will make funding available for same. [10448/11]

45. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide the guidelines and criteria that will govern the targeting and selection of persons to participate in Tús; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10452/11]

52. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of funding being made available for all aspects of Tús. [10457/11]

57. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps she will take to ensure that no worker displacement arises from the introduction of the new Tús scheme, the work placement programme and internships. [10450/11]

68. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will introduce a travel allowance for Tús participants. [10449/11]

168. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Coimirce Sóisialaí cén uair a bheidh cead ag Cumann Lúthchleas Gael an 200 duine a bhí le hearcú acu faoin scéim TÚS a earcú ó tharla go bhfuil an séasúr faoi lán seoil agus ag cur san áireamh freisin na hacmhainní atá an Cumann sásta a chur ar fáil don scéim; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [10362/11]

191. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection when will the new Tús employment scheme be established and if the participants on these schemes have the same entitlements as the workers on existing community employment schemes. [7978/11]

Deputy Joan Burton: I propose to take Questions Nos. 42, 45, 52, 57, 68, 168 and 191 together.

The Minister for Finance announced the introduction of a community work placement initiative for up to 5,000 persons in the Budget Statement to Dáil Éireann on 7 December 2010. The initiative, known as Tús, was launched on 21 December 2010 and work on developing the necessary implementation structures has been under way since. The aim of Tús is to provide short-term, quality work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than one year. Some €30 million has been provided in my Department's Estimates in 2011 to fund the roll-out of the initiative.

Detailed conditions and rules to guide the operation of Tús have been developed with representatives of the local development companies and officials of my Department. These conditions and rules require that each local development company takes the necessary steps to guard against potential displacement of existing private or public sector service or worker displacements. Additionally, internal procedures for the selection of persons to participate have been developed and will be issued to local office managers and staff in the coming days. The random selection of participants by my Department will commence shortly as the necessary arrangements become operational at local development company level.

Promotion of Tús to potential work placement providers has been under way for some weeks as part of a process of identifying suitable work placements and local development companies are recruiting supervisory staff. This includes engagement with a number of national sports organisations, including the GAA, in respect of games development and related activities. With respect to the latter, my Department will make detailed proposals in the coming days with a view to finalising arrangements to enable participants to avail of games development opportunities across the country.

There are a number of significant differences between the operation of Tús and the community employment programme. In the main, these differences relate to the programmes' aims, participant selection, delivery, duration of engagement and training requirements. The amount

paid to participants on both programmes will be similar and participants will continue to maintain their entitlement to certain secondary benefits. Equally, participants will be required to work $19\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week.

Other than tasks related to training, Tús will not have a compulsory training element, although training opportunities may be available from the range of initiatives delivered by local development companies. Travel and out-of-pocket expenses will not be payable, although every effort will be made to ensure work placements are available close to a participant's home. The target is to have 1,000 placements filled by the end of June, with the remainder being filled over the course of the next year.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Is the Minister aware that circumstances may arise in which Tús participants will find themselves working alongside community employment scheme participants while enjoying fewer entitlements? Does she agree that this is unfair?

Does the Minister agree that random selection may be a flawed approach in that, for example, persons without a background in sport could be sent to the GAA or the FAI to engage in sports training? The selection process needs to be reviewed. Will the Minister consider allowing those who qualify for the scheme by virtue of having been on the dole for one year to apply to be included in a panel for selection to participate in Tús?

If Tús is to be more than workfare, it must have a strong training element. The Minister has indicated funding is not available for this purpose. Is funding available that could be allocated to partnership groups or local development companies to enable them to provide additional training over and above their current contracts to ensure Tús participants have some access to training and the scheme will deliver real benefits?

Deputy Joan Burton: I was very encouraged when I first heard about Tús on entering the Department. I was under the impression that many of the places had been taken up and was surprised to find that while there had been four or five announcements on the launch of the initiative, other than the pilot scheme involving 119 people in two local development company areas, Tús had not commenced. I have now spent a considerable number of weeks seeking to encourage the widest possible participation from the various local development companies and sporting organisations that have been provided with a complement of places.

I am encouraged by the positivity with which people have been reacting. I also have had discussions with Members of different parties from all sides of this House, many of whom are also involved in local development companies. In a manner similar to the internship scheme that will be announced later today by the Minister for Finance, there is an opportunity for everyone who is involved in a local development company to identify people. In many ways Tús is probably modelled on the original rural social scheme. However, it now applies to both urban and rural areas and as Minister, I certainly intend to ensure that not only rural areas but every town, village and city in Ireland in which there are development companies and partnerships anxious to engage people will be fully involved in the process. As I stated, the response thus far is encouraging.

Deputy Barry Cowen: The Minister referred to Tús and the local development companies. My local development company in County Offaly has informed me that in respect of the recruitment of supervisors, for example, those who advanced themselves or who sought to better themselves by participating in departmental training in the year previous to their application are not allowed to apply. How can the Minister stand over this and how can local development companies be hamstrung by virtue of this fact? People were given a leg-up by encouraging them to participate in training and to further improve themselves and their skill sets, yet the

[Deputy Barry Cowen.]

Minister presides over a scenario whereby she will not allow anyone to take up a supervisory position because they tried to better themselves in the previous year.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Will the Minister review the random selection element to put in place some sort of system that would enable participants or those who wish to participate to put their names forward in a manner that would avoid, for example, those who have no interest in sport being forced to engage in sport? How many staff supervisors are being employed to cover this initiative?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Some of the local partnership companies are Leader companies. Is any European money available for this programme?

Deputy Joan Burton: County Offaly has been offered 100 Tús places with five supervisors. While I acknowledge the Deputy's point in respect of the selection of supervisors, I inherited this scheme and the legislation relating to it from my predecessor, the Deputy's distinguished colleague.

Deputy Barry Cowen: That will only last for so long. For as long as the Minister is playing that game, it is like stretching elastic.

Deputy Joan Burton: One reason for the inclusion of random selection was that one measure in the programme agreed by the previous Government with the troika was to provide for activation measures, some of which would be based on random selection.

In response to Deputy Ó Snodaigh's question on the possibility of someone like me, who is not the greatest person at football or hurling, being selected, this is about reasonable offers that relate to a person's capacity or interest. There is no way in which someone who was totally unsuitable would be selected for a particular offering. It is about reasonable offers that are meant to assist a person to acquire valuable experience and training. I am confident there will be a good match and I intend to send the details to all Members of this House. Moreover, as I stated previously, I have spoken personally with many Deputies in respect of their interaction with their own local companies. We will make as great a success of this as we can.

I am afraid that no additional European funds have been made available in this regard. However, much emphasis is laid in the memorandum of understanding with the troika on the business of getting people into work, training and education. Were we to show that schemes such as this or the internship schemes can be successful, productive and helpful to people trying to get back into work, it would bear fruit during the renegotiation of the terms and conditions of the deal.

Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 21 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Michael McCarthy — the need to grant financial assistance to Abbeystrewry national school, Skibbereen, County Cork; (2) Deputy Martin Ferris — the delay in the Shannon liquefied natural gas project; (3) Deputy Joan Collins — the need for the HSE to release the Meridian productivity report into the Dublin paediatric hospitals and have it debated in Dáil Éireann; (4) Deputy Tom Fleming — the provision of the necessary funding in respect of diabetes paediatric services in the HSE south area; (5) Deputy James Bannon — the need to restore funding to Lough Ree Development Co-operative under the Pobal com-

munity services programme; (6) Deputy Ciarán Lynch — the need to make statutory provision to enable the tenant purchase scheme for local authority apartments under Part 4 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 to be given effect; (7) Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív — an gá atá ann go gcuirfear dóthain airgid caipitil ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta don trí bliain atá romhainn; (8) Deputy Colm Keaveney — the need to consider the concerns of the family of a man (details supplied) who died in Germany; (9) Deputy Joe Costello — the need to ensure that outreach facilities for young people at risk such as those (details supplied) in Dublin 9, based in the community and funded by the HSE, are properly supervised; and (10) Deputy Dara Calleary — the need for a range of schools in County Mayo to secure funding under the increased budget for the 2011 summer works scheme.

The matters raised by Deputies Michael McCarthy, James Bannon, Ciarán Lynch and Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív have been selected for discussion.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: Earlier today, Commissioner Rehn made it clear that he expects Ireland to receive a reduction in interest payments relating to the support loan. He all but announced a reduction earlier today and it has been clear since the beginning of the year that this would happen. As expected, it appears from his statement to form part of a wider restructuring of support programmes for Greece and Portugal. However, I am sure the Taoiseach will agree this is nowhere near the end of the matter as there remain major issues concerning the ECB, funding mechanisms for the bank and the ongoing measures required to reduce our deficit. The immediate question arises as to what is the Government policy concerning the money saved by this reduction. Will it be used to reduce the deficit or will it be diverted into spending?

It is fair to state there is a clear division between the Government parties on this matter and I ask the Taoiseach to state clearly two matters. First, will the Taoiseach reassure the House that Ireland's consistent opposition to the introduction of CCCTB remains firm and has not and will not be compromised in exchange for the reduction of the interest rate? Second, will he clarify whether the reduction in the interest rate and the savings arising therefrom will be used to pay down the debt or used for further spending?

The Taoiseach: I have noted the comments of Commissioner Rehn. This matter has not been finalised as yet and there have been some expectations in this regard for some time. I have noted the perception that often applies before European meetings of either Ministers or Heads of Government and I am always one to wait and see what actually happens. The Government is negotiating on an interest rate reduction and I am aware of the Commissioner's comments. As the Deputy is aware, this matter was devolved to the Ministers for Finance to be dealt with and that meeting will take place on Monday next. It is clear that an interest rate reduction would be in this country's interest. This was endorsed by President of the Commission Barroso and has been referred to by others, including the Irish Commissioner, Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn, yesterday. I prefer to wait and see what happens here. The situation in Portugal and Greece is of very topical conversation in Europe, as the Deputy is aware. Ireland is proceeding on the basis of looking for this deal on a constant basis. We have made the case in respect of an interest rate reduction and are continuing to do that. Obviously, after the meeting next week, we will know whether a conclusion can actually be reached here.

In respect of the Deputy's question about the reduction in the debt and our spending on job creation measures, he will be aware that while the language in the memorandum of understanding still stands, there is a clear understanding that, for instance, the sale of non-strategic public

[The Taoiseach.]

assets will be looked at on a case-by-case basis in respect of investment in job creation, of which the jobs initiative today is but a down payment in terms of the programme for Government.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The EU-IMF programme states that anything realised from the sale of State assets would be used to pay down the debt, but my question was about the reduction in the interest rate, the savings arising from that and how they will be used. Problematically, confusion is developing about the clear statements in the programme for Government and the revised EU-IMF agreement. In terms of the economic background and in advance of the Government implementing new policies, the Minister, Deputy Noonan, has released figures that, according to him, show that Government finances are ahead of expectations while Deputy Howlin has released figures showing that public service numbers are being reduced in line with expectations. Today there has been news from Commissioner Rehn. In light of the fact that there is no change in the fiscal——

An Ceann Comhairle: A supplementary question, please.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am asking one in light of the matter raised. Given that there has been no change in the fiscal situation to force a change in the policies agreed ten weeks ago, will the Taoiseach explain the current status of the coalition's tax promise? The programme for Government states clearly that bands and credits will be maintained, but the Cabinet published a document last week stating that the next budget would include a lowering of tax bands and credits, which means that working people will need to pay more tax on their incomes. There is no way for the Taoiseach to spin his way out of this one.

Deputy Tom Hayes: Deputy Martin would know.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is this a straightforward——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Martin cannot spin his way out of this either, but his time is up. The Taoiseach to reply.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: There is a time limit on this question.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is a straightforward contradiction between two documents agreed by the Government.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: There were 15 years of contradiction.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This is another U-turn and broken promise.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach has one minute to reply.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Martin is aware that this situation has not been concluded yet because it has not been finally negotiated.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Which?

The Taoiseach: I have made it perfectly clear in respect of the interest rate reduction that, following the fact that the bank stress tests were not concluded by the Heads of Government meeting, the Ministers for finance would pursue that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I was not asking about the interest rate.

The Taoiseach: I have noted the comments of different Commissioners and Ministers for finance. The fact of the matter is that the meeting takes place next Monday.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That was not the supplementary question at all.

The Taoiseach: I quite understand that——

Deputy Michael McGrath: He is trying to answer another question.

The Taoiseach: ——but I wanted to say to the Deputy that the matter of the interest rate negotiation is not concluded yet. Following discussions between the troika and the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the memorandum of understanding has had to be revised extensively in respect of the mess that they are looking to clear up and in respect of which, on a daily basis, there are now figures inserted by the Deputy's own Government for which there was no backup to achieve in terms of spending and savings.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Government is saying that the figures are ahead of target and better than expected. The Ministers, Deputy Noonan and Deputy Howlin, have stated it.

Deputy Mick Wallace: He is spinning well now.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: In respect of the income tax position, let me be quite clear. The Government will honour its commitment in respect of there being no increase in the income tax bands. The extract from the memorandum of understanding says that the comprehensive spending review under way will be completed in September 2011 and that the budgetary measures outlined above will be examined by the Government in light of the findings of the review of the programme for Government. Based on the CSE and in consultation with the European Commission, the IMF and the ECB, the Government will introduce budgetary changes that will aim to realise fully the efficiencies identified while remaining fiscally neutral. We have no intention of reneging upon the commitment in respect of income tax.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I have been trying hard to understand the Taoiseach's negotiating strategy regarding——

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Keep trying.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Adams, please.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Every circus needs its clowns.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, the Deputy should proceed as best he can.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Gerry Adams: I would like the Taoiseach's help.

Deputy Tom Hayes: By God, we will help. We have the pick and shovel for Deputy Adams.

Deputy Gerry Adams: This seems to be about reducing the interest rate on the bailout. While this is important, it will happen anyway, as other Sinn Féin Deputies and I have stated previously. I am trying to come to terms with the matter. As I look at the Greek Government's situation, the Taoiseach has not even had a discussion with his counterparts at a summit on Ireland's disastrous situation. In fact, he boasted in the Chamber about taking the issue off the agenda.

Does the Taoiseach know that the Greek Government recently had a high-level meeting with select EU finance Ministers to discuss the worsening Greek situation? Has he received any word about this secretive emergency meeting, which involved France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece, the European Central Bank and Olli Rehn, the European economics Commissioner?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It was not much of a secret.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Does the Taoiseach know that European Commission President Barroso, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the European Council President are to meet tomorrow, not to discuss the awful situation pressing down upon the Irish people——

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question? His time is up.

Deputy Gerry Adams: ——but to discuss the Greek situation? As the Taoiseach stated, Greece and Portugal are at the top of the EU's conversation. Why is Ireland not at the top? The Taoiseach should explain that to the House.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I have no intention of decrying the people of Greece, Portugal or their Governments, which are dealing with difficult situations. In so far as we are concerned, we want to focus on the difficulties that we have as a country and as a Government that is grappling to resuscitate an economy left in an atrocious mess by the previous Government. Be that as it may, the situation is that this will not happen, as the Deputy knows, unless negotiated agreements are reached. The fact of the matter is that the Ministers for finance will meet next Monday, these matters are on the agenda, we will be in discussion and negotiation with our counterparts in Europe up to and during that meeting and, hopefully, a conclusion can be reached.

I have not spoken to Mr. Juncker, who called the meeting in Luxembourg at short notice, nor have I spoken to any of the persons the Deputy mentioned and who are meeting tomorrow. All I can confirm to him is that I have spoken with our Minister for Finance and, on behalf of the Government, he has been delegated to continue these negotiations. An interest rate reduction in Ireland's case would obviously be very welcome and very necessary but, for us, we must look at that as one issue and continue to seek improvements in the overall bailout deal, as we have pointed out on many occasions.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Obviously, the Taoiseach knows nothing about any of the questions I asked, as he did not answer any of them.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: They were all in the newspapers on Saturday.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I was not decrying the Greeks. I was praising them. Something that hurt me — I am sure it hurt every Irish citizen — was how some protestors at a demonstration in Greece had placards——

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: That is a novelty.

Deputy Gerry Adams: ——that read, "We are not the Irish".

Deputy Simon Harris: That is true.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Therein lies the core of it. A fellow countyman of the Taoiseach's, Mr. John Healy, wrote a book many eons ago, entitled *No One Shouted Stop*. He was referring to the scourge of emigration, but he could have been talking about this Government. We know what Fianna Fáil did, but it is not in government. Rather, the Taoiseach is in government. Some 500,000 people are unemployed.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could I have a supplementary question, please?

Deputy Gerry Adams: On the way to the House this morning, I saw mile-long lines of people queuing for the dole. The jobs stimulus does not appear to be a serious investment plan on the Government's radar. What I am saying is simple — the Taoiseach needs to say "Stop". He needs to catch the attention of the senior partners in the two-tiered EU and tell them that this debt, as the Minister for Finance stated, is not sustainable. He said it; we have said it; the proverbial dogs in the street are saying it: we cannot afford the debt.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: What do we do?

Deputy Gerry Adams: We should tell those at the upper echelons of the European Union that this is the case. We must get their attention and angry with them. The laughing hyenas behind them should be turned loose on those who have a responsibility——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is up.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Government has a responsibility to stand up for Irish interests, but it is not doing so.

Deputy Alex White: Does the Deputy have any ideas?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Will the Taoiseach do this? Will he go and say, "Stop"?

(Interruptions).

Deputy Gerry Adams: Is ceist shimplí é.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask those on the backbenches to give Members a chance.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: To be truthful, I do not know whether there was a supplementary question. I remind Members that this is Leaders' Questions. It is not a time for statements. We can hear statements when this is over.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: The Deputy is learning the ropes.

An Ceann Comhairle: If there was a question, I ask the Taoiseach to answer it; if not, there is no answer to be given.

The Taoiseach: I will reply to the comments made. I assure Deputy Gerry Adams, as the leader of his party, that I will be proud to stand up for the Irish and all things Irish.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I will protect and defend all those who serve the State in so far as my constitutional responsibility goes. I want the Deputy to understand this. I did not see the placard in Athens, but I assure him we are not the Greeks. We are the Irish and will deal with our problem in our own way. We were left a particular legacy by the previous Government. It is not a very edifying sight.

A Deputy: We are Europeans.

The Taoiseach: In line with our practical approach of being up-front with the people and our European colleagues, we will spell it out as we see it. With regard to the Exchequer figures released last week, the Deputy is well aware that despite the difficulties, we are meeting our targets. We will continue to negotiate, as is the remit of the Minister for Finance, to achieve an interest rate reduction in the bailout deal and, as has been pointed out by Minister after Minister, to seek improvements in that deal for Ireland. Part of this is the jobs initiative being announced today which I hope Deputies will support. I notice the Sinn Féin Deputies have had a change of heart about the National Pensions Reserve Fund. They do not want it to be used for debt reduction purposes——

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Government would give it all away. It would give it to the bankers.

The Taoiseach: ——but for job creation, which is welcome.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The improvements are not enough.

The Taoiseach: As the Deputy started by rolling up his sleeves, I will say, "Cuirfimid ár bhfir ag obair."

Deputy Finian McGrath: I want to ask the Taoiseach a few questions about what is happening in Dublin Bay and the new port expansion plan by the Dublin Port Company. It is linked with the broader issue of job creation. Earlier the Taoiseach mentioned the possibility of commemorating the Battle of Clontarf of 1014. There could be another Battle of Clontarf shortly. Does the Taoiseach accept the principle——

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Deputy is only allowed to ask one question.

Deputy Finian McGrath: ——that Dublin Bay belongs to the people of Dublin and Ireland, not just the port company? Does he agree that the bay needs to be preserved and that filling in 40 ha. of land would constitute environmental vandalism, particularly when the Dublin Port Company does not need the land? Is he aware of the anger expressed about the master plan launched by the serving Minister at the Cabinet, Deputy Leo Varadkar, despite the fact that the stated policy position of both Government parties before the general election was that no further infill of the bay would be supported? Does he accept that the late Seán Dublin Bay Loftus and groups such as Dublin Bay Watch and the Clontarf Residents Association have spent the last 30 years fighting with Governments, City Hall and the Dublin Port Company to preserve and protect Dublin Bay and won that battle? With regard to the retention of employment, is the Taoiseach aware of the thousands of people who use Dublin Bay and walk on the sea front and the major impact this infill would have on local small businesses such as coffee shops, pubs and restaurants? What about the further potential of marine tourism and leisure destinations? Does the Taoiseach agree that Dublin Bay is a valuable natural resource and

amenity and that filling in 40 ha. of it with rock, concrete and steel would seriously damage this asset?

Deputy Tom Hayes: We need a dual mandate.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Finian McGrath was mentioned in his absence as being the defender of Clontarf. Of course, I agree that Dublin Bay is a valuable amenity for the citizens of this city and country and those who come to visit us. In fact, arising from Captain Bligh's plumbing contract — he did the assessment of Dublin Bay — I have often had the opportunity during the years of walking on Bull Island and playing on the golf course. I hope the coffee shops and tourism outlets will thrive under the jobs initiative to be announced later by the Minister for Finance in the Dáil.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Their wages will be cut under it.

The Taoiseach: Obviously, this is a serious matter. Dublin Port is a powerhouse for jobs in this city and an important part of the economic strength of the country. Any proposals for development in Dublin Bay would have to be sustainable and go through a rigorous process. I am well aware of the campaign waged against a proposal to fill in sections of the bay in recent years, which I opposed. This is a matter that has been on the agenda for the past 30 years. Proposals for the development of Dublin Port would have to be sustainable and there is a rigorous process for dealing with them.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Will the Taoiseach ask the management team of the Dublin Port Company to manage its 60 acres of port land more efficiently and use other ways of updating the port? I also ask him not to allow the bay to be destroyed by vested interests because of its major potential. I ask him whether his Cabinet is split on the matter. One Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, says he is against the infill, while another, Deputy Leo Varadkar, says he wants to get on with the job and supports the Dublin Port Company. Is there a split in the Cabinet? Can the Taoiseach inform me of the Government's policy on the proposal? I ask him to clarify once and for all where the Government, including the Labour Party, stands on the proposed infill.

The Taoiseach: I will refer the Deputy's request for more efficient management of the 600 acres of port land to the board of the Dublin Port Company. As they say in Irish, táimid dlúthcheangailte lena chéile ar seo. There is no scoilt, as the Deputy might call it. In fact, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Leo Varadkar, was there merely to make a presentation. The words of the Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, are very clear. I assure the Deputy that, unlike the Battle of Clontarf, there is no split in the Cabinet on this matter.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Richard the Lionheart.

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 6, statements on the jobs initiative 2011. It is also proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the following arrangements shall apply to No. 6: the statement of a Minister or a Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group who shall be called upon in that order shall not exceed 30 minutes in each case; the statement of each other Member called upon shall not exceed 20 minutes in each case; Members may share time; a Minister or a Minister of State shall take questions for a period not exceeding 30 minutes; and a Minister or a Minister of

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State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed 15 minutes. Private Members' business shall be No. 3, Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill 2011 — Order for Second Stage and Second Stage, and the proceedings on Second Stage thereon shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 8.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 11 May.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are two proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 6 agreed to? Agreed. With regard to Private Members' business, is the proposal for dealing with No. 3 agreed to? Agreed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I seek leave to introduce a Private Members' Bill entitled the Twenty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (No. 2) Bill 2011.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will deal with that matter later.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: What is it about?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Dúirt an Taoiseach uair éigin ó shin go mbeadh díospóireacht faoi chúrsaí Gaeilge.

The Taoiseach: Gabh mo leithscéal.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Níor chuala an Taoiseach mé. Bhí mé ag rá go ndúirt sé, cúpla seachtain ó shin, go mbeidh díospóireacht ann faoi chúrsaí Gaeilge. Níl sé ann fós. An bhfuil uair agat?

The Taoiseach: Bhí cruinniú ag an choiste Rialtais faoi seo ach ní bheidh díospóireacht faoin ábhar go dtí go mbeidh díospóireacht anseo faoi chúrsaí Gaeilge. Ba chóir go n-iarrrfadh Aoire Shinn Féin ag an chruinniú anocht nó amárach go bpléifí an cheist sin. Tá an Rialtas toilteanach go mbeadh díospóireacht faoin Ghaeilge ann nuair a bheadh sin oiriúnach.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: De réir mar a thuigim, tá seo iarrtha go minic ag na hAoirí d'Fhianna Fáil agus de Shinn Féin agus níl sé socraithe fós.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Cuív, do not be getting excited.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Buachaill dona.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Adams to continue. We do not need any help.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Déanfaimid sin ach nuair a dúirt an Taoiseach sin faoin Ghaeilge bhí Seachtain na Gaeilge ar siúl; tuigeann sé an méid atá le rá agam. Ní maith an rud é nach raibh seans ann ó shin go dtí seo agus nach bhfuil rud ar bith socraithe ag an Rialtas go fóill.

The Taoiseach: Dúirt an Teachta Ó Cuív go raibh seo ar an chlár aige nuair a bhí sé ina Aire. Nuair a bhí sé sa phost sin, chuir mé féin ceisteanna air maidir le straitéis na Gaeilge agus níor tharla rud ar bith ar feadh cúpla bliana in any event. Má tá an Teachta ar lorg díospóireachta faoin Ghaeilge nó faoi chúrsaí Gaeilge ag an chéad chruinniú eile leis an Phríomh-Aoire, beimid toilteanach go mbeidh díospóireacht ann ag am oiriúnach.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I understand the Government intends to announce a number of research initiatives this afternoon as part of the jobs initiative.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will deal with that very shortly.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Legislation will be necessary to implement some of those initiatives and when will such legislation be introduced?

The Taoiseach: That will be introduced in the next few weeks.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Tá tuairisc tar éis teacht amach faoin Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna faoin chóras aitheantais atá ann do ghaelscoileanna nua. Deir muintir na ngaelscoileanna go gcuirfidh an córas sin cosc ar ghaelscoileanna nua a bhunú timpeall na tíre. An bhfuil an cinneadh sin déanta ag an Rialtas? An mbeidh seans againn an cinneadh a phlé sa Teach?

The Taoiseach: Níl cinneadh déanta faoi sin. Níl an tuairisc sin léite agam ach má chuireann an Teachta ceist díreach ar an Aire, tabharfaidh sé freagra iomlán dó.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a matter for the Whips to organise debates. I call Deputy Healy.

Deputy Seamus Healy: When is it proposed to bring legislation before the House to implement a commitment in the programme for Government to ensure the highest standards of transparency in the operation of NAMA?

The Taoiseach: It is not listed for this session but I assure the Deputy that the structure and working of NAMA is under active consideration. As soon as the Government is in a position to bring forward whatever legislation it proposes, it will be published.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In the week that the Moriarty tribunal report was published the Taoiseach informed the House that a comprehensive programme of legislation in response would be announced within four weeks. That deadline passed a fortnight ago. When is it now proposed that the list will be published? I ask the Taoiseach to consider supporting the passage of the Bill on corporate donations that we will debate this evening during Private Members' time, to move it forward and accept it in order that the Dáil can proceed with it and that we can take action now without having to wait further.

The Taoiseach: I am mindful of the sincerity with which the Deputy said that.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: It is a new beginning.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is a corporate donations proposal. The sniggers of a few Members does not change a thing.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: The Deputy is on the road to Damascus.

The Taoiseach: *Mirabile dictu*. I can inform Deputy Martin that the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government will bring forward the heads of his Bill in respect of corporate donations to Cabinet next week. The Ministers in their Departments responded to the request and the recommendations made by Moriarty. This will be brought forward as a matter of priority. For that reason and as the Deputy's party has recognised the inadequacies in the Private Members' Bill, we will not be supporting it in so far as the legislation to be introduced by the Minister, Deputy Hogan, will be comprehensive, clear and unambiguous in this matter.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Will the Taoiseach advise the House of any legislative change he understands will be required to facilitate the new portfolios he announced upon

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taking up Government? He announced his range of Ministers, which in some cases amounts to changing some aspects of portfolios to others and in two instances it amounts to brand new portfolios. Will he confirm what he understands, Department by Department, is required to make that happen and when it will happen?

The Taoiseach: A number of transfer orders have gone through the Cabinet in respect of changes in the titles and the responsibilities of different Ministries. The legislation in respect of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, for which the Minister, Deputy Howlin, has responsibility, will be before the Cabinet on Tuesday. The legislation dealing with the Minister with responsibility for children and youth affairs will be before the Cabinet in the first week in June.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: On the legislation required for the referendum on children's rights, does the Taoiseach concur with the timeframe given by his Minister on Highland Radio in Donegal last Friday for introducing that referendum within the next 12 months? Why has there been a U-turn when members of his party in government——

An Ceann Comhairle: We can only deal with promised legislation.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: ——committed to having that referendum in conjunction with the Presidential election? Why change that now? Does the Taoiseach commit to his Government bringing it in within the next 12 months? When can we expect to see that legislation before the House?

The Taoiseach: This is a complex matter and the reason I have not tied a timeline to presenting to the people a referendum on children's rights is that it has got to be right. This is a sensitive issue. The Deputy will be aware that during the lifetime of the previous Government an all-party Oireachtas committee came forward with a specific wording, following its members from all parties having done a great deal work on it. The then Attorney General recommended a change in the wording. The children's rights advocacy groups believe that wording is not sufficient to deal with the requirements involved in the referendum. The Minister with responsibility for children and youth affairs is now dealing with having to provide a number of Bills in respect of this. She will be dealing with the children's rights advocacy groups in order that there be a thorough analysis of where best to go from the situation that exists. I did not tie a specific timeline on this because it is very important that it be got right. That is one of the reasons we have a front line senior Government Department dealing with children and children's issues.

An Bille um an Naoú Leasú is Fiche ar an mBunreacht (Uimh. 2) 2011 — An Chéad Chéim

Twenty-Ninth Amendment to the Constitution (No. 2) Bill 2011: First Stage

Deputy Micheál Martin: Tairgim:

> Go gceadófar go dtabharfar isteach Bille dá ngairtear Acht chun an Bunreacht a leasú.

I move:

> That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Constitution.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

The Taoiseach: No.

Cuireadh agus aontaíodh an cheist.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Tairgim: "Go dtógfar an Bille in am Comhaltaí Príobháideacha."

I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Cuireadh agus aontaíodh an cheist.

Question put and agreed to.

Jobs Initiative 2011: Statements

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is just under nine weeks since the new Government assumed office, having obtained a secure and stable mandate from the people. We have agreed a programme for Government, motivated by a clear vision of an Ireland that, by the end of our term in office, will be recognised as a modern, fair, socially inclusive and equal society, supported by a productive and prosperous economy.

As indicated in the programme for Government, the success of our economic strategy will lay the foundation for the rest of our agenda for change. That economic strategy in turn is based on several essential elements that include fixing our broken banking system, restoring order to our public finances, regaining and enhancing our international competitiveness, supporting the protection and creation of jobs, radically reforming our system of public administration and rebuilding Ireland's reputation on the international stage.

We have hit the ground running. Within three weeks of taking up office, we took firm and decisive action to recapitalise and restructure the domestic banking system to restore the banks to a position where they are fit for the purpose of supporting economic recovery. Within three more weeks we re-engaged with the European Union-International Monetary Fund-European Central Bank partners to renegotiate the Programme of Support for Ireland.

We have also confirmed our commitment to bringing the public finances on to a sustainable trajectory and to achieving a deficit of less than 3% of gross domestic product by 2015. To this end, we have embarked on a fundamental and comprehensive review of public spending, both current and capital. We intend to use the results of those reviews as key building blocks in our budgetary plans for 2012 and beyond.

The Government is also committed to implementing a range of reforms to the domestic budgetary framework. It is our intention to have put in place by the end of June an independent fiscal advisory council and to publish, by the end of the year, a fiscal responsibility Bill which will set out a radically new approach to the management of the public finances. These important reforms will place Ireland's future budgetary framework on a more sustainable and credible footing.

Today, well within our first 100 days in office, we move forward with the jobs initiative. It comprises a set of measures that represents the new Government's first steps towards improving the economy's international competitiveness and promoting job creation. We are taking these steps against a background where the economy has seen three successive years of declining economic activity. Between 2007 and 2010, the volume of goods and services produced in

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Ireland fell by approximately 12%. This year, however, we can look forward to positive growth which we fully expect will accelerate as we move into 2012 and beyond.

The recently published stability programme update forecasts positive gross domestic product growth this year, a welcome development following the past three years. For 2012, my Department projects that gross domestic product will grow by 2.5%, with average growth of 3% per annum possible between 2013 to 2015.

Underpinning this expected rebound in economic activity is a strong outlook for goods and services exports. The picture emerging is one of an export-led recovery which is in line with expectations. A recovery in a small open economy such as Ireland's typically takes this form.

On foot of recent competitiveness gains and improving external demand, the exporting sectors of the economy are in general performing very well. Last year, exports increased by 9.5% in real terms, the strongest rate of growth for a decade. Looking to the future, export growth is projected at about 6.75% in 2011 and 5.75% in 2012.

Since the 1950s, Ireland has used its corporate tax regime as an integral part of its strategy to encourage growth, attract foreign direct investment and increase employment. We do not have the allure of a large domestic market or substantial public procurement to attract major international firms here, so we must use the other tools at our disposal. This approach is supported by research by bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development which points to the importance of low corporate tax rates to encourage growth in small open economies.

The Government is committed to continuing this policy approach, knowing that certainty is essential for existing and prospective investors. Our 12.5% rate of corporation tax is here to stay. It is central to our industrial policy and is an integral part of our international brand. The Government's message is, therefore, unequivocal. There will be no deviation from that position, one which also has broad cross-party support.

The corporation tax regime is a vital element of our industrial policy. However, other measures also have an important part to play. In this regard, Ireland has a very attractive research and development tax credit scheme that allows as a general measure 25% of incremental expenditure by a company on qualifying research and development to be set off against its corporation tax liabilities or, where there are no such liabilities, for the credit to be paid to the company.

Since its introduction in 2004, the scheme has influenced the decisions of many multinational firms to locate internationally mobile research and development projects in Ireland. To maximise the benefits to companies and further encourage investment and employment in research and development, I intend to amend the research and development tax credit legislation to enhance flexibility for companies in how they account for the credit, giving the option to account for it above or below the line.

Ireland's attraction for research and development activities has played, and continues to play, a critical role in encouraging foreign direct investment and creating employment. The Government intends to continue to enhance that attraction.

The jobs initiative is about encouraging employment. In that regard, I have reviewed the decision taken by the previous Government to introduce employer PRSI on share-based remuneration. This was a serious mistake and I intend to reverse it in the forthcoming finance Bill. The imposition of this charge on employers needlessly increases the costs of doing business in Ireland and would have the potential to negatively affect current employment levels and future investment decisions. Businesses operate under strict budgetary control in the current

economic climate and increasing their costs is unwise. The potential loss to the economy from this measure far outweighs the potential yield to the Exchequer. Accordingly, I have decided to abolish the employer PRSI element with effect from 1 January 2011.

There is a perception that export growth is not jobs-rich which is true in general. Most exporting sectors in the economy tend to be capital rather than labour intensive. However, tourism is one very obvious exception to this general pattern. Much economic activity in the tourism industry is highly intensive in its use of labour. This is particularly true of hotels and restaurants, recreation and entertainment. In the case of tourism and exports, it is simply that the persons who purchase the goods and services come to the country to do so.

Its relative labour intensity makes it all the more unfortunate that tourism has greatly underperformed other exporting sectors. Far from expanding, as overall exports did, tourism continued to decline last year with the total number of trips by visitors to Ireland down by 13% on the 2009 level. This brought to 25% the cumulative decline in inbound tourism numbers between 2007 and 2010. Over the same period, earnings from tourism and travel fell by about 30%.

These figures reflect the scale of the challenge facing the tourism industry. They also illustrate the scale, however, of the opportunity that exists for the industry if it can get it right. Even by recovering the ground it has lost in recent years, tourism can make a substantial contribution to our economic recovery and to the creation of employment in all parts of the country.

Another strong reason we should make every attempt to capitalise on the potential of tourism is that significant investment has already taken place in this sector. Whatever about the merits of some of the schemes that encouraged this investment, we have a stock of accommodation, much of it of a very high quality by international standards, which we must now utilise to full advantage. We also have a stock of entertainment and recreational facilities that has been significantly enhanced by public investment in recent years, not to mention a transport infrastructure the capacity of which has been greatly augmented.

Overall, our tourism products are very strong. In addition to Ireland's natural attractions, we have a wide range of high quality accommodation, including hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs, self-catering accommodation and hostels, to suit all tastes and budgets. We offer a wide range of sporting and recreational facilities and events. Culture and heritage, golf, angling, walking, cycling and equestrian pursuits are all easily accessible. In recent years, holidaying in Ireland has become more affordable. These are some of the many advantages we must harness to improve visitor satisfaction and to increase the number of people from overseas who choose Ireland as their holiday destination.

5 o'clock

While the provision of tourist facilities and amenities is important, marketing of what Ireland has to offer as a holiday location is crucial. The United Kingdom is our most important overseas market, with close to half of our overseas visitors coming from there. It is also the market that has seen the greatest contraction since the recession began. Between 2007 and 2010 trips to Ireland from Britain fell by 32%. It is critical that we see a return to growth in visits from the UK to achieve overall growth in tourist numbers. As part of a three-pronged strategy to promote tourism by encouraging airlines to improve levels of access for visitors to Ireland, tourism marketing resources will be made available for Tourism Ireland, working with the three State airports, to promote visitor traffic from destinations served by additional routes and services through co-operative marketing with carriers. The tourism marketing fund will support a strong focus on our major source markets, including the UK, to take advantage of the additional opportunities presented in 2011 by the forthcoming visits of Queen Elizabeth and President Obama. These visits present exciting opportunities to get Ireland back in the minds of potential tourists and are invaluable in terms of marketing and publicity.

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The programme for Government provided for the lowering of the reduced VAT rate. Rather than applying a 1.5% reduction to the rate for all goods and services currently on the 13.5% reduced rate, I have decided to introduce a more focussed and larger reduction for certain goods and services while other items continue to be subject to the existing lower rate.

Consequently, as part of the measures to support the tourism industry, the VAT reduction will be targeted mainly at those services relating to tourism. In this context, a new temporary second reduced rate of VAT at 9% will be introduced with effect from 1 July 2011 until end December 2013. The new 9% rate will apply mainly to restaurant and catering services, hotel and holiday accommodation and various entertainment services such as admissions to cinemas, theatres, museums, fairgrounds, amusement parks and sporting facilities. In addition, hairdressing and printed matter such as brochures, maps, programmes and newspapers will also be charged at the new rate. All other goods and services to which a reduced rate currently applies will remain subject to the 13.5% rate. This measure is estimated to cost €120 million this year and €350 million in a full year. The purpose of this targeted VAT relief is to boost tourism and stimulate employment in the sector. I am confident that it will give the tourism sector a much needed shot in the arm. However, to ensure that the sector is delivering, the effects of the changes announced today will be assessed and the measures reviewed before the end of 2012 in the context of preparing Budget 2013.

To encourage overseas visitor numbers, I will provide for the air travel tax rate to be reduced to zero on a date to be fixed by Order.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Noonan: To be clear, the commencement of this measure is subject to an agreement being reached with the airlines to bring in additional passenger numbers. The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport is holding discussions in that regard. Furthermore, as with the targeted VAT reductions, a review of this measure will be conducted before the end of 2012 to evaluate its success in bringing in additional passenger numbers. If it is not being successful, the air travel tax will be reapplied. Consequently, the relevant legislation will remain in place to allow the tax to be recommenced if there is no appropriate activity in the market.. The cost of this measure, based on a possible implementation date of 1 July 2011 is €15 million in 2011, €90 million in 2012 and €105 million thereafter. The suspension of the air travel tax is one of a number of approaches being taken to revitalise the tourism industry as part of the jobs initiative. Other elements include a new scheme of discounts on airport charges, which has been agreed by the State airports in consultation with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and the airlines. A tourism marketing campaign will begin, which will be particularly focused on Ireland's major source markets such as the UK.

In addition to these measures, the Minister for Justice and Equality will announce a major reform measure in the visa application system for entry to Ireland. This initiative will make it easier for overseas visitors, including visitors from crucial emerging markets, to come to Ireland without having to incur the trouble and expense of applying for separate visas once they have already obtained visas for the UK. Essentially, the holders of such visas will not require a separate visa to come to Ireland. I know that as well as presenting business and employment opportunities for the coming season, this measure will provide a great opportunity for tourist service providers to capitalise on the hundreds of thousands of visitors who will travel to the London Olympics next year.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Noonan: The notable under-performance of tourism over the past few years highlights the need to improve the sector's cost competitiveness, an objective that the measures I have announced will help to advance. A set of costs that are especially important to tourism and other employment-rich areas of the economy are labour costs. One way to help job creation and improve our labour cost competitiveness is to ease the costs on employers of taking on new employees. Accordingly, and in line with the commitment given in the programme for Government, I am announcing today the halving of the lower rate of PRSI until end-2013 on jobs that pay up to €356 per week. This measure will take effect from 1 July next. Also, 1 July next is the effective date for restoration of the minimum wage to its previous level.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Noonan: This will be done through legislation to be introduced by my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton. The existing employer job, PRSI, incentive scheme will remain in place until the end of this year so that enterprises and businesses that had planned to take on staff under this scheme in that period may continue to do so.

As set out in the programme for Government, it is the Government's intention to reform the structures for setting wages at sectoral level. The Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation has recently received the report of the independent review of Employment Regulation Orders and Registered Employment Agreements, which he will be published shortly. The report states that the system requires radical overhaul to make it fairer and more responsive to changing economic circumstances and labour market conditions.

The downturn in the economy has had a profound effect on the labour market, with areas such as retail, accommodation and food being among those hardest hit. In this environment, it is necessary to ensure that these structures are flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and that they reflect the realities of our modern economy. In particular, there are issues relating to overtime and premium payments for Sunday working, the number of Joint Labour Committees and the general functioning and supervision of the system. Following publication of the report, the Government is determined to proceed with urgency to substantial reform of the system.

Job creation is central to any economic recovery strategy. That is why labour market policy forms an important part of the programme for Government. Measures to reduce employment costs and to make wage-setting arrangements work more fairly and more responsively are, in turn, essential tools of labour market policy but they will not be sufficient to address the severe labour market problems that we currently face. They must be accompanied by measures that ensure a pathway to appropriate employment, education and training opportunities for people who have become unemployed. At all costs we must avoid the risk that people who are now long-term unemployed will find it difficult to secure meaningful employment again in the open labour market. That is why it is essential to maximise the effectiveness of the substantial resources we provide on activation measures and provide for a more integrated approach and targeting of effort.

Increasing levels of engagement with the unemployed at clear milestones is a key element of our approach to creating pathways to employment for such persons. A re-invigorated national employment action plan, within the architecture of the National Employment and Entitlements Service will underpin this increased level of engagement. The Minister for Social Protection will publish details of the further development and roll-out of the new approach to engagement with those on the live register. The Government's objective will be to ensure the State will

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engage with unemployed people and advise them on training, education or work placement opportunities that are appropriate to each individual's circumstances.

We will provide an additional 6,000 specific skills training courses targeted at those who have left employment in areas where there are now significant structural employment issues, such as the construction industry. We will also provide an additional 3,000 Back to Education initiative places which will be targeted at adults with less than the leaving certificate. Some 1,000 additional post-leaving certificate places will be targeted at school leavers and adults returning to education. An additional 5,900 places will be provided under the third level-springboard programme targeted at those who have left employment where there are now significant structural employment issues.

The Government will also establish a new national internship scheme providing 5,000 work experience placements in the private, public and voluntary sectors. This will be a time-limited scheme and will provide work experience placements for interns for a six to nine month period. A weekly allowance of €50 per week on top of the existing social welfare entitlement will be payable for the period of the internship.

Taking all of these measures together, the net result is that there will be some 20,900 places available at an additional cost in 2011 of €11 million. This represents a substantial and meaningful commitment to helping people who have lost their jobs. These measures are, of course, on top of the other initiatives such as the supports for over 1,000 redundant apprentices now being put in place to enable them to complete on-the-job training.

An Ceann Comhairle: It would appear that the time allocated to the Minister is insufficient. Is it agreed that the time be extended to allow him to finish? Agreed.

Deputy Michael Noonan: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. I will be able to slow down now.

Deputy Finian McGrath: A Cheann Comhairle, will the time be extended for other speakers?

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Has Deputy McGrath something to announce?

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no time limit for other speakers.

Deputy Sean Fleming: The Minister should be allowed to proceed. This is an important announcement.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I will move on to initiatives relating to public capital projects. Public capital investment can play an important role, both in promoting employment and in addressing worthwhile, visible and pressing infrastructure needs throughout the country. Despite our current circumstances, we will continue to invest in such worthwhile and necessary projects, with the considerable sum of €4.6 billion being allocated for 2011. Capital investment can stimulate economic activity as well as providing direct employment, with an average of eight to 12 direct jobs being created per €1 million of capital expenditure. Additionally, well-targeted investment in infrastructure can have significantly higher indirect job creation impacts in the medium term. However, an investment programme must strike an appropriate balance between projects the purpose of which is to create new capacity, for example, new roads or new schools, and works whose purpose is to maintain the capacity of existing infrastructure by carrying out necessary repair and maintenance. The comprehensive review of State capital spending to which I have already made reference will help the Government to get this balance right in relation to 2012 and beyond.

In the meantime, I have decided that there is a case for tilting the balance for 2011 in the direction of what are called minor capital works and away from new build projects. This is largely on the grounds that I think more resources than originally provided should be directed towards ensuring that our existing stock of infrastructure does not become degraded. A welcome consequence of this is that there will be some modest boost to employment since minor capital works tend to be more employment intensive than larger projects.

Specifically, there will be further investment in schools, local and regional roads and the national energy retrofitting programme.

Deputy James Bannon: Hear, hear.

Deputy Michael Noonan: The cost of these measures will be met by re-allocations from elsewhere within the capital allocations of the relevant Departments and from some of the proceeds of a new levy, the details of which I will set out shortly.

Delivering and maintaining necessary schools is one of the priorities of Government over the next five years. We will continue to invest heavily in our schools. An educated workforce has been central to our previous economic advances and is an absolute prerequisite for our future economic renewal. This will form part of the capital review which is just commencing and which is due to be completed in the autumn. To this end, a further €30 million will be made available for school works and associated works in 2011. Some €20 million of this will be re-allocated by the Minister for Education and Skills from within his own Department's allocation. An additional €10 million of Exchequer funding will be made available to the Department from the proceeds of the new levy. This will be allocated to immediately ready projects to be delivered by schools and will lead to the commencement of an additional €40 million investment, €30 million of which will be spent this summer on what are locally referred to as the summer schemes for schools. A targeted programme using re-allocated funds will enhance existing schools, address building defects and, most importantly, provide immediate, labour-intensive employment in localities throughout the country.

The Government has also agreed that the Department of Education and Skills will continue to invest in new schools. As a result, the Department will identify and deliver two further public private partnership schools bundles in areas where additional infrastructure is required post-2016. Planning and preparatory work will begin immediately. Details of these measures have been announced by the Minister for Education and Skills.

An extra €60 million will be re-allocated to invest in our regional and local roads to carry out much needed surface restoration and road reconstruction works. This important, remedial work is overdue and the additional money invested will allow local authorities to bring forward important projects to 2012 that had previously been pushed back to 2013. The local and regional roads network is fundamental to supporting economic activity away from the main urban centres and motorways. The existing road network must be maintained to a sufficient standard to ensure that the value of this important capital asset does not depreciate prematurely over the coming years. Indeed, if such work is not undertaken soon, the quality of the roads is likely to deteriorate markedly.

All in all, the re-allocated €60 million will help repair about 800 kilometres of local roads right across the country. In addition to this, a further €15 million will be spent on local sustainable transport projects in both urban and rural areas. These will include cycle lanes, pedestrian routes and park-and-ride facilities. These labour-intensive schemes will have a real local impact both in the provision of direct employment and enhancing the quality of local infrastructure. These two measures will support the creation of a number of additional jobs.

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There will also be an additional €19 million in Exchequer funding to the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, for the national energy retrofitting programme, to be supplemented by €11 million savings from within that Department's existing allocation. This will double the funding for the retrofit home energy efficiency and renewable energy programmes in the second half of this year. Energy efficiency works are more labour intensive than other capital programmes and will therefore support additional jobs, as well as delivering long-term savings to households and to the economy in terms of carbon savings. It should also be pointed out that, under the retrofit programme, each €10 million of Exchequer funding provides leverage for up to €15 million in private sector spending.

The size of Exchequer funding for this measure in future years will be considered in the capital review, to be conducted by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. In accordance with the programme for Government commitment, we will prepare alternative measures to ensure more energy efficiency programmes can be funded without further recourse to the Exchequer by the end of 2013, if not sooner. In addition to these initial investment measures, we are committed to a more radical overhaul of the wider Exchequer finance capital programme in line with our changed economic and social needs and are putting in place a parallel, commercially financed New Era strategic investment programme in key works of the economy. Further announcements in this regard can be expected shortly.

The Government recognises that the small and medium enterprise sector is very important to the economy and that public procurement can be an important source of business for SMEs. The Government will build on existing initiatives to promote greater access to procurement opportunities for SMEs, including through identifying and overcoming barriers to their participation in the procurement process. We will also seek to foster greater SME engagement in developing innovative products and services to meet the needs of public bodies within the framework of EU law, and will explore schemes in other EU countries in this regard.

The Taoiseach recently signalled the Government's willingness to pilot an incentivisation scheme to encourage a broad diaspora to work for Ireland in finding potential foreign investments that result in sustained employment in Ireland. The initiative will be piloted by IDA Ireland and is intended to complement the IDA's initiative to attract more fast-growth emerging companies to Ireland. The focus will be mainly on generating projects from SMEs which are not reached through IDA's marketing and networking structures and ideally have the potential for rapid international growth.

To ensure additionality, the pilot will be structured around projects that would not otherwise have found their way to Ireland. It is intended that private sector partners, who could be from the "for profit" or voluntary sectors, will be selected following open competitive tendering, based on objective criteria such as the ability to deliver appropriate leads; the international reach of the persons involved; the ability and quality of the proposed mechanism to filter leads for real potential; a proposed fee and fee structure; and proposals to encourage the use of the fee income for philanthropic purposes. The details of the scheme will be agreed between the Department of public expenditure and reform and the Department of enterprise, jobs and innovation.

The Minister for public expenditure and reform is announcing tomorrow a relaxation of the numbers ceiling applying to non-Exchequer funded posts in the higher education sector in order to further facilitate the maximum possible employment creation potential of that sector, while also encouraging institutions to seek to diversify their sources of funding away from the Exchequer. It is envisaged that similar type arrangements will also apply to contract posts involved in research activity in non-commercial State agencies.

The various tax reduction and additional expenditure measures which I am announcing today will be funded by way of a temporary levy on funded pension schemes and personal pension plans. I propose that the levy will apply at a rate of 0.6% to the capital value of assets under management in pension funds established in the State. It will apply for a period of four years commencing this year and is intended to raise approximately €470 million in each of those years. The levy will not apply to pension funds established here and providing services and benefits solely to non-resident employers and members. Further details regarding the proposed measures of the levy are set out in the summary of initiative measures.

I am conscious of the concerns of the pensions industry about the impact of a levy in circumstances where the pensions sector, in common with other sectors in our economy and society, is finding the current economic and financial environment very challenging. However, the imposition of the levy is for a relatively short period and its purpose is to improve that environment by providing the means to encourage job creation in areas of our economy most likely to deliver that employment quickly. These pension funds, the vast majority of which are invested in overseas assets, have been the beneficiaries of massive tax relief in recent decades. In our current circumstances, there is sound economic logic to clawing back some of the tax relief on capital invested overseas to finance greater domestic employment in Ireland.

The levy is being confined to pension funds because I believe the alternatives for increases in taxation elsewhere at this time would be more damaging to the economy. I will be glad to consult the pensions industry on the legislative provisions which will give effect to the levy so as to seek to minimise, where possible, any unnecessary difficulties to which this measure may give rise.

The pension levy represents a very significant contribution by the pensions industry and the many individual savers it represents to our commitment to getting the economy moving again. I am aware that the pensions sector is also concerned, given the temporary levy, about the commitment in our agreement with the EU-IMF to reduce the tax relief on pension contributions starting next year. I will examine this issue in the context of the results of the comprehensive review of expenditure currently being undertaken by the Minister for public expenditure and reform, and any resulting scope for fiscally neutral changes to the EU-IMF agreement.

At the end of March, a range of measures was announced to reorganise, recapitalise and deleverage the domestic financial system in order to restore the banks to health and continue to provide a secure banking system for deposits. The three main elements of this strategy — recapitalisation, strong liquidity standards and a radical reorganisation and downsizing of the banking sector with the establishment of two pillar, full-service banks — are fundamental to economic recovery and job creation. The restructuring of the banking system will result in banks that are more proportionate to the size of the economy, that can better serve business and households and provide the vital supply of credit needed to support industry and consumers.

The banking system must provide substantial new lending into the economy. The business plans submitted by the pillar banks provide for over €30 billion of total new lending over the next three years across their core business areas. Up to €20 billion of this figure will go to small and medium size businesses, which are the lifeblood of economic recovery. The authorities will be rigorously monitoring the banks' activities to ensure credit is available for borrowers meeting reasonable credit standard requirements.

The plans to restructure and recapitalise the banking system represent the principal response to the challenge of ensuring the availability of credit to viable businesses. These plans are designed to secure an adequate flow of credit into the economy to support economic recovery, even as the banking system is downsized. Notwithstanding this, there remains an issue which

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predates the recent banking crisis, whereby new companies or expanding companies trying to develop new products or markets struggle to secure finance. This can be due to a lack of familiarity or understanding of the new industry, the new product or the potential of new markets. This market failure in the provision of credit to viable businesses became particularly acute in Ireland during the property bubble, during which time the Irish banks lost the capacity to assess credit risk in companies that were unable to offer property-related collateral.

This is why my Department will work with the Department of enterprise, jobs and innovation over the coming weeks to flesh out the lending targets of the two pillar banks agreed as part of the restructuring plans and to develop a package of additional, targeted initiatives designed to address specific market failures in the provision of credit for viable businesses. These measures will, of course, be subject to EU state aid approval, where necessary.

Among the issues that will be examined will be the role of the Credit Review Office, the credit assessment procedures and skills of the two pillar banks, the reporting procedures of the banks regarding new lending and what the Government can do to support the continued operation in Ireland of foreign-owned banks. As part of this package of initiatives, and in accordance with the commitment in the programme for Government, we will also be initiating a tendering process for the development of a temporary, partial credit guarantee scheme.

The design of the scheme will draw from international experience to support new lending that would not otherwise have been extended by the banks. In this way, the scheme will complement, rather than be a substitute for, existing lending activities by the main financial institutions. It will be designed to encourage banks to lend to new or expanding commercially viable SMEs so they can grow their company, develop new products or expand into new markets.

The Government's commitment will be for an initial period of one year. Specific performance criteria will be set down that allow for review and revision of the scheme at the end of that initial period before committing to a roll-over of the scheme for subsequent years. There will be a modest and known level of exposure to the taxpayer when the scheme is launched but I expect to see a significant positive knock-on benefit to the economy in terms of job creation, welfare savings and returns to the Exchequer by way of tax revenue generated. The Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, and I will develop this proposal further with our officials. It is our intention to announce the details of the scheme in June, with a view to having a targeted scheme in place by the autumn.

In line with the commitment in the programme for Government, a microfinance start-up fund to provide loans to small businesses is being developed. A workable scheme and optimum delivery mechanisms are now being considered and this work will be brought to fruition for the December budget.

There is no escaping the fact that we do not have the resources available at present to fund large-scale policy initiatives to help to generate economic activity. Given the weak state of the public finances, the costs associated with the measures we are implementing as part of this jobs initiative must be paid for through the introduction of off-setting measures. In practice, this means the initiative must be budget-neutral over the period to 2014. That in turn means the direct stimulatory effect of today's package of initiatives will be modest and there will be no extravagant claims made in its regard from this side of the House.

However, the measures announced principally represent the first steps by this Government towards improving the competitiveness of important sectors of the economy and enhancing the functioning of our labour market to better facilitate the return to work of those who are currently unemployed. These first steps will be followed by further movement towards this Government's vision of rebuilding a prosperous and productive economy by the end of our

term in office. In addition, I believe today's jobs initiative will help to rebuild confidence among households and firms at home and amongst potential investors abroad. In the first instance, as an initiative it points to a Government which is alive to the fact that, despite the tight constraints within which economic policy must now be pursued, it is still possible to make policy changes for the better. The Government is prepared to initiate those changes. Second, I believe the jobs initiative will help to rebuild confidence because it points to a Government which has a vision of what it wants to achieve, a strategy for getting there and the energy and decisiveness needed to adopt the measures required.

I believe the House will agree that in the early days of its tenure, this Government has not been found wanting. We identified priorities for action in our programme for Government and are well on the way to delivering on each of these although barely two months in office.

I commend the jobs initiative to the House.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Where are the jobs?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call the spokesperson from Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I welcome Deputy Higgins to the Government benches. He has joined this side.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask for order, please.

A Deputy: Come on over here, Joe

Deputy Joe Higgins: They are not here, that is for sure.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: You gave away your job in Brussels, Joe.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputies to show some respect for the spokesperson for Fianna Fáil. Can we have some order in the House? I thank Deputies, when they are ready.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I ask to share time with Deputy Sean Fleming.

An Ceann Comhairle: Agreed.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I welcome the opportunity to comment on this, the Government's first initiative in the field of job creation. Welcome though it may be, however — and I welcome it — it is rather minimalist. When one compares it to the documents produced by Fine Gael less than 12 months ago which promised €18 billion expenditure on job creation, it pales into insignificance. For every €36 promised in that original and widely circulated document €1 is being spent today. Of course, when reality kicked in the figure of €18 billion dropped, first to €7 billion. Now it has dwindled to €500 million.

None the less, the unemployment problem in this country is very severe. I recognise this, as does my party, and I welcome any initiative, from whatever Government, that will attempt to deal with that situation. I intend, therefore, to be as positive and constructive as I can. I have a number of questions which I hope are legitimate, a number of criticisms I hope the Minister will regard as constructive and a number of suggestions I hope he will regard as helpful.

Deputy Peter Mathews: A trinity.

Deputy Alan J. Shatter: Let the Deputy include in his contribution an apology for destroying the economy.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: In regard to the Minister's announcement on employers' PRSI, I had been somewhat confused as to how exactly this would operate, arising from certain statements made by the Minister and some of his colleagues. However, it is made reasonably clear in today's statement, which I welcome. It would appear that in respect of jobs which generate up to €356 per week income an employer who creates such a job will have his or her employer's PRSI halved, from 8.5% to 4.5%. The Minister must recognise there is a danger in this situation. What about the case of a person earning, for example, €370, €365 or €360 per week? In such a case will there not be an incentive for an employer to reduce wages to avail of the new rate of PSRI? I do not know how the measure will operate — we will tease it out when the Minister answers questions on Thursday, as I am glad to see he will do. Neither do I know if there is to be a kind of tapering, or marginal, relief that may be worked up gradually from the figure of €356. This must be done very carefully otherwise the cure is in danger of being worse than the disease.

The Minister announced a very important change in regard to the tax treatment of research and development expenditure which I warmly welcome. Leaving aside terminology in respect of above and below the line, in effect this means that in order to encourage people to invest in research and development this State will provide tax incentives or credits. As a result of this change, people who now provide such investment will, in almost every case, be able to claim full credit for the investment they provide. That is a very substantial step forward. We must remember there is very substantial tax competition at present in regard to the tax treatment of intellectual property. Other countries have taken various initiatives in this regard. The success of this country has been phenomenal if one considers the figures for recent years as released by the relevant agencies. Ireland has been phenomenally successful in attracting this type of investment which is absolutely vital for the future health of its economy..This is a very worthwhile initiative.

If I may presume on the Minister's obvious interest in this area there are some other aspects of this issue I wish to mention. There is a difficulty with the way such tax treatment is currently calculated, in terms of a base year of 2003 and expenditure over the amount spent in the base year. That has created a number of difficulties for what I imagine to be a relatively small number of firms which spent a great deal of money on research and development in 2003 and have been spending similarly since then. Perhaps a small adjustment, if not in the forthcoming budget perhaps in that of December, would yield very desirable results in that regard.

Another point I wish to make to the Minister in the context of tax relief on research and development concerns the outreach cap. As I understand it, at present an enterprise is allowed to outsource only 5% of its expenditure on research and development to a research institute. It is time to raise that cap substantially. One impact is to prevent linkage between the work done in this regard by research institutes and the work done by business. The Government has taken over many other policies designed to encourage linkage from the previous Government and has announced them in the programme for Government. Basically, maintaining the cap in place runs directly counter to many of the Government proposals with which I agree.

Will the Minister explain what became of the promise in the programme for Government to allow businesses that spend up to €100,000 on research and development to pay the full amount with no reference to the base year? This commitment was written into the programme for Government but I do not see it in the document today and I am bringing it to the Minister's attention.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are the lifeblood of the economy. I welcome the many references to SMEs in the programme for Government. Although there is some provision for them in the document, it is rather scanty. It relates to public procurement and is rather vague. There is no doubt that there is great capacity for SMEs to improve their business through public procurement but I state without fear of contradiction that the efforts made to date to improve the SME share of public procurement business have been an abysmal failure. For example, the first thing they run up against is the requirement for financial records and history. Many SMEs do not go back to the year dot or do not have 50 years of audited accounts, etc. There is too much emphasis on the financial history of the applicant for public procurement jobs and less on the capacity of the applicant to do the job.

Another problem is the famous Department of Finance circular 10/10, which was supposed to facilitate SMEs to access public procurement business. The circular has been honoured more in the breach than the observance. It was supposed to deal with such matters as transparency regarding opportunities which would arise, the capacity of companies or SMEs to break the contract into job lots, the capacity of SMEs to get together and make a joint application, information about indemnity and insurance etc. However, this is not happening. I put it to the Minister there is a need to urgently review this circular with a view to clarifying many aspects of it and to ensure that it is properly enforced.

A section of the document deals with labour market activation. I thought it looked somewhat familiar and now I remember that I saw it in the last budget and in the four-year plan. The measures seem to build on those. I recall the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, stating in Opposition that we had to consider scale with regard to these matters. He appears to be considering scale now, albeit a slightly increased scale. There are two difficulties in this regard. First, we must think bigger. If the present rate of unemployment is maintained — hopefully it will not increase — we must consider the scale of it. When he was in Opposition, Deputy Bruton rightly stated — I fully agreed with him at the time — that these measures could be cost-effective regardless of scale.

Second, the present system is unwieldy to say the least. It appears the Government is grafting on these new places to the present system. I realise the introduction of the one-stop-shop, which I welcome, will considerably alleviate the situation in this regard. Recently, I put a question to the Minister for Social Protection in respect of when exactly the one-stop-shop will come into operation. I was not overly enthused by the reply I received because it appears to be years away. What will happen in the meantime? We could do with some streamlining.

I wish to put forward several ideas with regard to labour activation. First, there should be a specific unit in one Department, with access to its website, to monitor the implementation of these schemes to ensure that we are getting value for money and that the schemes are working correctly. Second, apparently there is a problem with branding. I am informed employers do not relate well to opportunities with a social content. This is not rocket science, it is a question of re-branding. We could call it upskilling or further training for the new economy or whatever.

I welcome the Minister's announcement of the top-up payment of €50 per week on social welfare. However, in the vast majority of cases of which I am aware it will not work because the difficulty is that we are dealing with interns or graduates being taken on for work placement in industry or business for a given period. Most of these will be living at home and because of social welfare rules in this country they will be entitled to very little or perhaps no social welfare. In the meantime, the employer is prevented from paying them any money. The €50 initiative announced today is welcome in so far as it goes but I do not believe it goes nearly far enough. I urge the Minister to consider the question of giving legal status to interns. If

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internship is to be a feature of what we are doing in terms of labour activation then they deserve some legal status at least.

With regard to VAT changes, the original suggestion in the programme for Government was that the 13.5% rate would be reduced to 12%. The Minister has introduced a more focused scheme today and it represents the lion's share of the spending the Government has undertaken in this initiative, some €350 million in a full year. The perennial problem is whether the decrease will be passed on. I have no hesitation in admitting that enforcement in this country is fairly patchy. I am unsure what the Minister has in mind to ensure this is passed on so that consumers may properly avail of it.

A considerable range of labour intensive areas which are VAT rated at 13.5% have been excluded. The Minister is focusing the measure, which is fair enough. However, when one focuses a measure in one direction, one leaves out a whole range of other areas. Will the carpenters, electricians or plumbers be covered? I note the change covers meals in restaurants and theatre tickets, etc. Therefore, as a result of the initiative, the Government will ensure that someone who is having a meal out will pay less but the 13.5% rate still applies to the ESB and electricity charges suffered and incurred by people living in fuel poverty. There is no provision for them. Also, I note hairdressing is included. Yesterday, I passed a barber shop in Limerick that offered haircuts for €20.

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy should have gone in.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Deputy saw the Minister in time.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The deal was for €20 inclusive of VAT.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I have no vested interest in it.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Now, I will be able to avail of the service for €19, provided I get my hair cut before the end of 2013.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: There is no guarantee of that.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: The difficulty is whether this would create jobs. What is the linkage between this considerable expenditure from the Government, which is in straitened circumstances — that much we all accept — and job creation? Would the money not have been better spent on sectoral, targeted areas to create employment? I believe it would have been but there is no guarantee of it at present. The Minister will recall the efforts of the previous Labour Party Government in the United Kingdom which invested a vast amount of tax foregone on substantial reductions in VAT. It did not receive the concomitant response from the jobs market or from revenue yield and that Government finished up worse off than it started.

The method of funding leaves me bemused. Today, I heard the well-known authority, Eddie Hobbs, on the radio describing it as "theft Tuesday". He said it was bizarre. Basically, the position is that this country has an ageing population. The number of people over the age of 65 years is growing remarkably and it will have trebled during the course of this century. As there is absolutely no way the State can provide for these people, we must try to encourage them to provide for themselves. I recall Fine Gael spokesmen before the general election referring to the proposal included in the four year plan to reduce the payment of tax relief on

pension contributions from the top rate to the standard rate of 20%. The word was that they had a better way and a much less painful way of dealing with the matter, by introducing a levy such as this. What are they now doing? They are doing both. When we take the double whammy of the sum of €900 million a year in the EU-IMF agreement and this levy, taking into account the cost of annuities and poor returns, I do not know how many will take out private pension plans from now on. The cost will fall back on taxpayers.

There is no doubt that 80% to 90% of private pension schemes are insolvent. This is, basically, a levy on funds held by insolvent organisations, the liabilities of which exceed their assets. It will mean — the Government is legislating to enable this to happen — that those participating in defined benefit schemes, elderly people, those living in very poor circumstances and on fixed incomes because indexation had to be got rid off owing to the collapse in the markets will see their pensions being reduced as a result. Many pension schemes, because they will be unable to meet the minimum funding requirements, will be forced to wind up. The losses crystallised at that point will fall on those who have contributed; they will receive no pensions and only get back only a fraction of what they have put in. It is very unfair.

Towards the end of his contribution the Minister mentioned there had been massive tax relief for pension contributions. That is true, to encourage people to provide for themselves, but tax relief was also available to public sector workers, as well as to those in the private sector. This arrangement is confined exclusively, apparently, to the private sector. If this is compensation for the tax relief given in the past, it should be spread equally across the board.

We have a practice whereby we tax economic activity arising from deposits which yield interest payments that we then tax. People save for pensions and we tax payments from these funds. However, this is the first time in history the capital is being targeted. Pensioners' savings are on a par with deposits. A line has been crossed. Does this mean the Government feels free, with its huge majority if it gives itself the power, to target savings? The principle is the same. Some of those who will suffer reduced pensions as a direct result of this measure are those who have lost their jobs and are relying on their reduced pensions. It is hardly fair. This is the biggest smash and grab raid since Nero got rid of half of Rome to build a pad for himself.

There are alternatives as pointed out by the pensions body which wrote to the Minister. He says he wants to meet it now; it is a shame he did not meet it before now. There are innovative alternatives that could give the Government access to the €72 billion in pension funds to create jobs in the economy, especially when credit is in such short supply. We are suffering a 14.5% unemployment rate. Behind the cold official statistics there is human misery, desolation and despair. I welcome any attempt by any Government of any hue to deal with that issue, but this is not even, to use Churchill's phrase, the end of the beginning. The Government is barely scratching the surface. There was once an election slogan, "A lot done, a lot more to do". The slogan tonight could be, "Very, very little done, an awful lot to do".

Deputy Sean Fleming: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important day for the 440,000 on the live register, 170,000 of whom are long-term unemployed. To be added to these figures are the many graduates and school leavers who will enter the jobs market later this year. All these people, well over 500,000, pinned their hopes on this announcement today. From that point of view, one will appreciate there is a level of good will for the Government in taking this initiative, as people hope to see some improvement in their employment prospects, with the possibility of long-term unemployed persons, graduates and school leavers finding jobs. Sadly, I am disappointed to say, I do not see that happening, although I would like to be more positive, as I came here on a positive note. Most people will be positive when they tune into the news. However, when they look at the small print, they will ask, "Where is the beef? Where are the jobs?"

[Deputy Sean Fleming.]

The Minister says he is funding this measure with the pension levy, the 6% levy on the market value of pensions on 1 January 2011. People will see the nest egg they have built up during the years being raided. During the recent general election both Fine Gael and the Labour Party promised to increase the tax payable on interest on money people had saved on deposit in their banks. The Government is now committed to taxing the interest payable on bank accounts and raiding pension funds. People will be rightly concerned that perhaps it might raid their deposit accounts next. The Government must allay that fear; it must tell the people they need not worry that deposit accounts will be touched during its lifetime.

Most of these measures will be enacted by legislation by 1 July. I am concerned that the pension levy has been backdated to 1 January. This is a phenomenal shock. All pension funds made their plans and calculations for budgets and dividends on what they could afford towards the end of last year. On page 20 of the Government's own document it is stated the yield this year will be €470 million. That will also be the yield next year and the year after. It is a retrospective levy for the full year, even though it will only be taken in the second half of the year. People will be shocked that there is to be a levy, that it is so severe and being backdated for six months. That will be a further bone of contention for many.

There is a figure of €390 million in the capital programme for schools. The Minister says he will move a figure of €20 million from this to the summer works scheme and that an extra €10 million will be provided by way of the pension levy. Normally the capital fund creates eight to 12 jobs for every €1 million spent. We will assume there will be a doubling of that figure in the case of the summer works scheme, but even if 20 jobs are created per annum for each €1 million spent, it will amount to only 200 extra jobs. These 200 jobs in the construction industry will be welcomed and appreciated and we will support their creation, but in the context of the scale of the problem, the single greatest initiative will, at a maximum and on a very optimistic basis, provide for the creation of only 200 jobs in a full year.

6 o'clock

People will be disappointed at the small number of jobs which will flow from today's announcement. Overall, I am shocked by this announcement. The Minister states that the pension levy will raise €470 million. I welcome the reduction in other taxes such as a reduction in excise tax by €15 million and VAT by €120 million, PRSI by €85 million and by €9 million and the Minister proposes to reduce other income taxes by €230 million. This means he will have €240 million available for job creation.

I refer to current expenditure measures proposed on page 22 of the Minister's statement:

> Total additional current expenditure to specified areas will amount to €29 million in 2011 or €45 million in a full year. These will be funded by reallocations of €18 million from within existing current resources and €11 million from the introduction of the levy on pension funds in 2011.

The Minister is providing €11 million out of the pension levy for current expenditure job creation, which means the labour activation projects. The Minister proposes that total additional capital expenditure will amount to €135 million, funded by reallocations of €106 million from within existing resources and only €29 million will be produced from the introduction of the levy on pension funds. The capital expenditure fund will receive €29 million from the pension levy and €11 million from the pension levy will go to current expenditure, giving a total of €40 million from the pension levy. A total of €240 million will come from the pension levy, meaning that the pension levy is being raided today to the tune of €470 million, with €40 million of it going into capital and current job creation measures. The Minister states that his

figures will produce a surplus from the pension levy of €200 million which he will use to reduce the deficit. This is a raid on the pension fund to cut the budget deficit by €200 million, with a few scraps of €40 million given to job creation and a reallocation of a couple of hundred million. There is no sign in the Minister's document of the vast bulk of the pension levy being spent on job creation.

I remind the Minister of the old cliché that one should not judge a book by its cover. This is very true with regard to this document. The title cover reads "Jobs Initiative May 2011". However, one can judge this book by what is written on the final page where it states that according to the quarterly national household survey the unemployment rate at the end of 2010 — just a few weeks before this Government came into office — was 13.6%. The Minister's document forecasts that the unemployment rate at the end of 2012 will be 13.7%. The Minister is predicting an increase in the unemployment rate over the first two years in office of this Government. Some people may be fooled by a book cover but people cannot be fooled all the time. They will see that most of the pension levy is being used to cushion the budget deficit. In the final paragraph the Minister predicts an increase in unemployment in the period from last year to the end of next year. People will be very disappointed when they read the details of the initiative.

The Minister states that he will reduce the deficit to 3% of GDP by 2015. This will mean extra borrowing and extra interest rates to be paid for an additional year. I ask the Minister to say outline the resulting extra cost to the Exchequer of funding the jobs initiative.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Listening to the Minister's speech I now fully understand why the Government downgraded today's announcement from being a jobs budget to a jobs fund to a jobs initiative and the reason is crystal clear. It gives me no pleasure to say that across the country, hundreds of thousands of people will be deeply disappointed by today's jobs initiative. There are 439,571 reasons the Minister and his Government colleagues should have done better and done more.

The election, held a few weeks ago and which brought this Government into office, was all about jobs. However, one must question how many jobs are being promised in this initiative and how many people will be taken off the live register. How many of the 439,571 people can look to a future of employment as a result of this major announcement from the Government? The capital projects such as retrofitting, schools maintenance works, investment in local and regional roads, the smarter travel project, will benefit by an additional €29 million. The Minister estimates that this investment will create jobs per million euro. I congratulate the Minister because this proposal for the total allocation for capital projects will create 348 jobs this year. I do not know if this is what he expected but people will be desperately disappointed at these announcements and hope has been snatched from them.

There is no doubt that the Government has entered into office when the country is in an economic mess left by the previous Administration. Despite projections to the contrary, almost all the economic indicators show that the policies of austerity implemented by Fianna Fáil and the Green Party since the 2008 budget continue to drive our economy into the ground. We all know that GDP continues to decline, by 0.7% for the last quarter in 2010 and unemployment continues to rise at 439,571 in April, up 1.6% since April 2010. Inflation and interest rates are steadily rising, creating additional pressures on businesses and families struggling to cope with lower wages, fewer working hours and depressed consumer demand. All the while, despite being told there is no money for investment in job creation, public service provision or adequate social welfare, the previous Government was willing to borrow billions of euros to prop up a banking system with no evident social or economic dividend for the ordinary citizen.

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As a result of three long years of bank bailouts, savage cuts and increasing unemployment, it is no wonder that the Government deficit continues to rise. At the end of the first quarter of 2011, the Government deficit now stands at €9.9 billion, which is €3 billion up on the same period in 2010, thanks to a further injection of €3 billion into Anglo Irish Bank. According to the OECD, Irish debt as a percentage of GDP, continues to rise. It is projected to hit 113% at the end of 2011, up from 105% last year. The European Commission estimates that our debt to GDP ratio will reach 120% by 2014, which would bring the total debt to €190 billion. This is not new because Sinn Féin in this Dáil and previously said this was the direction and the trajectory which the State as taking under the austerity measures. Only last week, the UCD economist, Mr. Morgan Kelly, argued that when liabilities and expenditure from bank recapitalisation and NAMA are taken into account, the State will have a total debt of €250 billion in 2010, amounting to an incredible €120,000 debt per person per year.

Our society and our economy are in the middle of a perfect storm, comprising three linked crises, a jobs crisis, a debt crisis and a deficit crisis. The outgoing Government believed that the best way to exit this perfect storm was to ignore the need to create jobs, to borrow billions to bail out the banks and heap the burden of the recession on low and middle income families with wage cuts and tax increases. This approach is simply not working. Those who do not think the figures speak for themselves should go out on to the streets and talk to people who are struggling. I refer, for example, to families that are finding it difficult to pay their bills, businesses that are finding it difficult to secure credit lines and unemployed people who are finding it difficult to get work. Our society and our economy are on their knees. People are looking to the Government to devise and implement solutions to our jobs, debt and deficit crises.

I remind the House of what Fine Gael and the Labour Party said during the election campaign. They told the electorate that if they were elected, job creation would be the priority of the new Government. Deputy Kenny had a five point plan to get Ireland back to work. It is clear that it is now a five point U-turn. He told us that the protection and creation of jobs was his priority. Deputy Gilmore's jobs strategy involved the establishment of a strategic investment bank and was aimed at creating jobs and getting credit flowing to businesses again. Fine Gael was not embarrassed to say it would create 100,000 jobs over five years through the NewERA programme. It told voters it would invest €7 billion in the development of the State's water services, telecommunications, infrastructure and energy industries. I remind Deputies that Fine Gael said it would invest €7 billion in such capital projects. The investment in such projects that has been announced today amounts to an additional €29 million and will create 232 jobs. Fine Gael also promised that 45,000 new employment and training places would be created to target youth unemployment. Some 23,000 of these places were to comprise a national internship programme and 17,000 were to be second chance education places. It also proposed that 700 new places for apprentices and 5,000 new community employment places would be made available. The scale of Fine Gael's job creation, training and education proposals was ambitious, even if the costings were a little fuzzy.

The Labour Party promised before the election that it would put in place a €500 million jobs fund to support new ideas and create employment in strategic sectors of the economy. It also promised to establish a strategic investment bank, with a lending capacity of €2 billion, from the National Pension Reserve Fund. Like Fine Gael, the Labour Party outlined a series of training, education and work placement schemes. It promised to provide 60,000 places during the lifetime of the Government — 30,000 in work experience places for graduates and 30,000 in training and education places for the unemployed. If we were to believe the pre-election promises of Fine Gael and the Labour Party, some 100,000 jobs and 60,000 training places were

to be funded to the tune of between €2.5 billion and €7 billion. These commitments were used to win votes, to get the former Opposition Deputies into the positions they are in today and, ultimately, to form the new Administration.

The speed with which Fine Gael and the Labour Party have abandoned their promises is truly breathtaking. Within two weeks of the election, they agreed a programme for Government that contained no figures or targets for job creation in its 64 pages. The strategic investment bank and the NewERA proposals survived the negotiations, but the proposed investment of between €2.5 billion and €7 billion did not. The programme for Government sets out a target number of education, training and work placement programmes, but it is half the figure promised by Fine Gael and the Labour Party during the election campaign. The number of places proposed dropped from 60,000 to just 15,000. Just 20,000 places have been announced today. If ever there was an example of political parties breaking election promises as soon as they got into office, this is it. During the election campaign, the Labour Party promised a jobs strategy and Fine Gael promised a jobs budget. In the programme for Government, these weighty commitments were downgraded to a "jobs fund". This weaker proposal has now been diluted further and is now a revenue-neutral jobs initiative. The spending commitments are gone and the job targets and training places have been slashed.

Before the Minister for Finance and his Fine Gael and Labour Party colleagues came to the House today, it was clear to Deputies on this side of the House and people in the wider community that we would get very little. The Government had been playing down the initiative and rightly so because very little was to be presented. Today's announcement needs to be read in conjunction with the savage austerity measures that have been proposed by the Government under the EU-IMF programme. The measures outlined during last week's debate will further depress consumer spending and lead to higher levels of unemployment in the public and private sectors. There is no two ways about it — the measures in the austerity programme, such as the introduction of water rates and property taxes and the reduction in tax credits and tax bands, will depress consumer spending and lead to more people becoming unemployed in the domestic economy.

Some aspects of today's initiative are undoubtedly to be welcomed. When the proposals that have been outlined by the Minister, Deputy Noonan, are taken together, it is clear not only that they will fail to create substantial employment, but that some of them will depress consumer spending and lead to a rise in unemployment. Sinn Féin is on record as welcoming the reversal of the cut in the minimum wage. This is especially welcome for the thousands of workers who lost a significant portion of their income when Fianna Fáil introduced the cut last year. The positive benefit of this measure for the economy is dramatically undermined by the Government's assertion — repeated again today — that it intends to attack the wages of up to 300,000 low-paid workers across the State under the guise of a review of joint labour committees. Any reduction in the income of this section of the workforce will have a devastating impact on thousands of small and medium sized local businesses that depend on the spending power of lower income earners to survive. This will be compounded by the cuts to social welfare being proposed under the guise of removing so-called disincentives to work in the social welfare system. These cuts will further reduce the spending power of the increasing number of people who receive social welfare payments and, in turn, further damage our local retail and service sectors.

The employers' PRSI initiative was a targeted jobs scheme. It meant that those who employed someone who had been undertaking a FÁS training programme or had been unemployed for six months did not have to pay PRSI for 12 months. It was specifically targeted at new employment. It was not available to the existing employees of employers. Although the

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scheme will continue until the end of this year, it is disappointing that the Minister for Finance failed to announce today that it will continue thereafter. Instead, the Minister announced that he intends to reduce the rate of employers' PRSI from 8.5% to 4.25%. Sinn Féin is concerned that the reduction to 4.25% in the rate of PRSI applying to jobs for which employees are paid up to €356 per week will incentivise employers to decrease the pay of those who currently earn more than this amount, or engage in firing and rehiring to achieve the same end. I ask the Minister to keep a close eye on the practices of those who avail of this incentive. The existence of two rates — 4.25% and 10.75% — will offer employers a major financial incentive to reduce the pay of employees in order to avail of the lower rate. That was not the case in the past because the rates were closer together.

The elements of the initiative that I have mentioned, such as the review of joint labour committees, have nothing to do with job creation. They involve trying to suppress the cost of labour in a vain attempt to increase economic competitiveness. The employees who will be most affected by these wage cuts work in the domestic rather than the export sector, which demonstrates that this is simply a cost-cutting initiative that will drive down wages, increase poverty and lead to further job losses. Any new programmes or expansions of existing schemes that are aimed at improving people's employment are to be welcomed. I have said that some of the Minister's proposals are welcome. Sinn Féin will study in detail the proposal, as outlined today, to provide 20,900 new places under various training schemes. My colleague, Deputy Crowe, will elaborate on that when he addresses the House during this debate on Thursday. The 20,900 new places are a far cry from the 60,000 places promised several weeks ago. That the total additional expenditure in this area is a meagre €29 million speaks for itself. Increased investment in labour activation measures is only worthwhile if there are meaningful jobs on the other side of it. The Government has not properly addressed the issue and is not prepared to stimulate the economy. There is deep fear that we are about to see a repeat of what took place in the 1980s and that people will be trained for a future of social welfare or emigration.

The substance of today's jobs initiative deals with issues of labour market costs and activation. The questions many people will ask are, "Where are the jobs?" and "How many jobs will the initiative create?" As with the programme for Government, the jobs initiative does not contain job creation targets. The Government proposes to spend a total of €135 million on capital projects in the coming year. Of this figure, €106 million is from existing capital allocations. This means only €29 million of additional expenditure will be allocated in this area in 2011. According to the Government's figures, slightly more than 200 jobs will be created as a result. Considering the level of immediate job growth that could be delivered in this area and the funds at the Government's disposal, its unwillingness to significantly increase investment in labour intensive capital projects constitutes a complete failure. As for the much promised measures to assist small and medium sized enterprise to access credit, the Minister's proposals do not provide detail.

The Minister has argued that the Government's hands are tied, the jobs initiative must be financially neutral and an alternative is not available. There is always an alternative. We elect Governments to bring forward proposals and, as my colleagues have noted, stand up for Irish interests. Sinn Féin has put forward alternatives. My party has long argued that the Government can neither cut nor borrow its way out of the jobs, debt and deficit crises. While we need to reduce the deficit and debt to GDP ratio and require a strategy to allow the State to return to the international bond markets to resume normal lending, none of these objectives can be achieved through the economics of austerity. We have had four austerity budgets since 2008 and each time unemployment, debt and deficit levels have increased. Austerity is not only incapable of fixing these problems, it makes them worse. The only way to exit the perfect storm

of the jobs, debt and deficit crisis is to invest in job creation. The only way to get the economy back on track is to invest in a major stimulus package aimed at saving and creating jobs, assisting small and medium sized businesses, helping hard pressed families and boosting consumer spending.

If Sinn Féin were in Government, we would invest €2.9 billion over the next 12 months to stimulate economic activity, job creation and consumer spending. Not only is such an approach affordable, it is urgently needed if we are to break the downward spiral created by the Fianna Fail Party policies of austerity which are being followed by Fine Gael and the Labour Party. Most of us know that there is €14.7 billion left in the National Pension Reserve Fund, of which €10 billion has been committed by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Labour Party for future bank bailouts under the terms of the EU-ECB-IMF austerity programme. Sinn Féin in government would use €2 billion of the remaining €4.7 billion over the next 12 months to fund a job creation and retention programme. Combined with a €900 million package aimed at boosting consumer spending, it would be possible to protect and create in excess of 75,000 jobs.

Sinn Féin would spend €1 billion of the €4.7 billion on fast-tracking labour intensive infrastructure projects, including schools and hospitals building projects, upgrading water infrastructure, developing public transport networks and rolling out State-wide broadband services. According to the Department of Finance, every €1 billion invested in capital infrastructure projects generates more than €4 billion in GDP over time, which would amount to an increase of GDP in the order of 3.2%.

Sinn Féin would use a further €600 million for a specific job creation and retention fund which would subsidise small and medium sized enterprises to retain existing staff and, where possible, take on additional staff. This proposal is similar to the successful model developed by the German Government. We would invest €400 million in the State child care and pre-education sector with the objective of building a public child care service, creating jobs and incentivising parents to return to employment by providing child care at an affordable price. Studies have shown that for every €4 invested in child care, €7 is returned to the Exchequer in increased workforce participation.

In light of the fact that 50,000 young people are due to emigrate in the coming 12 months, we would ring-fence €500 million of the spend in each of the three areas I have cited to specifically target employment opportunities for young people, ensuring that at least 20,000 of the 75,000 jobs would go to those under the age of 25 years.

In addition to this €2 billion job creation and protection fund from the National Pension Reserve Fund, Sinn Féin in government would inject a further €900 million into the economy in the form of a family stimulus package funded through additional tax revenue and the abolition of the universal social charge. The aim of this package of measures would be to reverse some of the heavy burden placed on working families and those on social welfare by the previous Government and, in so doing, boost consumer spending. Our family stimulus package would be funded through a portion of a new 1% wealth tax that we would introduce on net assets of more than €1 million. We estimate this proposal would generate an additional €1 billion in a full calendar year. The package would include €140 million investment in refundable tax credits for 113,000 of the lowest income earners, which would benefit 240,000 people in total.

We would also restore the Christmas bonus and thereby put €225 million into the pockets of the State's poorest families and, in turn, local economies across the country. We would boost employment and consumer demand through an additional €50 million per annum investment in frontline community sector employment and an €85 million investment in easing the recruit-

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ment embargo in frontline public services such as education, health, the Garda and social welfare.

In addition to this family stimulus package, Sinn Féin would immediately abolish the universal social charge, thereby releasing a further €400 million of spending power into the local economy. We would replace the revenue lost to the State under this measure by introducing a third rate of income tax of 48% on individual incomes over €100,000 per annum.

Combined, the measures proposed by Sinn Féin amount to an investment of €2.9 billion in saving and creating jobs and boosting consumer spending. Alongside this package, we would introduce a range of measures to assist small and medium sized enterprises, the full detail of which my colleague, Deputy Peadar Tóibín, will outline when he addresses the House tomorrow afternoon.

The policies of austerity implemented by the Fianna Fáil Party and now supported by Fine Gael and the Labour Party are not working. The approach outlined by the Government today, written under the watchful eye of the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund, will continue to push our economy and society further into the cycle of unemployment, debt and deficit. It is ironic that for the past six weeks the Government has bored us with the mantra that its jobs budget must be revenue neutral and its hands are tied as a result of the economic circumstances when, only a few weeks ago, it committed to inject €24 billion of taxpayers' money into failed banks. Even last week, it repeated that, subject to the stress tests in Anglo Irish Bank which are due in the next couple of weeks, it will commit further billions of euro, in addition to the €30 billion it has already committed, to this failed bank.

Many people are asking why it is not possible to have a revenue neutral banking policy when we must have a revenue neutral jobs budget. Such an approach would make a major contribution to solving the problem we face. The Government appears to believe it is fine to take a revenue neutral approach to its number one priority of getting 437,000 into work while investing not millions but billions of euros of our money in failed toxic banks which will never pay a dividend for the economy or to citizens. There are alternatives that can break this cycle, based on investment in jobs and boosting consumer demand. The economy is crying out for stimulus and ordinary people are crying out for a change of direction. Sinn Féin today laid out proposals for a €2.9 billion investment in our society and economy, which is the only credible and costed alternative to the failed policies of austerity that were introduced by Fianna Fáil and unfortunately, despite all the pre-election rhetoric, now are being supported Fine Gael and Labour.

What was presented in the Chamber today will be revenue neutral but unfortunately also will be jobs neutral. There is a better and different way and Sinn Féin has led the charge in this regard. While some of the measures announced by the Minister are welcome, they are not even a drop in the ocean of what is required. I appeal to the Government to take up Sinn Féin's proposals, change direction and get the economy back on track. I appeal to it to give hope to the aforementioned 437,000 people, many of whom have given up hope on the present Government and who are giving up hope on this country and are emigrating as a result of failed policies of the past. Unfortunately, these failed policies now are being implemented by the new Government and I appeal to it to change direction.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): I now call on the Technical Group. I understand Deputy Halligan wishes to share time.

Deputy John Halligan: I wish to share time with Deputies Catherine Murphy, Ross and Finian McGrath.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): The Deputies will have roughly seven minutes each.

Deputy John Halligan: I welcome any initiative, however small, that will relieve the present horrendous position in which more than 400,000 people are unemployed. Even as matters stand, unemployment is destroying the social fabric of society and testing people's well-being to extremes. Moreover, in this context one should not forget that many more than 400,000 people will experience some form of poverty or deprivation or will suffer in some way because when one includes the families and children of those who are unemployed, up to 700,000 people are affected.

This afternoon, I tabled a priority question to the Minister for Social Protection pertaining to unemployment and social welfare benefits. It sought a guarantee that they would not be cut or interfered with, because that would drive people further into poverty, and that the Government would stick by the agreement its predecessor stated would alleviate poverty by 2016. Although I did not receive a straightforward answer, I agreed with one part of the Minister's reply to the effect that by creating employment with reasonable wages, poverty could be alleviated and spending in the economy could be generated. Were this to be done, the economy could be helped to grow twofold by reducing unemployment and poverty and not being obliged to pay out huge amounts of money on social welfare, while introducing spending into the economy.

I accept that the Government has been dealt a fairly bad hand by its predecessor, but it is unfortunate that I cannot discern initiatives that would alleviate unemployment. This goes back to the old Fianna Fáil way of providing courses and training schemes for the unemployed, who do not want courses and training schemes. Electricians, fitters, engineers and plumbers are being sent on courses to be retrained but for what? Where will they get work? They want jobs for which they are qualified. Were one to trawl through the 430,000 people who are unemployed, one will find many whose families have paid for them to go through university. However, such people now are being put on training schemes or courses to help them to re-educate themselves to get themselves employed. Years ago, FÁS used to teach people how to use the telephone and how to present themselves for interview. It was, and still is, pathetic. The facts speak for themselves. For instance, although only 20% of FÁS trainees have managed to get some form of work in the past five years, the comparable figure in Scotland is 48%. Yet, Members are aware that FÁS splashed out €643,000 in junkets over the past four years. Consequently, putting people on training courses will not fool anyone.

In common with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and many bodies, I accept that every million euros invested in infrastructure such as broadband, water conservation, home insulation and so on can create jobs. This is the direction we must take. We must opt to create sustainable, rather than part-time jobs. For example, an ISME survey found that one third of small to medium-sized businesses expect to shed jobs within the next 12 months owing to economic uncertainty, lack of finance and increasing cost to business. Moreover, more than 1,000 small businesses have been deemed to be insolvent since January 2010, resulting in significant job losses nationwide. It also has been revealed that 50% of businesses were refused credit by the banks to keep their business solvent within the past 12 months. One can ask any small business for the solution. Two of my friends, who employed seven people, closed their business in Waterford two weeks ago and they will point to rates and rent. They were paying €38,000 in rent per annum before paying rates or staff. They were obliged to let go seven staff and it will

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cost the Exchequer approximately €140,000 per year, or €20,000 per year each, to take those seven people out of employment and to put them in receipt of social welfare. If one thinks outside the box, small initiatives like forcing down the cost of rent or of rates come to mind. While there is an associated loss in revenue, there is a long-term gain because of the number of people who would not be placed on the live register. I do not understand who wrote the Minister's speeches or who came up with the jargon in the document I have to hand, but the mathematics appear simple. Although I am not a mathematician, if it costs the Government at least €20,000 between payments and statutory redundancy to put someone on the live register, why can it not come up with a few thousand euros to keep that person in work?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): The Deputy's time is up.

Deputy John Halligan: I have almost finished.

One must not forget that each year, the multinationals take €32 billion in profit out of the country. I refer to the likes of Tesco, Aldi and so on. Do they not owe the country anything? Why is there no initiative whereby they could invest some money in the country to create employment? Have such companies not been approached to suggest that instead of employing part-time workers, who may still be in receipt of social welfare benefit, they might invest some money? As they are making a bloody good living out of Ireland, could they not leave a few billion or a few hundred million euros or whatever to create employment? This is the kind of initiative that is not being put forward.

My final point pertains to procurement and the national procurement policy introduced by the Fianna Fáil-led Government in 2002. I refer to tenders in locations such as Waterford, Cork, Dublin and so on and how people now are being forced out of business because of the obligation to tender outside the country. For example, although a Dublin company got it this year, I refer to a French company that at one stage last year——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): The Deputy is taking his colleagues' time now.

Deputy John Halligan: I really am finished this time.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Then the Deputy can sit down.

Deputy John Halligan: Can this policy be reviewed or revoked——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): The Deputy can prove he is finished by sitting down.

Deputy John Halligan: —— to save jobs? All of these small initiatives will create sustainable jobs, not jobs which will see someone put on to a FÁS course to learn how to re-employ themselves.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: One of the last phrases in the document read out today was that this was a modest proposal. It was not an overstatement. Seven or eight Deputies are in the Chamber. This initiative is about giving hope to people outside the House, but I do not see where the hope lies. A number of these small initiatives are worthwhile, but the scale is modest. I did not bring notes with me when I came to the Chamber, but I listened and made some notes for my response. I was worried before this debate, but I am slightly nearer to being terrified side at this stage. Were I one of the 440,000 people in question or a member of their families, I would be really worried.

I know what I expected to see, given how people were told on their doorsteps during the election campaign that there would be €2 billion in a strategic investment bank — the Government was told that this might not be a good idea — and shovel-ready jobs that would put thousands of construction workers back to work on large projects. There is no evidence of this despite the fact that it relates to one of the severely affected sectors.

Approximately 60% of all jobs are in the domestic economy, yet we rely on an export-led recovery predicated on foreign direct investment, FDI, companies, namely, the multinationals. I do not know how the Government can deliver on jobs if this is what it is relying upon. The small to medium-sized enterprise, SME, sector is where jobs will be provided. If every SME created one job, it would go a long way towards resolving the problem. A specific problem relates to the banks and securing finance. It is one matter to claim finance will be available, but the type of financing is important. There is no point in giving term loans if overdrafts are necessary.

I am greatly disappointed by the provisions regarding the sectoral wage agreements. "Flexible" and "adaptable" are code words for reducing people's income levels. The €356 threshold for employers' PRSI is just above the minimum wage, yet the Government is setting it as an appropriate target. It is much too low. While I accept there must be a limit, this will reduce the amount of money available to go back into the economy via the jobs created. I do not see how it will deliver the kind of return we need.

The €470 million to be raised in the coming years via the pension levy is a raid on pension funds. It is not targeted at the people who benefited the most from tax incentives that encouraged people to invest in such schemes. Some schemes have lost considerable amounts and some are insolvent. It is not that long since people had the daylights frightened out of them by television advertisements telling them to put money into pension schemes because they would be poverty-stricken when they were elderly. We are now telling them to put money in and that we will take it out. This is a bad message.

The tourism sector is being targeted. The UK and the US have been mentioned as markets we have lost, including a 32% loss in the number of trips from the UK. If one asks people in the UK about where they will go on their holidays, the answer will be anywhere outside the eurozone because their currency has been devalued. It is not a question of Ireland reducing the cost of rooms, although this is a contributing factor. There is good value in terms of restaurants and so on and people have responded, but the issue is the difference between sterling and the euro. This is the main difficulty we must overcome if we are to encourage the British to visit Ireland.

I would have liked to see other provisions. In terms of local schemes, 800 km of roads will be improved. This equates to approximately 30 km per county. If we are discussing modest, then this is modest. Could some consideration be given to the level of return we will receive for this modest investment? That 30% of all money invested by local authorities in road improvements goes towards health and safety matters is problematic. It is too much money and, although I would not want to put anyone at risk, the issue must be revisited.

I would have liked to see social welfare changes. For example, one must wait 12 months before one can qualify for the back to work scheme. People have told me that they would have loved to have returned to work or started their own business, but that they lost their entire network of people, their confidence and so on as a result of waiting the 12 months.

In February, Kildare County Council ran out of the money it was using to fund the microeconomic sector. If someone is putting together a viable business, funds must be available. We are underfunding the microeconomic sector. Even if someone drafts a business plan or feasi-

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bility study, new start-ups will have less chance of succeeding if we do not invest the level of work required. We have missed the boat.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Deputy Ross has seven minutes.

Deputy Shane Ross: And a half.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): And one second, which the Deputy has just used up.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The Acting Chairman can dock him the half.

Deputy Shane Ross: This initiative was our first opportunity to judge the new Government on its merits and on its own measures. I am sympathetic to the Government's daily mantra in the House, that is, to blame the current main Opposition party for the state in which the former inherited the country. This can carry some weight for a short period, but this is the first time we can point to the Government's part of the solution. It is something on which we can judge the Government.

The measure has all of the characteristics of an election promise that the Government has realised it cannot or is unwilling to keep. This is the second leg of a big back pedal by the Government on its election promises, the first being its promise to revise, amend and dramatically change the deal with the IMF and the EU. This budget — I am insisting on calling it a budget, given that it has the characteristics of a budget, including the applause from the backbenches to the Fine Gael Minister for Finance that we traditionally associate with a budget — is a damp squib that promised so much and delivered virtually nothing. One or two of its provisions are good. For example, the concentration on the tourism industry is to be commended and there are some other concessions here, there and everywhere, but the Government is tinkering at the edges. Where is the vision we would expect from a new Government that has inherited such an appalling situation? This has the markings of the Department of Finance. It has been conceded by the Government that this is being dictated by the IMF and the EU. There is nothing new, no imagination and no big picture. There is simply a tiny tinkering with tax rates.

I will echo the words of my colleague, Deputy Halligan. I cannot believe that the solution to the unemployment problem is to give a bigger mandate to FÁS, the most discredited agency in the nation. The Government intends to put 20,000 more people on training courses with a company that is utterly discredited, not just because of its junkets but also because of its training. The FÁS training schemes have been exposed as empty vessels in many cases. Why did the Minister not say, instead of promising to spend €500 million, that he would cut the FÁS budget by €500 million? Where is the promise to abolish FÁS? Instead of that, we will train people for jobs that will not necessarily be there at the end. There is no big picture.

There is one aspect on which I differ from my colleagues. We refuse to acknowledge the role played by multinationals in job creation and the development of this nation. Around 140,000 jobs have been directly created by multinationals and supported by the IDA, while 250,000 jobs have been created indirectly. That is one in seven jobs here. More importantly, this is the only identifiable area in which we can say the number of jobs increased last year, although it was admittedly by few. At a time of depression, when the economy was in decline, this sector managed to buck the trend and create 1,500 jobs. Why, then, do we not look to this sector — which, after all, accounts for a majority of exports — to support us in our hour of need? Why do we not encourage such companies to come in? These are high-end jobs; the

average salary for a job in a multinational is €5,000 to €10,000 higher than for any other type of job. This is an area on which we should concentrate. We should not ridicule the prospect of reducing corporate tax if necessary. If it is necessary to attract more multinationals, let us consider the cost of doing so and say "Yes". It is estimated that a 1% decrease is equivalent to the creation of many thousands of jobs. That formula would result in the creation of many more jobs than the one that the Government, as so eloquently interpreted by Deputy Doherty, has come up with — a derisory figure.

The solution offered by the Government to raise the money has been touched on by all speakers. It is a serious problem when the Government sees a big lump of money and decides to pillage it. As Deputy Murphy so rightly pointed out, a high percentage — nearly 90% — of the pension funds it intends to raid are in deficit. They are insolvent; they are broke. Their liabilities are larger than their assets. Yet the Government says it will go in there and take €470 million a year out of these broken entities. That is the height of irresponsibility. It is also unjust, because these are people's savings. Let us not dress this up as something else: raiding these pension funds will reduce people's pensions and income. In addition, as one speaker rightly said earlier — I think it was Deputy O'Dea — if the Government can raid the savings of pensioners, it can raid next the savings of depositors. That is what will happen, because it is almost exactly the same thing. Reducing the income of pensioners will reduce their power to spend.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Deputy, I am afraid I must interrupt you.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am just finishing. The result of this is that the austerity measures will result in a contraction of the economy. Bringing in more multinationals would expand consumer spending and possibly allow us to break out of the extraordinary spiral we are in, but the measures announced today are unlikely to help in any significant way.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for the opportunity of speaking on the important and urgent debate on the jobs initiative. Before I go into the details of the debate, I must state that I have many friends and family members who have lost their jobs over the past 12 months. It has been a terrible experience for all of them, and that is why we have to focus on job creation as part of any strategy to deal with the economic mess. We must all think of the human side of losing one's job or not having had one at all. I urge all Deputies in this debate, regardless of party, to focus on this as a matter of priority.

Unemployment and emigration are two evils that must be tackled. While I strongly welcome some of the proposals in this package, we have a national and civic duty to come up with other ideas and sensibly costed plans to create employment. This is not the time for sitting on the fence, and we all have a role to play. Our first priority must be to buy Irish products and support our local small businesses by buying from them — whether it is a small local shop, a pub, a restaurant or a factory. This is the way forward and it must be part of the solution. For example, on the subject of funding and supporting small businesses, we should start a low-budget campaign to encourage people to spend an extra €20 per week in their local shops and businesses. This has the potential to create 20,000 new jobs. Let us remind ourselves of the €75 billion in savings that are in bank deposits at the moment. This money mostly belongs to people over 55 years of age because many of them are afraid to spend. I encourage those over 55 to get out there and spend an extra €20 per week out of the few bob they have to support local small businesses.

We also need big job creation projects as part of the strategy. One project that is ready to roll, but on which the Government is dithering, is the plan for the metro north. This has major

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potential for job creation — a couple of thousand jobs — but would also have considerable local impact for small businesses along the proposed route while it is being constructed. This is something that has gone off the boil in recent weeks, but it should be considered.

I welcome the announcement by the Minister, Deputy Noonan, that funding will be provided for building projects in schools. In my constituency, for example, Belgrove National School, which the Minister knows well, needs this funding. The project is ready to roll. It is the same with the Holy Faith school in Clontarf.

I have heard much debate tonight about the private sector and the public sector, but we must not forget the role of the semi-state in job creation. There is major potential in this sector to provide jobs. The recurrent theme over the past 12 months has been that private sector equals good and public sector equals bad. I strongly disagree with this. We need a mix of the public sector and the private sector to get job creation on track. A good-quality, efficient public sector can play a major part in creating jobs.

With regard to the proposals we heard today, I support the cut in the 13.5% rate of VAT to 12% by 2013. I also support the halving of the lower 8.5% rate of PRSI up to the end of 2013 on jobs paying up to €356 per week. I strongly support reversing the cut in the minimum wage to bring it back to €8.65 per hour. When we are creating jobs and providing employment, we must ensure that people have a reasonable and decent wage. I warmly welcome the abolition of the €3 travel tax as part of the deal with airlines to restore lost routes. There is potential there.

With regard to employment, we need to fix the cost base and consider issues such as commercial rates. We must stimulate the economy, facilitate enterprise and encourage job creation, particularly on the north side of Dublin.

Private Members' Business

Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill 2011: Order for Second Stage

Bill entitled an Act to restrict the making of donations for political purposes by companies, trade unions, societies or building societies, to amend the law relating to the disclosure of donations to political parties and individuals, to provide for the auditing of the accounts of political parties and to implement the recommendations relating to political funding contained within the second Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into Payments to Politicians.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I move: "That Second Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill 2011: Second Stage

Deputy Micheál Martin: I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I wish to share my time with Deputy Niall Collins.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill 2011 and to urge its acceptance by the House. This proposed legislation puts forward a structured, comprehensive and legally sound basis for transforming how politics is funded in our country and for making our democracy more transparent. This Bill, if accepted, will be a positive and historic new departure in how politics is conducted in Ireland. It will break the link between business and politics which has long been advocated from all sides of this House but, as yet, has gone undelivered.

All of us in public life recognise that the allegations of improper payments from businesses to politicians, which have flowed from the tribunals over the past decade, has done immense damage to the public perception of politics. It has a created a perception that big business can buy influence by financially supporting the election funds of parties or candidates. If we are to renew politics, we need to overturn this damaging impression. The reality is the only way we can conclusively do this is to ensure that campaign financing is not reliant on business or commercial interests.

The basic principle underpinning our proposals in this legislation is that elections should be funded only by people entitled to vote in them. Specifically, this Bill contains a commitment to the introduction of an effective ban on the receipt of direct donations given to political parties and candidates from businesses and corporations. This commitment is intended to deliver further openness and transparency in the funding of political parties and political activity in order to assure public confidence in the operation of the political system; to ensure the funding of political activity through smaller contributions from individuals, rather than larger contributions from businesses and corporations; and to improve the reputation of Ireland's democratic structures and electoral processes at an international level, which is very important in today's difficult and competitive economic climate.

As well as effectively ending corporate donations, our Bill will also implement key recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal relating to political funding and cut donation limits so that no large-scale individual donations are possible, meaning that no one can attempt to distort a campaign through deploying his or her own personal fortune. The Bill provides for an annual audit of all income from public or private sources paid to political parties and dramatically increases levels of transparency in political funding and expenditure.

I believe this Bill, if enacted, will put in place a fair and transparent system of regulation of political fund-raising and spending, which will begin the process of restoring confidence in our politics after a long and damaging run of controversies relating to political donations. I hope that this debate can be conducted in a constructive manner and free from point-scoring. We do not need the type of partisan debate which says Fianna Fáil had a tent in Galway and Fine Gael has one in Punchestown, while Labour coined in compulsory subs from the unions from many people who do not even support its party. These sorts of debates generate more heat than light and go to the root of why so many people are now apathetic to politics and politicians.

The debate on the Moriarty report was not a very positive occasion. The Government benches are filled with many new members elected on the basis of stirring commitments to change politics. In light of this, the complete absence of any form of self-reflection about what the report said about the last time their parties were in office was striking. That they spent most of their contributions on a report which dealt substantially about Fine Gael fund-raising and preferred to talk about Fianna Fáil was textbook old politics. If one cannot accept any criticism of one's leaders and parties how can one change anything? If we are honest with ourselves as public representatives, we should all accept that over the years, the fund-raising practices of all the main parties have done damage to politics. That is why today our debate must be about change and how we give effect to it.

For the record, I readily admit that in regard to my own party, there have been some unedifying and unacceptable abuses in regard to fund-raising and donations. I deeply regret that. I am determined that on my watch, as leader of Fianna Fáil, this will neither be tolerated nor possible. From the moment I took over as leader of my party, I made clear my intention to bring an end to corporate donations.

During the general election campaign I ensured that Fianna Fáil committed to the introduction of a Bill banning corporate donations within one month of the reconvening of a new Dáil

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and that we would seek all-party support for it. This is also a position that Fianna Fáil had taken in the previous Government and we had prepared a draft Bill, which we had intended to introduce in February, had an earlier than planned election not intervened.

On Monday, 11 April we published the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill 2011 following through on our election commitment. In this respect, and in fairness it should be said, we are only following belatedly in the footsteps of the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, who, to his credit, was the first political leader of one of the main parties to come out categorically against corporate donations. It was a brave stance and one in which he was ahead of his time. The position was reversed by the Taoiseach, Deputy Kenny, as one of his first acts when he became leader of Fine Gael. Since then, Fine Gael has engaged in significant corporate fund-raising and the Labour Party, too, has not been slow in accepting corporate donations.

Passing this Bill will create a new level playing pitch for everyone in Irish politics where corporate donations no longer impinge on our political life. This is now within our grasp.

The Fine Gael Party in its famous — or infamous — five point election plan committed to banning corporate donations, it must be said belatedly following years of vigorous corporate donation fund-raising. The Tánaiste, Deputy Gilmore, on behalf of the Labour Party, has made a similar public pronouncement. It is worth emphasising that because of these factors, this Bill should not be contentious, unless this House is going to revert once again to the same old charade of politics as usual.

We all agree that corporate donations should go, so the message from these benches is to get on with it. We all agree, so why delay? The only conceivable reason the Government will have for voting down this Bill tomorrow night is that we, on this side of the House, have introduced it. It is to be hoped that politics in this country is ready to move on from this stale and cynical approach.

The current stated position of all of the main parties in this House is that corporate donations should be banned. Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour have all given real and concrete commitments to this effect, as did other parties and Independents on this side of the House. Each of these parties campaigned on getting rid of corporate donations during the last election. As recently as 11 April this year, the Taoiseach told Midwest Radio that banning corporate donations is a priority for his Government. This Bill will specifically test that commitment. It gives everyone the opportunity to deliver on their election promises and to walk the walk on banning corporate donations.

This Bill can and should be accepted by the Government. Especially given that the Government has said in the past that it supports all of the measures in our Bill, we expect it to let it proceed to committee. To do otherwise brings the Government's credibility into question.

After ten weeks in office, it is surprising that the Government has yet to put a single new piece of legislation before the Dáil or to publish a policy White Paper. The contrast with the first ten weeks of the new British Government is dramatic. It is about time the Dáil started enacting changes promised to the electorate rather than just talking about them. It is clear there are no principles in this Bill that the Government parties oppose, or at least were publicly opposed to at election time. If we in this House are being straight up about our commitment finally to consign corporate donations to history, there is no need to delay further. Stalling only creates further doubt about the willingness of politicians to reform and to change the way we do politics. It does this House no service and it erodes further confidence. Specifically, the Dáil should be seen to act decisively and without delay on the recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal on how the regulation of political funding is organised. Hand-wringing

and foot-dragging on these recommendations are not good enough. Earlier the Taoiseach made a rather vague and superficial intervention on the recommendations. The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Phil Hogan, is also on the record as expressing doubt about them. Will he clarify if there is a commitment on the Government's part to implement all the recommendations made in the Moriarty tribunal report on political fund-raising and corporate donations?

The public is right to be cynical if the body politic cannot get its act together to implement the recommendations in a reasonable timeframe. On 29 March the Taoiseach told the Dáil that the Government would act definitively and decisively on the recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal, with Departments to report back in four weeks on how they should be implemented. When the Government promised action on the report's findings within one month, we took this in good faith. However, that deadline has passed by almost two weeks and, having heard nothing further but silence emanating from the Government benches, we are now bringing forward our own initiatives. The Government has missed its own self-imposed deadline for action on Mr. Justice Moriarty's recommendations. With legislation, most of which was initiated by the previous Government, piling up, Fine Gael and the Labour Party may be tempted to quietly put this issue on the backburner. That is not good enough and Fianna Fáil will not be complicit in letting the Government off the hook. The issues at stake are too important.

The Government has committed to introducing a similar Bill to Fianna Fáil's. However, we see no reason to postpone action indefinitely by waiting for its publication. The fastest way of addressing these crucial issues which go to the core of the conduct and the credibility of politics is to pass the Fianna Fáil Bill and allow it to proceed to Committee Stage. Should there be a need for technical amendments, they could be considered and deliberated upon on Committee Stage. Our objective is to ensure corporate donations would effectively be banned before the summer recess and that a formal constitutional ban would take effect before the end of the year. While the issues involved are not complex, the measures we are proposing are based on the clear legal advice that a formal ban on corporate donations could be unconstitutional, advice the Government would also have received.

The most significant part of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill 2011 is that it would introduce a restriction on corporate donations from companies, trade unions, societies and building societies to political parties and politicians, requiring the disclosure of any donation in excess of €100. This would amount effectively to a ban. This approach has been taken because of legal advice that a complete ban would be unconstitutional. We are separately publishing a Bill for a referendum on corporate donations which could take place this year. Accordingly, section 5 of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill 2011 states it is not possible to prohibit the making of donations by companies, trade unions, societies and building societies without a constitutional amendment since to do so would infringe their constitutional right to freedom of expression. Our constitutional amendment would allow for a more comprehensive ban on corporate donations by ensuring only citizens in the State who have the right to vote in any election or referendum would be entitled to make political donations to organisations or people involved in political campaigning. Our proposal excludes those only entitled to vote for candidates seeking election to the university seats in the Seanad. To ensure no added significant cost to the taxpayer, we are committed to proposing that the referendum be held on the same day as the Presidential election later this year. To ensure this timeframe can be met, this morning I introduced the Twenty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (No. 2) Bill which will be published and distributed later this week.

The Government seems to have accepted that a complete ban on corporate donations would be unconstitutional since it also talks about holding a referendum to ban such donations. We

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

urge it to follow our lead on the matter. While it is not possible to introduce an outright ban on corporate donations until a referendum on the matter is held later in the year, the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill 2011 proposes to bring greater transparency to the way in which such donations are made, while also making it significantly more difficult for them to be made. Section 5 provides that all corporate donations over €100 would have to be declared within 14 days, authorised by a general meeting and registered with the Standards in Public Offices Commission, SIPO. It would also ensure any donation by a company or trade union exceeding €100 in value would be difficult to make and extremely transparent. First, the company would have to apply to the SIPO to be registered as a "donating company" or a "donating trade union". It would have to provide it with full details of the organisation, membership and shareholding of the company and have secured support for the donation through a vote of its members or at a general meeting. If a donation was subsequently made which could not exceed €2,500 to a political party, the Bill requires that any donation in excess of €100 in value would have to be published in the company's accounts.

Section 5 would also introduce a new and welcome provision into electoral law, based on the recommendations contained in chapter 62.12.vii of Mr. Justice Moriarty's report. A company would be required to publish in its accounts details of any government contracts entered into or that it intended to enter into at the time of the making of the donation where the contracts exceed €1,000 in value. This provision is designed to ensure transparency. This builds on another important Moriarty tribunal recommendation, namely, that a donor should be obliged to identify any relevant financial, commercial or other interests if donations exceed a certain threshold. This would include identifying any government contracts or involvement in procurement processes. This requirement is not simply limited to the company but also includes its directors, shadow directors or significant shareholders. Section 6 would ensure failure to comply with these requirements would be a criminal offence, punishable on summary conviction by imprisonment for a period not exceeding 12 months or a fine not exceeding €5,000.

The Bill provides for a major reduction in both the levels at which donations to political parties, third parties and candidates must be disclosed, as well as a reduction in the maximum allowable donations. As well as drawing on Mr. Justice Moriarty's recommendations, the Bill draws upon recommendations made both by the Council of Europe and the SIPO. In 2009 the Council of Europe group of states against corruption, of which Ireland is a member, undertook an evaluation study of Ireland's political system, specifically examining the issue of party funding. The report makes a series of recommendations to enhance transparency and improve controls in the funding of political activity in Ireland. They include a recommendation that all registered political parties should prepare independently audited accounts that would be made public in a timely and accessible way. It is also recommended that consideration be given to lowering the current disclosure threshold to an appropriate level, although a precise figure is not specified. These recommendations from the Council of Europe are covered in the Bill. By passing it, we can do our reputation some good. The Government should be cognisant of this in its deliberations on the Bill.

Several issues addressed in the Council of Europe group's report were also the subject of recommendations by the SIPO when it addressed the issue of disclosure thresholds: "If the intention of the legislation is to provide for transparency and openness in relation to party funding and expenditure, then it is not achieving this aim". In regard to these and other recommendations, key changes contained in the Bill include reducing the maximum allowable individual donations to political parties and third parties from €6,348 to €2,500, with the level at which these must be publicly declared to fall from €5,078 to €1,000. It would reduce the maximum

allowable donation to a candidate from €2,539 to €1,000 in any one year, with the level at which these must be publicly declared falling from €634 to €500.

The Bill would introduce an amendment to section 23A of the Electoral Act 1997, based on one of the recommendations in the Moriarty tribunal report on political funding which identified a problem where one donor made a series of donations all under the declarable threshold. The amendment would provide that where a donor made a donation in the same year to two or more persons of the same party, these would be treated as one donation to a political party or third party, ensuring no more than €2,500 could be donated in total per annum by a donor.

Another key Moriarty tribunal recommendation stated political donations should be disclosed in a reasonable timeframe following an election. Accordingly, the Bill would require the publication of donation statements within 25 days of polling, as opposed to the current arrangement of 58 days for unsuccessful candidates and until 31 March of the following year for successful candidates.

This Bill provides for SIPO to audit the accounts of political parties each year, with the income and expenditure account, balance sheet and donations statement to be published. A further recommendation by Mr. Justice Moriarty was that SIPO shall publish a record of all donations received by a political party, which shall include the size and amount of all donations and whether the identity of the donor is publishable or not. This will ensure that all income of political parties is disclosed to SIPO. This will also apply to Independent candidates.

I believe that the measures as set out in this Bill are necessary, appropriate and desirable. They will put in place a strong foundation for a political system in Ireland that is, in Mr. Justice Moriarty's words, "not subject to the invisible or disguised influence of powerful individuals or entities" as well as ensuring a new "measure of transparency and openness to scrutiny [which] is essential". I want to conclude by reading the following insightful and wise words into the record of the House:

> All over the world, it is recognised that financial support from business to politicians is perceived by the public to have one purpose [namely] the securing of commercial advantage. Claims that such donations are made from disinterested motives are simply not believed. As the lurid tribunal scandals play out before our eyes, one thing is clear. We cannot restore politics until the perceived link between political contributions and public policy is broken.

These words were spoken by the current Minister for Finance in 2001. I sincerely urge the Government to accept this Bill and to help us to finally begin to restore politics and to break the perception of a link between political contributions and public policy.

Deputy Niall Collins: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to tonight's debate on this important issue. It is fair to say that as political practitioners we all know our fair share about fund-raising. It is important the debate this evening and tomorrow evening is held in a constructive manner. We must impress upon the wider public at every available opportunity that politics and the practice of politics and funding of political parties is necessary. Political parties and campaigns do not run on fresh air. However, we must in this regard try to achieve a balance which will reinstate confidence in the profession of politics which has, during the past number of years, taken a severe denting. We all partake from time to time in exercises with the various third level institutions and in other forms of research. Often the focus of questionnaires circulated to us by the institutions and other researchers focus on the standing of politicians, politics and political parties. We need to ensure a collective approach on this issue within the House.

I have been a Member of this House since 2007. I believe too often a partisan approach is taken on issues common to all of us. With the exception of the Independents, all Members of

[Deputy Niall Collins.]

this House are members of political parties of one shade or another. As I said earlier, it is fact of life that political parties must fund-raise. If we are to have active and interactive politics the profession must be put on a sustainable footing, while ensuring the public remains confident everything is being done in a proper manner.

Deputy Martin in proposing the Second Stage reading of this Bill referred to the Moriarty tribunal. It behoves all of us in this House to take seriously Mr. Justice Moriarty's recommendations. The Moriarty tribunal sat for many years, culminating in the recently published report which was debated at length in this House a few weeks ago. Given the number of years for which the tribunal sat, the detail of what was investigated and how the tribunal went about its business in following the money trail, we must take seriously Mr. Justice Moriarty's recommendations. Whether through the Bill before us or by way of other legislation, these recommendations must be implemented. The wider public expects that. There has been fair criticism of the tribunals in terms of the length of time taken to come to their recommendations. However, cost and time aside, it behoves all of us to act.

There has been too much populism and political point scoring in this House down through the years in regard to the Galway tent, Punchestown or, in respect of the Labour Party, trade union alignment. There is in place legislation which provides for the accounting and recording of moneys of particular events. The fact is that all political parties and candidates engage in fund-raising exercises and activities. However, we must ensure a common approach in terms of how we go about this, which is seen to be, and is, above board and must do so in a fair and balanced manner. In this regard, we need to consider broadening the base of political financial support. The recent Obama campaign included the targeting of a large number of people to donate one or two dollars, thus allowing people to take ownership of their political parties for a small fee, which is a good way to get involved. It is better for parties to do this rather than being seen to be aligned to big business.

All political parties have operated various fund-raising mechanisms down through the years, regardless of whether one believed them to be right or wrong. Aligned to whatever legislation is introduced must be a code of practice. I do not wish to engage in political point scoring but I recall a friend of mine who is a Fianna Fáil councillor in business in the southern half of the country receiving a letter from a fund-raiser in the Labour Party, who is now a Minister. It was a cold calling letter sent to him because he was on a register of business directories. Is it right that my party or any other can spray correspondence in all directions seeking support because they may, according to opinion polls, be the next parties in Government?

Constitutional issues arise and as such we will have to hold a referendum to provide for a complete ban on corporate donations. It will be important that a commonsense approach is taken to this matter. In the absence of a referendum and anything that cannot be legislated for, all political parties should consider signing up to a code of practice. This idea could be first discussed by the party Whips.

The Bill seeks greater involvement of SIPO relating to corporate donations, which I support. The notion of companies who intend donating having to apply to go on a register of potential donors for political purposes is a good idea. Too often, there has been hard evidence and anecdotal evidence that companies donate to individuals and political parties to gain competitive advantage. From that point of view, I support the Bill. I welcome its timely publication and ask that the Government parties take cognisance of it and expedite it. We are at a crossroads in this country. We have moved on from the election and this is a new start for everybody, including the Government. The people rightly want us to take whatever measures are within

our ability to promote and re-instill confidence in the political system. I believe that is paramount.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá áthas orm deis a bheith agam cupla focal a rá faoin ábhar fíorthábhachtach seo. I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak on this issue.

I am disappointed the Government cannot accept the Second Stage of this Bill. If it did accept the Bill, it would have six months to replace it with a Government Bill. This would put a time limit on the Government's efforts. Much work has been done already on this Bill, much of it during the term of the previous Government. Contrary to constant media reports, there was no difficulty in the Fianna Fáil Party with dealing with this issue. We agreed it had to be dealt with, but we had to deal with some legal issues which have been well outlined today.

Laws should not be there to trip people up. We have all read historical accounts of how the innocent were caught and the guilty got away because the law was so complex that ordinary people did not understand it. It is time we simplified and codified this legislation in a new way. Even the fact that the monetary limits are in odd amounts, because they were set in the days of the Irish pound, needs to be dealt with.

I have always had a slight reservation about banning corporate donations completely. This is because of something that happened once, totally innocently. An event was being organised locally with a subscription of €100. That is not a huge amount of money in any person's language. I happened to notice that one of the cheques was in the name of an individual. The person had a private business and, obviously, wrote the cheque on the company account, because "Teo." was written after the individual's name. It would take a fairly sharp person to realise that it was, technically, a corporate, and not a private, donation. That is the kind of tripping up of an innocent action that we must avoid.

My preoccupation was never with whether a donation came from a corporate or private source but with the amount of money involved. The Bill makes very good steps in that regard. For example, it proposes reducing the total amount one can give to a party to €2,500 and the amount above which one would have to publish to €1,000. The maximum donation from an individual would be €1,000 and the amount above which one would have to publish would be €500. These are modest amounts of money and are realistic. No matter how little a party receives, it must account for it in its donation statement. Therefore, this is a step in the right direction. It is balanced, as it must be.

On the other hand, we all go to party meetings. Someone might pay a membership fee of €5 or put €20 in the bucket at a church gate collection. When Fine Gael recently had their national collection, Fianna Fáil people coming out the church would not pass the Fine Gael collectors without putting a few euro in the bucket. I often saw Fine Gael people putting money in our bucket, because they respected people's involvement in politics and were mature about what was going on. The idea that one would have to declare every euro donated, which seems to be the demand in the media, is unrealistic. The idea that someone who throws a fiver into a bucket is likely to hugely influence the political system is bizarre.

Therefore, we need limits under which a declaration is not required. What we propose is reasonable. I would have no problem declaring every donation. I do not take political donations. The last €50 euro went into my political donations statement account five years ago. That is my decision. It is how I operate. On the other hand, I have, quite legitimately, passed money on to the party that was given to me for the party. The limits we propose are operable and reasonable.

Another issue must be dealt with. The difficulty of multiple donations can arise, especially with people who have their own personality and a good number of companies. Such a person

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could try to circumvent the law by giving large sums of money to several parties, spend quite a bit of money keeping in with all sides and donate to the very limit. That type of multiple donation should be dealt with forthwith, and it is addressed in the Bill.

I would like to touch on the issue of the publication of the accounts of political parties. Our own party, for some reason I can never understand, traditionally has not published all its financial affairs. Whatever justification there might have been in times gone by, and I do not know what it was, it is not justifiable today. We live in a totally different atmosphere. The idea that all political parties would publish their accounts is reasonable and practical. I have one caveat, being practical about this issue. Most of us have a central party, and it should publish its accounts. We also have local branches. In my constituency there are 80 branches — we call them cumainn — eight comhairlí ceantair and a comhairle dáil cheantair. One must multiply that across the country. How could a party get down to every last fiver given to a local branch and get it all together in some super account? I do not know how good other parties are at getting their guys to fill in all the fivers donated at the AGM. We normally charge a fiver. In the midlands I know it is often more, because they are richer than we are in the west.

Deputy Willie Penrose: We are poor too.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We need to deal with this practical issue. I often ask our European colleagues to put some kind of *de minimis* clause in legislation. It is easy to include a *de minimis* measure to deal with this small local issue, which in no way influences anything at a national level. We should ensure that is provided for.

We must consider the issue of referendums and interest groups. I have no problem fighting elections with professional politicians who are fighting by the same rules as myself. I have never spent big money because I believe the best way to win an election is through the hard slog of volunteer workers. There is no way of buying an election that matches getting a big team of committed people together and doing the work. On the other hand, it is wrong if campaigning groups, in referendums or otherwise, can spend huge sums of money from sources they never declare and fight very well-financed campaigns against professional politicians and parties who have been fighting with transparent and limited resources.

Things happened in the past that should not have happened. Tarring everyone with the same brush is wrong. Most politicians and parties have acted honestly and fairly. When people start pointing the finger at individuals, I am reminded on an Irish seanfhocal: an té atá thuas óltar deoch air; an té atá thíos buailtear cois air; an té atá saor chaithfeadh sé cloch. They toast him who is up; to him who is down they give a kick; and let him who is free throw a stone. The implication is clear. There are many ways, beyond money, of not playing fair in politics.

Money was wrongly used in the past. I will not point a finger but it may have been used to influence decisions. I never collected enough money to be influenced by anyone and no one ever came to me, in all my life as a Minister, and said I would have to do this or that because certain people had contributed. I do not know, and no one ever intimated to me, who gave money to my party. I never saw donations as influencing decisions. There is a possibility, however, that it could exercise influence. Perhaps it did, and we will leave to do so those who have been appointed to decide those things. If donating money influenced decisions, then it must be stopped. We must have limits that put influence off limits.

Let us not fool ourselves. Human beings are creative in how they get their way. At times, we are all prone to other kinds of political dishonesty that are equally wrong. There is the dishonesty of promising things we know we can never fulfil and of buying elections with promises. I have often said in Galway that if, at an election time, someone proposed to build a

bridge from Connemara to America, there are very few politicians who would not promise to do it. They would say: "Fine, lads, whatever you want me to sign up for." They would know they would renege on the promise afterwards because it was not possible to do what was promised. Let us be honest about it — that is corrupting of politics. We have had elections where promises were made when it was known at the time by the people who made them that they could never be fulfilled.

I wish to raise a final issue which came to my attention when, along with my colleagues, I decided not to take the ministerial severance pay. I made an inquiry as to whether I could donate some of the money I was foregoing to the party. I was told by the authority that if I gave more than €5,000, it would be a political donation, although it was a legitimate sum to which I was entitled from the State and which I wanted to pass on to the party of which I am a member and a public representative. That response was fair enough, so I decided to leave the money in total to the State as it was the simplest thing to do.

However, I have heard politicians in this House boast that they only take the average industrial wage, and I understand those people have the full amount of their wages put through the books of the Houses. Somebody needs to explain to me how they manage to make donations I could not make.

Deputy John Perry: It is a good point.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: If people are boasting they are doing something, we should know how they are doing it. I would have loved to give that kind of money to Fianna Fáil, which could badly do with it at present. However, I was told that while I could take the money myself and pay tax on it, if I donated more than €6,350 a year, it was a political donation over the limit and I was not allowed to do it. I could spend it on myself but I could not give it to the party.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): At the outset, I acknowledge that the Bill contains some good and welcome proposals and I would not take issue with a number of the points made by Deputy Ó Cuív. However, in many respects the Bill is too limited and narrowly focused. It also contains a number of flaws that would make some of its intended provisions unworkable. The Government has a more ambitious programme for the reform of political funding arrangements and we will, therefore, be opposing this Bill.

I am somewhat surprised by the speed at which this Bill has been brought forward. Notwithstanding what Deputy Ó Cuív said, there was ample opportunity for the previous Administration not only to publish a Bill, as Fianna Fáil has now done, but to have it enacted and implemented. Clearly, this did not happen during the lifetime of the previous Administration.

However, rather than focusing on what should have been, I want to talk about what is going to be. I want to deal specifically with what the Government will do to radically overhaul politics and Government work. Our plans for reform are set out in the programme for Government, which we are already implementing.

Provision is made in the Government's legislation programme for the current Dáil term for the publication of an electoral (amendment) (political funding) Bill. This Bill will amend the Electoral Acts so as to implement political funding commitments set out in the programme for Government. Work is currently under way on its preparation and I expect draft legislation will be published in a matter of weeks.

On matters related to the reform of the funding and operation of politics, the programme for Government makes the following commitments. We will introduce spending limits for all

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elections, including presidential elections and constitutional referendums, including for a period in advance of scheduled local, European, general and presidential elections. We will significantly reduce the limits on political donations to political parties and candidates to €2,500 and €1,000, respectively, and require disclosure of all aggregate sums above €1,500 and €600, respectively. We will introduce the necessary legal and constitutional provisions to ban corporate donations to political parties. Our open government legislation will also establish an electoral commission to subsume functions of existing bodies and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. Public funding for political parties will be tied to the level of participation by women as candidates achieved by those parties.

The Government is serious about changing the way politics is conducted. Although we have been in office for just over two months, tangible actions have already been taken. Last week, my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Phil Hogan, announced decisions taken by Government to deliver real and tangible political reforms in regard to other commitments outlined in the programme for Government. These decisions include changing the terms of reference of the constituency commission to facilitate a reduction in the number of TDs. A constituency commission is due to be established upon the publication of the 2011 census preliminary results, which are due in June. That commission will report within three months of the publication of final census results in 2012.

It also includes the reduction of the presidential election spending limit from €1.3 million to €750,000 and a reduction in the amount that candidates can be reimbursed for expenses from €260,000 to €200,000. This demonstrates the Government's commitment to show restraint in all aspects of spending involving public life and our belief that we need to start at the very top. In all walks of life, we have to do more with less, and that applies to political parties and politicians as much, if not more, than anyone else.

The Government has also decided that Dáil by-elections should be held within six months of a vacancy occurring. Democracy and the holding of elections are a right. They should not be regarded as an inconvenience to be avoided and it should not be in the gift of the Government of the day to decide if and when by-elections are held. Separate legislation is currently being prepared to give effect to these changes, which follow other reforms already introduced by the Government including the removal of the automatic entitlement to ministerial cars and drivers, the cutting of the pay of the Taoiseach, Ministers and Ministers of State, and the removal of severance pay for Ministers. We are a Government in a hurry and we have a lot to do. However, we also want to do things right and to implement legislation that will work.

I will now address some of the measures contained in the Bill. Provision is made to place restrictions on corporate donations from companies, trade unions, societies and building societies. However, there are a number of other corporate structures that have not been included. For example, no provision is made for donations made by partnerships, unincorporated bodies, trusts, sole traders and non-governmental organisations. As it stands, the Bill before us would allow a number of corporate-type bodies to continue to give political donations, while restricting others. In its present form, the Bill would not work in practice as it does not address all donors who are not individuals.

The Bill provides for a reduction in the level of donations that may be accepted by political parties from €6,348 to €2,500, and by candidates and elected members from €2,539 to €1,000. The Bill provides for the level at which donations must be declared to be reduced from €5,078 to €1,000 for political parties and from €654 to €500 for candidates and elected members.

The provisions contained within the Fianna Fáil Bill represent a change from what was being proposed by that party during the recent general election, with greater reductions now being

advocated. In fact, three separate positions have been adopted by the party opposite since the beginning of this year. There was the position taken when in government, then the position taken during the general election campaign and, now, the position has been modified again in the Bill before us. Each change of policy has been an advance on the previous position, and it would be churlish not to welcome this. However, I am of the view that the programme for Government and our own plans for legislative change on political funding are more comprehensive, better thought through and will be more effective in providing the improvements that the people of Ireland want to see.

The Bill before us would require the publication of donation statements within 25 days of polling by unsuccessful candidates and by 31 March of the following year for successful candidates. This change purports to address a recommendation in the Moriarty tribunal report for information on donations to be made available in real time. However, the measure put forward would not appear to provide any demonstrable improvement on current arrangements.

The Fianna Fáil Bill provides that the Standards in Public Office Commission would audit the accounts of political parties each year, with the income and expenditure account, balance sheet and donations statement being published. This provision does not appear to have sufficient regard to existing arrangements that are in place for reporting by political parties to the Standards in Public Office Commission. Currently, political parties are required to submit audited financial statements in respect of State funding received under the Electoral Acts and through the party leader's allowance. On the one hand, we would still have parties continuing to prepare these audited statements that the Standards in Public Office Commission would examine, while on the other hand the Standards in Public Office Commission would also be carrying out a further separate audit. I am not dismissing the proposal put forward, but clearly we need to avoid duplication and overlap and we need to target the resources of the Standards in Public Office Commission in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Fianna Fáil has stated it will extend the supervision of the Standards in Public Office Commission to independent expenditures in referendums. The Government agrees that change is needed in the regulation of spending and donations at referendums, as outlined by Deputy Ó Cuív. Particular problems have previously been identified in regard to the regulation of spending and the sources of income of groups campaigning at referendums. I refer in particular to a report prepared in March 2009 by the Standards in Public Office Commission on the operation of provisions applying to third parties at the first referendum on the Lisbon treaty in 2008. Third parties are typically campaign groups and are defined under section 22(2)(*aa*) of the Electoral Act 1997 as a person other than a registered political party or a candidate at an election which accepts a donation exceeding €126.97 in value.

Referendum campaigns involve decisions on matters that have significant and far-reaching implications for the country. It is important that citizens know how much money is being spent by campaign groups and from where they get their money. However, the actual provision in the Fianna Fáil Bill amounted to a relatively minor amendment in the definition of what constitutes a third party, and a referendum would appear to be wholly insufficient to achieve anything of substance. It will take much more than inserting a few lines into the Electoral Acts to bring about effective reform in this area.

The explanatory memorandum published with the Bill states that it seeks to apply equivalent obligations in regard to financial transparency to Independent or non-party candidates as apply to political parties. It is doubtful whether the measures in the Bill would have this effect. The provisions in the relevant section of the Bill appear to relate more to third parties than Independent candidates. In short, although the stated intention of the Fianna Fáil legislation in this area appears to be clear, the measures to achieve the policy objectives do not appear to match

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up. The same point can be made, specifically in regard to this measure, but also more generally in regard to the Bill as a whole.

In making these observations and criticisms of the Bill, I acknowledge the work done in its introduction and acknowledge the understanding on the part of Fianna Fáil that more needs to be done to the Bill in any event to amend it and make it workable in practice. The press release issued by Fianna Fáil when it published this Bill on 11 April states: "We believe that the Government should support this Bill and allow it to go forward to Committee where amendments can be made". However, this Bill is too incomplete and not sufficiently comprehensive and for that reason the Government cannot support it.

An important context for the Government in the introduction of its legislation to reform political funding is the recent report on the tribunal into payments to politicians and related matters, more commonly referred to as the Moriarty tribunal report. The private Members' Bill before the House purports to address recommendations made in the tribunal report albeit in a relatively limited and selective manner that lacks co-ordination. It is important to re-cap on what is actually in the Moriarty tribunal report. In line with its terms of reference, the tribunal put forward observations on the subject of political funding and its report makes 12 specific recommendations in this area. In paragraph 62.07 it is acknowledged that considerable advances have been made in the governance of political donations since the matters into which the tribunal has inquired arose. The report mentions the Electoral Act 1997 introduced by the Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left Government, the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2001 and the legislation which established the Standards in Public Office Commission but under current regulations the large-scale donations that were the subject of the tribunal's inquiries could not now be accepted. The maximum donation that can now accepted by a political party is €6,348, while the maximum that can be accepted by a politician or candidate is €2,539. The programme for Government commits to reducing these amounts to €2,500 and €1,000 respectively.

The Moriarty tribunal recommendations represent a substantial contribution to consideration of policy in this area. They are made in a report that lays bare the failings in the system that existed at the time. Although rules and regulations have been changed since the 1990s, some of the failings identified still prevail. The potential continues to exist for undue influence to arise from the corporate funding of politics, to the detriment of the wider public good. In addition to the potential for corruption, the perception that there is some form of mutually beneficial relationship between politics and business can have a corrosive impact on public trust. This is based on the view that the corporate funding of politics contributes to a public belief that those who pay can exert inappropriate influence in the formation of policy.

Therefore, the recommendations in the tribunal report are timely, as the Government is embarking on a major programme of legislative reform to improve governance and Government. Every recommendation is being considered in the preparation of this legislation. The programme for Government already commits to making radical changes to how politics is funded and operated here. On the most crucial issue in this area, the programme for Government goes beyond what the Moriarty report was in a position to recommend. The report states:

> It may be observed in passing that, ultimately, the only cast iron guarantee against corruption and abuses in the political system, and against the risk of distortions in the democratic process that may arise from the private funding of political parties and political representatives, would be to provide for a complete ban on private funding and, as in some other European countries, to fund political parties entirely from the public purse.

> The desirability and feasibility of such a general ban, having regard also to any constitutional law issues that might arise and to the national financial exigencies, is pre-eminently a matter for the Oireachtas and for public debate and consideration, and falls outside the remit of this Tribunal, whose focus under its terms of reference is on political funding from undisclosed sources.

The programme for Government contains a commitment to address corporate donations, to substantially reduce the level of donations that can be accepted and to reduce significantly the level at which donations must be disclosed. It may also be noted that the recommendations and views put forward in the tribunal report have some similarity with recommendations made by other bodies.

Ireland is a member of the Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption, GRECO. In 2009, this body undertook an evaluation study of Ireland's political system, specifically examining the issue of party funding. Among the recommendations made was that all registered political parties should prepare independently audited accounts that would be made public in a timely and accessible way. It also recommended that consideration be given to lowering the current disclosure threshold for political donations. This report recommended the extension of the election spending control period, pointing out that expenditure outside of this period is not disclosed. Stronger investigative powers for the Standards in Public Office Commission are also advocated. Similar recommendations have been made by the Standards in Public Office Commission. Over the years, the commission has raised a number of concerns about the effectiveness of certain aspects of political funding legislation and has put forward specific recommendations for change. The commission's 2009 annual report, published in July 2010, is a case in point. Chapter Three of the report deals with the commission's responsibilities under the Electoral Acts. The report notes on page 32, that,"while the current system of regulation of political funding has some strong features, there are other fundamental measures which are yet to be developed". The same annual report also summarises the most significant proposals from previous reports of the commission in an appendix, along with updates on any progress which may have taken place in the meantime.

It is clear from the extensive and detailed range of recommendations made by the Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption, the Standards in Public Office Commission and, more recently, the Moriarty tribunal, that there is no shortage of analysis on the shortcomings in Ireland's arrangements for the funding of politics. The one thing that has been lacking is a willingness to act. That may have been the case before but is so no longer.

The Moriarty tribunal was set up at a time when politics and political parties were predominantly funded from private sources. It is important to acknowledge the extent to which the taxpayers and citizens have taken on much of this burden in the interim. Considerable State resources are now committed to supporting the operation of our political system. There are three direct sources of public funding. Qualifying political parties can receive funding under section 18(1) of the Electoral Act 1997, whose provisions were introduced in 2001. To qualify, a political party must be included on the register of political parties and must have obtained at least 2% of the first preference vote at the preceding Dáil general election. Based on the most recently available information, the total funding dispersed through this source in 2009 was €5,438,385. This funding is used for the general conduct and management of a party's affairs, and cannot be used for electoral purposes. Each qualifying political party must submit an annual statement of expenditure of this funding and an auditor's report to the Standards in Public Office Commission.

The party leaders' allowance provides for the payment of an annual allowance to the parliamentary leaders of a qualified political party in respect of expenses arising from the

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parliamentary activities of their party, including research. To qualify, a party must have at least one member in the Dáil or Seanad. An allowance is paid to the party leader in respect of each member of the Dáil and Seanad. The combined total received by all party leaders through this source in 2009 was €8,164,879. Provision for these payments is made in the Oireachtas Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices (Amendment) Act 2001. Each party leader must submit an annual statement of expenditure of this funding and an auditor's report to the Standards in Public Office Commission.

The Electoral Act 1997 provides for the reimbursement of election expenses to qualifying candidates who achieve one quarter of the quota at a Dáil, European Parliament or presidential election. The maximum amounts that can be reimbursed to a candidate are €8,700 for a Dáil election and €38,092 for a European election.

In the 2007 Dáil general election, some 304 candidates qualified for reimbursement payments and this amounted to €2,368,013 in total. In the 2009 European Parliament elections, a total of 26 candidates qualified for reimbursement payments and amounted to €981,860 in total. Up to now the maximum reimbursement in a presidential election was €260,000. This is to be reduced to €200,000 for the 2011 presidential election.

Apart from direct sources of funding there are indirect supports. Candidates at a Dáil, European or presidential election are entitled to send one item of post free of charge to each elector. The total cost of this provision in the 2009 European elections was €10,980,518, which was paid from the Exchequer to An Post. There were further costs totalling €540,669 in respect of the two Dáil by-elections held on the same day. The estimated cost of the facility for the 2011 Dáil general election is €8.4 million. Other indirect supports include free air time for party political broadcasts.

The State pays for much of the administrative apparatus of political parties through the funding mechanisms I have described. When discussing legislation to reform the funding of politics, we are predominantly discussing how parties and candidates fund their election campaigns and contributions made to pay for the running of election campaigns. This is why it is so important that political funding is more open and transparent with regulatory measures in which the people can have confidence.

The Moriarty tribunal recommendations that I have already described in some detail have as their main focus the funding of politics and political parties. This was in line with the tribunal's terms of reference.

Another crucial aspect in the funding of politics forms part of the Government's plans. This was referred to already by Deputy Ó Cuív and concerns spending at elections and referendums. The programme for Government contains a commitment to have spending limits for all elections and constitutional referendums, including for a period in advance of scheduled local, European, general and presidential elections. Given the proximity of the presidential election, the Government has moved to reduce the spending limit from €1.3 million to €750,000. The legislation for this is being prepared. Spending limits apply at Dáil, European Parliament, local authority and presidential elections. At each election a candidate must submit a statement of election expenses and statutory declaration and must stay within the spending limits or potentially face prosecution. However, as I have already noted, no equivalent spending limit applies at a constitutional referendum or a requirement to submit a declaration of expenditure by those involved in a referendum campaign.

8 o'clock

At the moment the spending limits in force apply only to the period immediately leading up to an election. At the recent general election, the spending period commenced on the date of dissolution of the Dáil, which was 1 February 2011. The election was held on 25 February 2011,

candidates had to declare their election spending during that 25-day period and it had to be under the legal spending limit. Ordinarily, spending on election materials used before 1 February would not count when calculating a candidate's election spending. A similar provision applies in respect of elections to the European Parliament in which the spending period commences on the date the order appointing polling day is made. A spending period of 38 days applied at the 2009 European elections. At local elections a spending period of between 50 and 60 days applies.

Concerns have been expressed that spending by candidates and parties before the election period is not captured under the current arrangements. I noted earlier that this point has been raised by the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption. The Standards in Public Office Commission has also highlighted this as an issue which should be addressed, as has the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in an election-monitoring visit to Ireland in 2007. As the commitments contained in the programme for Government make clear, the current arrangements that apply to spending at elections and referendums must be improved and we are committed to this.

I have outlined some of the key decisions on political reform that the Government has already taken. The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Donations) Bill is being drafted for implementation during the current Dáil session. There will be no delay or foot-dragging. As the Government's legislation programme states, the Bill will "amend the terms of reference for a constituency commission to provide for a report on Dáil constituencies to be made based on a reduced number of TDs in Dáil Éireann". It will also reduce the spending limits for presidential elections and legislate for the holding of Dáil by-elections within six months. Separately, the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Bill 2011 is to be published during the current Dáil session. As I have noted, the Bill will amend the Electoral Acts to implement political funding commitments set out in the programme for Government. The electoral commission Bill is also on the Government's legislation programme and is to be enacted during the lifetime of this Dáil.

The programme for Government contains a commitment to establish an electoral commission to subsume functions of existing bodies and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. This is another part of the Government's wider commitment to a radical overhaul of the way Irish politics and government work. An electoral commission will be an important element in a reformed and revitalised electoral system. In developing proposals for the establishment of an electoral commission, the Government is aware that there is extensive knowledge and expertise in electoral matters on all sides of the House. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution, which published a report on the electoral system in July 2010, stated that it strongly supported the establishment of an independent electoral commission. Those of us on this side of the House look forward to the continued input of Members in the implementation of the programme for Government commitment to establish such a body. It is noteworthy that during the recent general election campaign all the major political parties put forward policy proposals to set up an electoral commission. While there is broad agreement on the principle that an electoral commission should be established, setting up this new structure will be a major body of work and it needs to be done right. Issues for consideration include international best practice, the commission's structure and functions, to whom it should report, its relationship with other bodies currently involved in electoral administration and the approach to be followed in respect of the extensive legislation that will be required.

In addition to determining what areas of responsibility the electoral commission will have, we must consider practical matters such as its operational structure, staffing arrangements,

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budget, reporting arrangements and performance indicators. We have no wish to end up duplicating tasks currently performed elsewhere. The new electoral commission will have to be effective in the performance of its tasks and must be cost efficient. It should improve accountability and enhance the efficiency of elections. My colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government is giving consideration to how the necessary measures to establish an electoral commission can be advanced.

The Fianna Fáil Private Members' Bill is a useful contribution to the national debate taking place on the role of politics and how it is supported and funded. It would appear to address some of recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal, albeit in a relatively uncoordinated fashion. Similar provisions to those contained in the programme for Government have been included, especially in respect of reducing the donation limits and the thresholds for their declaration. The provisions for dealing with third parties at referendums are relatively limited and in their present form are unlikely to have a significant positive effect.

The principal measure in the Bill dealing with restricting corporate donations also appears not to have been fully thought through. Loopholes would allow a several corporate-type bodies to continue to make political donations. Overall, the Bill lacks vision, credibility and detail. In many ways, this sums up the difference of approach between the Government and the political party opposite.

The Government's proposed approach is a good deal more comprehensive and considered. It offers a joined-up approach to reform and addresses the following — how our political institutions work, or, in many cases, how they do not work to their full potential; political funding and election spending; and the reform of electoral administration. In bringing forward draft legislation on political funding, which we intend to publish shortly, we will also have regard to recommendations made by other individuals and bodies, including the recommendations made in the Moriarty tribunal report. Our legislation will match the expectations of the people for action with legislation and policy measures that will work. It will make the system more open and transparent for the voter. Accordingly, on behalf of the Government I oppose the Bill.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Bill. At a time when the profession of politics has been besmirched by the corrupt and greedy actions of the few, it is imperative that the House moves immediately to restore confidence in the political system. Dealing with the issue of political donations is but a small step, albeit an important one, in restoring this confidence. During the past 14 years, Sinn Féin has called for legislation on corporate donations. During these 14 years, the previous Administration led by Fianna Fáil failed to respond in a positive way to those calls.

In some ways this should not come as a surprise. For the last 14 years Fianna Fáil was the party with its hand on the wheel of power, its ability to court large businesses was unrivalled and its lack of morals to do so was never in question. The Galway tent did a roaring trade, the whip arounds in Manchester were fruitful and the golf classics were plentiful.

How times have changed. After being run out of office by the people, Fianna Fáil went into a period of reflection and like St. Paul on the road to Damascus, the party has had a revelation. Of course, the fact Fianna Fáil is no longer in power and its ability to attract and court big business having diminished has more to do with this recent conversion to the Sinn Féin way of thinking on corporate donations than any sense of redemption. There will be people at home laughing to themselves at the idea of Fianna Fáil tabling this legislation when they consider the previous leaders of the party, such as Bertie Ahern and Charles Haughey. We all know

what happened on their watch and the allegations of payments, mysterious amounts of sterling won on the horses and briefcases full of cash. How many of the Fianna Fáil Deputies proposing this legislation tonight knew of those goings-on and what did they do while they were Fianna Fáil members in that period? From where I am standing, they have no sense of the meaning of the word hypocrisy.

Bertie Ahern presided over a decade of Government, a Government in which the current leader of Fianna Fáil was a senior member, which saw a deepening inequality in our society and the squandering of our economic prosperity. Now Fianna Fáil has the brass neck to preach to us about credibility in politics. One has to ask why Fianna Fáil even picked this issue to debate when we consider that recent reports from the Standards in Public Office Commission repeatedly tell us the party received no donations.

According to these reports Fianna Fáil is not alone in this respect. The 2005 SIPO annual report stated that Fine Gael and the now defunct Progressive Democrats received no donations whatsoever in the course of the previous two years and that the Labour Party did not receive any donations in that year either. The 2006 SIPO annual report states that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael received no donations that year. Are we seriously expected to believe that the Christian Solidarity Party received more in political donations than Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael put together in 2006? It is preposterous and everyone listening to this debate will be chuckling at the idea.

Even more recent SIPO annual reports, such as the 2009 report, state that neither Fianna Fáil nor Fine Gael received any donations over the limit set for disclosure. As a party, Sinn Féin has consistently been the only party to make accounts fully available to the public. We have nothing to hide in regard to where we receive our funding and how we spend it, despite accusation thrown across the House about how we raise funds for political campaigns. The challenge I set other parties in this Chamber is to do the same and not hide behind legislation that allows political parties to hide significant donations from the public.

Political parties should be obliged to publish annual financial statements. The failure to do so in the past has led to international observers viewing Ireland as suffering from high levels of what is termed "legal corruption". Previous reports from Transparency International were correct in its assertions that patronage and personal relationships have influenced political decisions and policy in Ireland. This has been to the detriment not only to Ireland's international reputation but also at a cost to Irish society.

This scourge on Irish politics and society as a whole is underpinned by Fianna Fáil's 1980s golden circle culture. Under Fianna Fáil, the last Government undermined our economy, fattened the bank accounts of big bankers and greedy developers and left critical public services such as education, transport and health under-funded and in disarray. We hear that every day in this House from the Government that has now taken the reins of power. The current Government, however, was no different when it came to developers, bankers and fattened bank accounts. We know this only too well from previous tribunal reports.

In the Six Counties, political parties are required under law to provide a full income and expenditure annual financial statement to the Electoral Commission. Sinn Féin commends this requirement and believes a similar practice should be in place in this State. Like all organisations a political party needs an income in order to cover its expenditures. The public understands that raising funds and donations are part and parcel of generating that income. Public doubt starts to creep in when political parties are not open and transparent about their financial affairs.

[Deputy Jonathan O'Brien.]

The issue of donations to political parties is part of a broader issue of corruption that has been endemic in Irish political life. The recent Moriarty tribunal was a stark reminder of the cosy relationship between political parties and big business. There are still unanswered questions about the Lowry affair. Why was that debacle let happen in the first place? How can we create a system where this cannot happen again? How can we create a system that will not let big business influence political decisions?

Deputy Martin has already quoted the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, who in 2001 said:

> All over the world, it is recognised that financial support from business to politicians is perceived by the public to have one purpose [namely] the securing of commercial advantage. Claims that such donations are made from disinterested motives are simply not believed. As the lurid tribunal scandals play out before our eyes, one thing is clear. We cannot restore politics until the perceived link between political contributions and public policy is broken.

It is rare that I will agree with anything that the Minister for Finance has to say but he was correct on that point.

In 1997, the massive level of corporate donations to political parties emerged when a box of files that contained information on donors was, supposedly inadvertently, thrown in a skip outside the now defunct Progressive Democrats' head office during a spring clean. After the publication of the contents of that box of files by a Sunday newspaper, we got an insight into the level of political donations from big business to political parties and those of which the Progressive Democrats were in receipt. It is a pity that the cleaners in the Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil head offices were not as enthusiastic in their cleaning efforts. It is one box of files l would like to see.

In the last general election campaign, buzz words were bandied about like confetti such as job creation, change and political reform. This came from all sides, including the current Government parties. The time for buzz words has passed and the time for legislation has arrived. The citizens of this State need to be assured that the State's decision-making process is transparent, structured and disciplined. Anything less is not good enough. These structures need to inspire confidence. We need to restore confidence in our political system because if not, all of us fail. Members of all parties on all sides of the House will be tarred with the same brush so it is incumbent on all of us to work together to bring about the changes required to inspire confidence in the political system again.

I welcome the comments by the Taoiseach during the recent debate on the Moriarty tribunal report when he said this Government will move to ban corporate donations. I welcome this Fianna Fáil Private Members' Bill as a step in the right direction. However, it is very difficult to take it seriously when its author is the Fianna Fáil Party. Nevertheless, the Bill will be debated and considered by the House and we will vote on the motion tomorrow night. Regardless of the outcome of that vote, there is more work to be done. If we do not do the work in this 31st Dáil, then we will all suffer, not only as TDs and political parties but society as a whole. It is incumbent on all Members of the House to get this right.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I will share time with two other Deputies who will speak tomorrow night.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Fianna Fáil Private Members' Bill. I listened to the contribution from Deputy Martin, the leader of Fianna Fáil. He spoke about this opportunity to walk the walk regarding reform of the system of donations to political parties. Other

speakers have alluded to the fact that after 14 years in Government and having lost an election, the Fianna Fáil leader now decides to walk the walk and put forward these proposals. He also stated that this Bill is an opportunity to consign corporate donations to history and to end the culture of corporate donations once and for all but I do not agree. It is obvious that in the past year or two, the level of donations to Fianna Fáil has dried up and this can be seen by the level of debt the party holds in the aftermath of the general election. It is probable that in the same period the level of donations coming into Fine Gael and the Labour Party has gone through the roof and has reached an historical high. It is very interesting to hear the previous speaker quoting from the annual reports of the Standards in Public Office Commission in which, amazingly, even in 2009, neither party managed to declare any donations, when even the dogs in the street knew that money was coming in but they did not feel free to declare any of it.

This Bill is probably a cynical exercise by Fianna Fáil to put forward this amendment to ensure the Government will vote it down tomorrow night and Fianna Fáil will gain a bit of the moral high ground for a day or two before the Government publishes its own proposals.

I listened to the Minister outlining the Fine Gael proposals in the programme for Government which also limit corporate donations. The Minister stated that current legislation prevents what used to happen in the past when large cash donations were given to party members who were able to hide them. The current legislation limits the amount of donations and imposes an obligation to report them. However, the Standards in Public Office Commission report shows it is obvious they are not being reported.

We are all in agreement that ending corporate donations is the way forward. This could be done with a Bill containing a single section declaring that no donation of any kind from an individual, a company, a co-op or a trust, could exceed €100. This would satisfy the requirements once and for all and effectively ban corporate donations. There would be no requirement for a referendum because anyone could donate up to €100 to a political party. No donation higher than this amount could be accepted and this would have the effect of banning corporate donations. Such a Bill would pass without difficulty as all sides of the House would accept it and it would achieve the desired goal of every political party to end corporate donations. There is no need for the Government to go through the rigmarole of detailed legislation because I suggest that a simple amendment to this Bill would achieve one step along the road and it could then proceed with the other changes as outlined in the programme for Government. There would be no need for a constitutional referendum, nor would the constitutional rights of any individual wishing to contribute to the political system be endangered.

Debate adjourned.

Sitting suspended at 8.25 p.m. and resumed at 8.30 p.m.

Adjournment Debate

Schools Building Projects

Deputy Michael McCarthy: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose, and I look forward to a positive reply. I thank the Ceann Comhairle for giving me an opportunity to raise this issue. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the issue of Abbeystrewry national school in Skibbereen, in the constituency of Cork South-West. As Members are no doubt aware, for some time now the school has been campaigning to secure funding from the Department of Education and Skills to help it to settle outstanding debts that arose from renovation works that were carried out recently. The school is seeking a contribution of any size from the

[Deputy Michael McCarthy.]

Department to help it to bridge the €80,000 deficit it incurred over the course of construction works. Abbeystrewry national school is a Church of Ireland-run school which also absorbs Methodist congregations. It accepts children of other denominations. For this reason, the school is held in high regard locally. It is renowned for consistently producing high achievers and good results and pupil numbers have been increasing as a consequence. The school has 96 pupils, four full-time teachers and four resource teachers.

The Department has been extremely generous to the cause of the school in the past. Not very long ago, it sanctioned funding which enabled the school to construct two additional classrooms on the campus. Such extra accommodation was required because the school's pupil numbers had increased substantially. The management of the school recently decided to construct an astroturf pitch and sought to fund the facility independently. The pitch was formally opened in recent times and is a wonderful addition to the school campus. The school authorities envisage that local organisations could rent the pitch for sporting purposes, which would help to gradually offset the cost incurred. I understand that finances are extremely limited at present. There has been a very significant clampdown on what can and cannot be spent. It is with that reality in mind that I make the case for funding from the Department. Regardless of how small such a contribution might be, it would be important in offsetting the costs associated with the construction project I have mentioned and would be appreciated in these fiscally constrained times. The existence of external factors, such as the presence of the IMF, mean we do not have as much funding available to us as would have been the case in the recent past.

I appeal to the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose, to support this request for funding for educational infrastructure. He is well aware from his own area that one of the benefits of such investment is that it is repaid to the State time and again. In the current climate, one cannot classify any euro of investment in a school as a bad investment. It offers dividends such as raising the standards of educational attainment in the area and providing the infrastructure necessary to equip young students with knowledge and practical experience of curricular and non-curricular subjects. We hope that when the upturn comes and our young people enter or re-enter the workforce, they will be high earners and pay tax to the Exchequer at a higher rate. The benefit of that will be felt for a long time.

I ask the Minister of State to show solidarity with this project. There will always be a number of schools in various areas that are looking for funding for capital works and access to the summer works scheme, for example. The repair scheme that was announced today under the jobs initiative is a welcome development. It shows there is a recognition at departmental level of the undoubted deficits in our educational infrastructure. In fairness to the Government, it has made a commitment in this area as a major plank of the jobs initiative, which aims to stimulate jobs and growth in the economy. If we invest in this area, not only will we help to bridge the infrastructural deficit, but we will also provide funding to the construction sector, which has been badly affected by the events of recent years. If the local construction economy is to be rebooted, it needs a shot in the arm from the Government. The economy of west Cork, for example, would have been very much plugged into the construction activities of recent years. There are sufficient construction skills in the area. It is obvious that there are unseen levels of unemployment, by comparison with the Celtic tiger years.

If we create employment and give work to people who are currently on social welfare, there will be a wider benefit to society. When lost taxation and social welfare payments are taken into account, every job that is lost costs the State approximately €20,000. The request I am making is for a marginal contribution to be made in that context. I hope the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose, will look favourably on the request.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): I am taking this Adjournment matter on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Quinn. I thank the Deputy for raising this matter and giving me an opportunity to outline to the House the position of the Department of Education and Skills regarding the allocation of funding for Abbeystrewry national school near Skibbereen in County Cork. In July 2008, the Department introduced the additional accommodation scheme, which gives schools with an urgent and pressing need for additional accommodation that is likely to last for more than three years the option of using a devolved grant to purchase prefabricated classrooms or construct permanent classrooms. A central tenet of the scheme is that responsibility for the management of a project, including cost control, rests with the school authorities. Schools are informed of this in their approval letters.

In March 2010, Abbeystrewry national school was approved funding of €130,000 under the additional accommodation scheme to enable it to provide an extension consisting of an 80 sq. m. mainstream classroom and a 25 sq. m. resource room. In July 2010, the school authorities wrote to the Department to ask for additional funding for a staffroom and a corridor, which were needed because of increasing staff numbers. Following an examination of the school's application, the Department advised the school authorities that as the additional accommodation scheme is designed to cater for immediate and urgently needed classroom accommodation, it was not in a position to approve the school's request for ancillary accommodation. In August 2010, the school authorities again wrote to the Department to request further additional funding for ancillary works associated with the building project. The Department advised the school authorities that funding was not available for these works for the reasons that had been outlined in previous correspondence. The school appealed the Department's decision, providing detailed drawings and maps of the schools extension, in support of its appeal.

When the school's application was being reassessed, it emerged that the school had changed the scope of works for which the funding had originally been approved. The Department advised the school authorities that the appeal was unsuccessful and that it was satisfied that the grant provided was sufficient to provide the level of accommodation originally approved. The management authorities of Abbeystrewry national school were advised that the building works carried out were over and above those approved and, therefore, the onus was on the board of management to fund the costs of the extra works. Between 2006 and 2010, the school received over €327,000 in funding under the summer works scheme for roof works, replacement of windows, electrical upgrade and tarmac. Further funding for sewerage works was recently approved under the summer works scheme 2011.

I am sure the Deputy will appreciate there are many competing demands on the Department's capital resources. In this context, it must prioritise applications for the provision of much needed additional classroom accommodation. A total of €383 million will be spent under the Department's schools building programme this year. In the current economic climate, it is essential that costs are kept under control in the construction of school buildings and that those responsible ensure value for money is achieved for the taxpayer. In this way, the Minister can ensure the maximum number of projects are completed from within the funds available for the schools building programme. I thank the Deputy again for giving me an opportunity to outline the current position to the House.

Community Development

Deputy James Bannon: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for affording me time to discuss this important issue, namely, the need for the Minister for Social Protection, or the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, to restore funding to Lough Ree Area Development Co-operative under the Pobal community services programme. The loss of the

[Deputy James Bannon.]

invaluable service the co-operative provides to the community would have a detrimental effect on County Longford and the midlands as a whole. Lough Ree Area Development Co-operative in Lanesborough, County Longford, has had its funding for community development projects withdrawn by Pobal. This grant aid was essential to the running of community-based projects as it paid staff salaries. While youth services and the boxing and bridge clubs are not affected by the decision to withdraw funding, some other services are set to be scaled back. Not only will the projects in question be lost to the community but six members of staff have lost their jobs. Considering that the midlands is experiencing a high level of unemployment, there is little chance that the staff members in question will find alternative employment.

While I am aware that the withdrawal of funding was made on foot of an internal verification visit to the centre, the directors of the co-operative believe the decision to withdraw funding was unreasonable on the basis of the information provided. The main area of contention appears to be the manner in which time keeping was recorded and managed for the audit period. Following the findings of the audit, Lough Ree Area Development Co-operative has made every effort to resolve the problems highlighted. It is essential, given the valuable work the co-operative undertakes on behalf of the local community, that a full review of the audit be carried out. It is surely reasonable in light of the current financial and employment crisis being experienced in County Longford that every effort be made by Pobal to work with the co-operative to iron out any perceived problems.

The termination of funding to an organisation which provides a valuable service to the community, coupled with the loss of six jobs, is a major blow to County Longford. The co-operative will do everything possible to continue to provide services in the short term, although many initiatives have been threatened by the withdrawal of funding. It is almost inevitable, however, that services will have to be scaled back as a result of the withdrawal of funding.

The Lough Ree Area Development Co-operative was established in 1999 to help develop and promote the twin towns of Lanesborough and Ballyleague, which are linked by the River Shannon. It was involved in the establishment of the Lakeside community broadband project, among other valuable initiatives. Speaking at the launch of the project, the then Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Ó Cuív, highlighted the valuable work carried out by the co-operative, stating that the "commitment of the Lough Ree Area Development Co-operative to improve the quality of life of the community must be lauded". This commitment on behalf of the community it serves remains as strong as ever and the work undertaken by Lough Ree co-operative is needed more than ever.

The Lough Ree Area Development Co-operative is more than willing to work with Pobal to rectify any perceived difficulties. To date, the board has used every possible means to meet any requirements for the restoration of this essential funding. At a time when every job is vital to the well-being of communities in County Longford, I am sure the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose, who has a seat at the Cabinet table, will recognise the major blow delivered by the loss of funding to Lough Ree co-operative. I have every confidence that he, with the relevant Minister, will do everything possible to have funding restored and get the co-operative up and running again.

Deputy Willie Penrose: I thank Deputy Bannon for raising this matter, which I am taking on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton.

The community services programme is designed to address locally identified gaps in the provision of services to communities and exploit the potential of community assets and resources already in place in support of the delivery of services to improve community well-being. Responsibility for the programme transferred from the then Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs to the Department of Social Protection in September 2010. A

core requirement of the programme is that each service provider generates a significant level of its financial needs from non-public revenue sources such as by charging fees for services delivered, trading or fund-raising. Service providers in contract with the programme must be not-for-profit, social enterprise or community business in nature. The approximately 445 service providers approved for support employ an estimated 2,700 men and women in full and part-time positions.

The day-to-day operational elements of the programme are managed by Pobal on contract from the Department. Pobal is a not-for-profit company that delivers a number of publicly and EU funded programmes on behalf of Departments. As part of the services contracted by the Department, Pobal operates an independent audit and verification function to provide assurance that public funding has been spent for the purposes intended and bodies in receipt of public funds are in compliance with public accountability requirements and EU regulations, as appropriate.

An essential requirement of the community services programme is that each contract holder operates to good practice norms in respect of corporate governance, financial management, employment practices and quality of services delivered to the public. Pobal conducted an audit of Lough Ree Development Co-operative Limited in early 2010. Significant issues were identified in the operations of the co-operative which drew into question a risk to public funds. The issues identified related to corporate governance, poor management practices, inadequate financial control, poor quality record keeping and reliability of reporting. The outcome of this audit was sent directly to board members of the co-operative for their input and comment prior to any decisions being made by Pobal on continuing support from the programme. Following consideration of the audit findings and the responses to it received from Lough Ree Development Co-operative, the board of Pobal determined that the contract should be terminated. Notice of this was issued to the co-operative and an opportunity afforded to have the decision reviewed. A review was subsequently requested and conducted by a board member of Pobal who was not involved in the previous decision. The conclusion of this review was that the decision to discontinue funding was found to be correct and fair and that the process had been properly observed. The board of Pobal subsequently accepted these findings and confirmed its decision to terminate the contract.

The Deputy will agree that it is necessary that the highest standards should apply in respect to how public funds are managed and applied. All parties involved in the finding process must play their part in giving assurances to this House and to members of the public that funds are being properly applied and value is being achieved in return. Failure to do so must have consequences and may ultimately lead to loss of support from this or any other publicly funded programme. I will pass on to the Minister the points raised by Deputy Bannon.

Local Authority Housing

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): I understand Deputy Ciarán Lynch proposes to share time with Deputy Humphreys.

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: That is correct. I thank the Office of the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me to raise this important matter. I also thank the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose, for being present to respond.

Tenant purchase of local authority flats has been an issue for more than 30 years. Ultimately, it boils down to a fundamental issue of fairness. Across Ireland, tenants living in local authority flats are being denied the right to buy their homes while neighbours living in local authority houses may avail of this right. In the past 20 years, as property prices and the level of home buying increased exponentially, this group of tenants remained marginalised as a result of being precluded from buying their homes. The right to buy a home is a basic tenet of Irish society.

[Deputy Ciarán Lynch.]

I hope measurable progress will be made on this issue on which the previous Administration procrastinated. As I speak, Cork City Council and every other council are issuing letters to their respective tenants informing them about a new tenant purchase scheme that is being established. Tenants who have been *in situ* for 15 years will be able to obtain a 45% discount should they decide to purchase their homes. Tenants of local authority flats, however, a group that has been campaigning on this issue for more than 20 years, will continue to be denied the right to buy their homes. I ask the Government to take a new approach and resolve this issue by affording tenants of local authority flats the right to purchase their homes.

The previous Government, in debates on its Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, indicated it would introduce a statutory framework to allow local authority tenants of flats to purchase their homes under the incremental purchase scheme. While there are some difficulties with this approach, it at least amounted to a step in the right direction. The difficulty is that local authorities have not been facilitated to avail of such a legislative framework. While the House debates this issue, people continue to be denied the right to buy their home.

Deputy Kevin Humphreys: I thank Deputy Lynch for sharing time. The key issue in this debate is one of fairness. Many people in my community believe they are being discriminated against because, having been born and grown up in a local authority flat, they are denied the privilege of purchasing their home. In 1988, when the offer of tenant purchase was rolled out across Dublin, many local authority tenants in my area and the area represented by the Acting Chairman, Deputy Costello, wanted to purchase their homes. This would have many benefits, including the stopping of the rapid changeover within the flat complexes. It would allow people to put down long-term roots within their communities and to envisage their areas as long-term home prospects. Instead, they have been constantly denied.

As Deputy Ciarán Lynch has just noted, there is no difference between a family living in a flat complex and one living in a local authority house. At present however, those who live in the latter are offered a 45% discount on their homes, whereas those who live in a flat complex are told to go on the transfer list in order that they might be transferred into a house some day with the possibility of purchasing it thereafter. Court cases ran from 1988 to 2009 in which families fought a challenge on the grounds they believed they had an agreed purchase price with the local authorities on their homes. They lost that case in 2009 and were tied in a legal limbo. As many of them have stated repeatedly, they have been discriminated against.

There are many positive elements to this initiative, which provides an opportunity for low-income families to put down long-term roots. I refer to the recent "Prime Time" special on Dolphin House and Members are aware of how strapped financially are local authorities. The selling off of some of their apartments would allow local authorities to generate an income and to invest that money in the stock. It is a natural progression to allow people to put down long-term roots in their own communities and I ask the Minister to fast-track this legislation as we need to move quickly on it. A young family who applied to purchase their home in 1988 still are in limbo and consequently, I ask the Minister to move on this matter as soon as possible and thank the Minister of State for taking the debate.

Deputy Willie Penrose: I thank my party colleagues, Deputies Ciarán Lynch and Kevin Humphreys, for raising this important matter and am pleased to have the opportunity to inform the House of the position with regard to the proposed scheme for the tenant purchase of apartments.

The sale of local authority apartments to tenants has a long and chequered history, as outlined by my colleagues, due largely to the complexity of the issues that are involved in devising ownership arrangements that will protect the interests of everyone involved into the future.

Part 4 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 underpins the scheme now proposed, building on the long-standing arrangements in the private sector for the ownership and management of multi-unit residential developments.

The scheme provides for individual complexes to be designated by the housing authority for tenant purchase, where they meet certain statutory criteria and a substantial majority of the tenants living in them signal in a plebiscite that they wish to have the opportunity to purchase their apartments. Before the first apartments are sold, the authority transfers ownership of the entire complex to a management company established for that purpose, which immediately leases all the apartments back to the authority. The sale of individual apartments is effected by the transfer of the management company's apartment lease from the housing authority to the purchaser.

The new apartment sales scheme will be based on the incremental purchase model introduced in June 2010 for designated newly-built social housing. The level of discounts under the new scheme will, therefore, be related to household income rather than length of tenure. The incremental purchase approach will promote sustainable communities in the complexes concerned because it gives an incentive to purchasers and their families to remain living in the apartments. At the same time, the selling arrangements will ensure the State shares in any windfall profit from re-sale of the apartment before the housing authority's charge on the property withers away. I emphasise I have no proposals to amend the 2009 legislation with a view to selling apartments by any other method.

The necessary commencement order, regulations and detailed guidance must be finalised for the apartment sales scheme to be introduced. The transition from a rented social housing apartment complex to a mixed tenure of privately-owned and social-rented accommodation adds an extra dimension to the legal and practical problems that can arise in private apartment complexes. For this reason, my Department is giving particular attention to the drafting of the necessary documentation for the three complex transfers of property ownership involved in the scheme and for the establishment of the management company, as provided for in the legislation.

My aim is to put in place as soon as possible the last building blocks in a robust legislative framework that will stand the test of time for all stakeholders, that is, apartment buyers, apartment tenants who choose not to buy, and local authorities. I will commit to making progress as quickly as possible on this important issue which, as expounded by both Deputies, focuses on fairness and equality. I will pursue it as expeditiously as possible within the legal complexities as outlined previously.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghlacadh leis an Aire Stáit as ucht teacht isteach anseo tráthnóna agus as ucht an Athló a thógáil é féin, mar tá nós ag Airí gan teacht isteach agus éisteacht leis an rud atá le rá at Teachtaí Dála. Creidim nach bhfuil sé sin ceart. Tagann an t-Aire Stáit isteach i gcónaí agus tá a fhios agam go maith go dtuigeann sé an cheist seo. Ach an oiread liom féin, tá sé ar an mbeagán atá ag cónaí san nGaeltacht agus atá mar Theachtaí Dála. Tá an tríú duine ann. Is é sin comhghleacaí an Aire Stáit, an Teachta de Shinn Féin atá i nGaoth Dóbhair.

Tuigeann an t-Aire Stáit an riachtanas atá ag an údarás agus gan an t-údarás i mbun cúrsaí fiontraíochta nach mbeadh rath ar an nGaeltacht. Tá mé ag iarraidh air go ndéanfadh sé cinnte de go gcuirfear dóthain airgid ar fáil don údarás le go mbeidh sé in ann leanacht den obair a bhí ar bun ag an údarás faoi chúrsaí fiontraíochta agus forbartha san nGaeltacht le blianta beaga anuas agus le fada an lá. Ceist í seo a phléigh muid go minic cheana. Nuair a bhí an t-Aire Stáit ar an dtaobh eile den Teach is minic a thóg sé an cheist chéanna.

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

Bhí plé ann le gairid faoi cé mhéid airgid a chuir an Rialtas deiridh ar fáil, i bhfoirm chaipitil, an fhaid is a bhí mise mar Aire. Ins an mbliain 2007, bhí €34 milliún ag an údarás, de réir figiúirí an údaráis féin, le haghaidh chaiteachas chaipitil. Ins an mbliain 2008, bhí €33.93 milliún aige. Ins an mbliain 2009, bhí €30 milliún aige. Ins an mbliain deiridh a raibh mise mar Aire, bhí os cionn €23 milliún ag an údarás. Glacaim leis go bhfuil sé fíor nach bhfuil ach €12 mhilliún ar fáil do chaiteachas chaipitil i mbliana ó na foinsí éagsúla atá ag an údarás, agus is léir nach leor é sin. Bhí go leor rudaí a tharla ag deireadh na bliana seo caite a bhí chun tsiochair ar an bhfigiúr sin a bheith socraithe don Roinn. Bhí tuiscint soiléir ón Taoiseach deiridh go gcuirfí achmhainní ar fáil leis an straitéis 20 bliain a chur i bhfeidhm agus le déanamh cinnte de go mbeadh rath ar an nGaeltacht.

Ar an dtaobh eile den scéal, tuigim an chath ata roimh an Aire Stáit. Ní haon mhaith domsa a rá go mbeidh a job éasca, mar ní bheidh. Ar ndóigh, bhí an Roinn Airgeadais go láidir den tuairim nach ceart go mbeadh cúrsaí fiontraíochta fágtha faoin údarás ach níor aontaigh an Rialtas leis sin. Tá mé cinnte nach n-aontaíonn an t-Aire Stáit ach oiread leis sin. Ach, má tá cúrsaí fiontraíochta agus forbartha le bheith faoin údarás, caithfí airgead a bheith aige. Teastaí-tear, ar a laghad, €20 milliún in aghaidh na bliana, don údarás.

Bhí an t-áth orm nuair a bhí mé mar Aire mar bhí mé in ann an-chuid airgid a fháil. Bhí mé in ann airgead a fháil le haghaidh céanna, bóithrí agus go leor rudaí mar sin. Chomh maith leis sin, bhí foinsí airgid dá gcuid féin ag an údarás. Níl na foinsí sin chomh fairsing anois, agus tuigim é sin. Táthar ag brath ar airgead Stáit agus ar airgead díreach ón Státchiste.

Déarfaidh daoine gur ionann €20 milliún agus go leor airgid. Ach beidh an Stáit ag caitheamh €4 bhilliún ar chaipiteal. Céard é €20 milliún as an méid sin do rud chomh tábhachtach leis an nGaeltacht?

Tá mé cinnte go gcuirfidh an t-Aire Stáit an chath suas. Má chuireann, beidh tacaíocht iomlán aige uaimse, mar dhuine Gaeltachta agus mar Theachta Dála Gaeltachta sa gcath sin. Ar ndóigh, má chliseann ar an Rialtas beidh muid gearánach agus beidh údar againn. Tá a fhios agam cá bhfuil croí an Aire Stáit agus cá raibh sé ariamh. Tá a fhios agam go ndéanfaidh sé a dhícheall. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil croí an Taoisigh san áit cheart, fiú má tá daoine sa gcóras a bhfuil gráin dóite acu don Ghaeilge. Tá na daoine sin sa gcóras agus admhóimís é.

Tá rud amháin gur mhaith liom a rá mar chríoch. Céad go leith bliain ó shin, scríobh duine anaithnid an méid seo:

> As to the Irish language, toleration and patronage have come too late. It cannot be saved alive by any human power. It is at present confined to about one-third of the peasantry, and those the most ignorant and uncivilised. As a spoken language, it can hardly survive the present generation. The fathers and mothers will retain it till their death, but by the children it will be neglected and forgotten.

Scríobhadh é sin céad go leith bliain ó shin agus is mór an mhaith, ainneoin an méid a bhí ráite ag an am sin, gur tháinig an Ghaeilge slán. Bhí go leor daoine páirteach san iarracht sin agus rinne go leor daoine an t-uafás oibre. Ar ndóigh, le céad bliain anuas, bhí na daoine ann a deirfeadh i gcónaí, go mór mhór nuair a bhí brú airgid ann, nárbh fhiú an Ghaeilge nó nárbh fhiú an t-airgead a chaitheamh ar an nGaeilge. Cuirtear an argóint sin chun cinn go mór mhór nuair atá géarchéim eacnamaíochta ann.

Críochnóidh mé leis an méid seo. Dá bhfaigheadh an Ghaeilge bás, bheadh teanga nach mbaineann le haon treabh, cine nó dream ar domhan, nach bhfuil a shíolra in aon áit eile ach sa tír seo agus in Albain, tar éis bás a fháil agus bheadh an domhan níos boichte dá bharr. An bhfuil muid chun a rá go gcaillfear teanga na misinéirí, an teanga a bhfuair na mílte daoine bás ar a shon agus don dúchas, bás in Éire saor, bunaithe ar argóint go bhfuil géarchéim airgid

ann? Tá mé cinnte go n-aontódh an Aire Stáit liom nach mbeadh sin ceart agus táim cinnte go ndéanfaidh sé a dhícheall déanamh cinnte go mbeidh an t-airgead ar fáil don Ghaeltacht don bhliain seo chugainn, le jab foirfe a dhéanamh i bhforbairt na Gaeltachta.

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta as an cheist seo a thógáil ar an Athló anseo agus deis a thabhairt dom freagra a thabhairt. Mar atá ráite ag an Teachta, is minic, le blianta fada, a bhí mise thall ar an taobh sin den Teach agus eisean ar an taobh seo agus an argóint céanna á phlé againn.

Mar is eol don Teachta, tá sé molta sa Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 go mbunófaí údarás Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta, dar teideal Údarás na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta, a ghníomhódh ar bhonn náisiúnta maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na straitéise agus a chomhlíonfadh feidhmeanna ábhartha a dhéanann Údarás na Gaeltachta agus eagraíochtaí Stáit agus neamhrialtasacha eile i láthair na huaire, de réir mar is cuí. Tá sé ráite sa straitéis freisin go leagfar síos ról sonrach agus feidhmeanna sonracha an údaráis mholta nua i ndréacht-reachtaíocht.

Faoi mar atá sonraithe inár gclár Rialtais, tacóidh an Rialtas nua leis an straitéis 20 bliain agus déanfar na spriocanna inseachadta atá luaite inti a chur i gcrích. Tá lúcháir orm a bheith ábalta a rá go bhfuil tiomantas an Rialtais i leith na straitéise léirithe go soiléir cheana féin.

9 o'clock

Chomh maith leis na céimeanna atáthar á dtógáil laistigh de mo Roinn chun feidhm a thabhairt do mholtaí ábhartha na straitéise, ar a n-áirím bunú aonad straitéise agus ullmhú dréacht-reachtaíochta, is cúis sásaimh ar leith dom í go bhfuil an coiste Rialtais faoin nGaeilge agus faoin nGaeltacht athbhunaithe ag an Rialtas. Is faoi chathaoirleacht an Taoisigh féin a fheidhmíonn an coiste Rialtais agus tá na hAirí seo a leanas mar bhaill de: an tAire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta; an tAire Oideachais agus Scileanna; an tAire Caiteachais Phoiblí; an tAire Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádúrtha; an tAire Comhshaoil, Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil; agus mé féin mar Aire Stáit. Tionóladh an chéad chruinniú den choiste Rialtais ar 14 Aibreán 2011, áit ar tapaíodh an deis plé leathan a dhéanamh ar na féidearthachtaí éagsúla maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na straitéise. Ag eascairt ón bplé sin, tá oifigigh mo Roinne chun moltaí maidir leis na féidearthachtaí seo a ullmhú don chéad chruinniú eile den choiste Rialtais agus cuimseoidh na moltaí seo na féidearthachtaí maidir le ról agus cúraimí Údarás na Gaeltachta i ndáil leis an straitéis.

Is léir, mar sin, go bhfuil dul chun cinn á dhéanamh agus go bhfuil aghaidh á tabhairt ar na céimeanna is gá a thógáil chun an straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm laistigh de na hacmhainní teoranta atá ar fáil san aeráid eacnamaíoch reatha.

Mar ionadaí pobail ón Ghaeltacht — cosúil leis an Teachta — atá le fada ag plé le riachtanais phobal na Gaeltachta, tuigim go maith na dúshláin agus na constaicí a gcaithfidh Údarás na Gaeltachta dul i ngleic leo sa timpeallacht achrannach gnó atá i bhfeidhm faoi láthair. Tuigim fosta an dea-obair atá déanta ag an údarás agus na torthaí fónta atá bainte amach aige tríd an infheistíocht atá déanta aige chun deiseanna fostaíochta a chruthú agus a chaomhnú sa Ghaeltacht.

Níl amhras ar bíth ach go bhfuil an ghéarchéim eacnamaíoch náisiúnta agus domhanda ag cruthú deacrachtaí do chomhlachtaí sa Ghaeltacht agus tá impleachtaí dá réir ann do chúrsaí fostaíochta. É sin ráite, caithfear a nótáil gurb é an Rialtas deiridh, a raibh an Teachta Ó Cuív mar bhall de, a laghdaigh soláthar airgid caipitil Údarás na Gaeltachta ó €27 milliún in 2006 go €18 milliún in 2010 agus a laghdaigh an soláthar céanna arís go tubaisteach go dtí €6 milliún sa bhliain reatha, 2011.

Ní mór a mheabhrú don Teachta fosta gurbh é a Rialtas siúd a d'fhoilsigh An tAthbhreithniu ar Thosaíochtaí Infheistíochta Caipitil 2010 — 2016, inar laghdaíodh buiséad caipitil na Roinne

[Deputy Dinny McGinley.]

Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta, mar a bhí ag an am, ó €105 milliún in 2010 go €86 milliún do na blianta 2011, 2012 agus 2013. Caithfidh mé a mheabhrú don Teachta chomh maith go leanann an soláthar don Roinn ag titim sna blianta ina dhiaidh sin go €40 milliún in 2014 agus €30 milliún in 2015 agus 2016. Ag cur san áireamh go bhfuil beagnach €70 milliún de bhuiséid 2011, 2012 agus 2013 le dul i dtreo an chláir LEADER agus go raibh scéimeanna uilig na Roinne atá dírithe ar an Ghaeilge, an Ghaeltacht, na hoileáin agus Údarás na Gaeltachta le maoiniú as an bhfuílleach de thart ar €16 milliún, tá mé cinnte go n-aontóidh an Teachta liom nuair a deirim nár fágadh morán airgid agam le caitheamh, ní hamháin ar chúrsaí teanga i gcoitinne, ach le tabhairt d'Údarás na Gaeltachta chun cúraimí forbartha agus fiontraíochta na heagraíochta a chomhlíonadh.

Cé go mbeidh fáil ag an údarás ar thart ar €6 milliún breise óna chuid acmhainní féin i mbliana a chuideoidh leis an eagraíocht a chuid spriocanna a bhaint amach, aithním go bhfuil cur chuige an Rialtais dheiridh ag cruthú deacrachtaí suntasacha don údarás go fóill. Is sa chomhthéacs sin agus i gcomhthéacs na reachtaíochta úire a bheidh mé ag déanamh mo dhíchill chun na deacrachtaí sin a réiteach.

Mar fhocal scoir, tá mise dóchasach go ndéanfaimid dul chun cinn suntasach faoin chlár Rialtais chun infheistíocht fhiúntach a thabhairt go dtí an Ghaeltacht. Mar a dúirt mé, is cúis sásaimh dom í tiomantas pearsanta an Taoisigh don Ghaeilge agus don Ghaeltacht. Beidh mise mar Aire Stáit ag obair go dlúth leis an Aire Deenihan agus leis an gcoiste Rialtais san am amach romhainn chun spriocanna inseachadta na straitéise a chur i gcrích ar bhonn costaséifeachtach.

Ar ndóigh, tá lúcháir orm go mbeidh gach cuidiú le fáil agam ón Teachta agus óna pháirtí. Mar atá ráite agam cheana, tá oidhreacht agam, fágtha ag Fianna Fáil nuair a d'fhág siad an Rialtas, atá ag cothú agus a bheidh ag cothú deacrachtaí. Is é an dúshlán atá romham ná mo dhícheall a dhéanamh feabhas a chur ar rudaí, mar ní féidir leo a bheith mórán níos measa ná mar atá i láthair na huaire.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: An bhfuil réiteach á réitiú ag an Aire Stáit? An bhfuil sé i gceist aige ——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Níl mórán ama fágtha.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Tá sé an-fhurasta don Teachta é sin a rá ón taobh sin den Teach, ach tá mé sásta éisteacht leis.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil an-iontas orm nach raibh aon cheo sa mbuiséad inniu i dtaobh fostaíocht sa Ghaeltacht.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Fógraíodh rudaí sa straitéis inniu a bhaineann leis an Ghaeltacht, ó thaobh na turasóireachta de, mar shampla.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joe Costello): Níl aon am fágtha. Go raibh maith agaibh. Tá an Dáil ar Athló.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.10 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 11 May 2011.

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 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 10 to 35, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 36 to 42, inclusive, answered orally.

Social Welfare Benefits

43. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider any measures to alleviate the impact of cuts to social welfare brought in by the previous Government; if she will explain the process through which social welfare payments for 22 to 24 year olds are sometimes below €144 and those for 18 to 21 year olds are below €100; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10473/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The challenge for this new Government is unlike any faced before. The priority of this Government is to get our economy moving, restore confidence, fix our banking system and support the protection and creation of jobs. The success of our economic plans will lay the foundation for the rest of our agenda for change and the jobs initiative being announced today is the first step in this regard. Sustainable public finances are a prerequisite for economic stability and growth. To this end, the State must pursue a determined deficit reduction strategy. We believe it is appropriate, in order to enhance international credibility, to stick to the aggregate adjustment as set out in the National Recovery Plan for the combined period 2011- 2012.

Accordingly, the appropriate levels of social welfare rates will be considered in the context of Budget 2012. This Government is committed to tackling Ireland's economic crisis in a way that is fair, balanced, and which recognises the need for social solidarity. In this regard, it is important to note that the Programme for Government contains a commitment to maintain social welfare rates.

Jobseeker's Allowance is a means tested social assistance scheme. The maximum personal weekly rate of jobseeker's allowance is €188 per week. The maximum weekly personal rates applicable to certain persons aged under 25 is lower. For those aged 18 to 21 years of age, the maximum personal rate is €100 per week while the rate applicable to those aged 22 to 24,

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inclusive, is €144. These reduced rates do not apply to people aged under 25 if they have dependent children or if they are participating in a course of education, training or community employment, nor do they apply to people transferring to jobseeker's allowance from jobseeker's benefit or disability allowance.

The weekly rate of jobseeker's allowance payable is the relevant maximum weekly rate less any means assessed. For means test purposes, account is taken of the income and assets of both the claimant and his or her spouse/partner. In addition, n the case of a single claimant aged under 25 years of age, account is taken of the value of any benefit and privilege enjoyed by that person by virtue of residing with a parent or step-parent. Accordingly, where the rate payable to a jobseeker's allowance recipient is less than the relevant maximum weekly rate, be it €188, €144 or €100 per week, it is the means assessed in the individual case which reduces the amount payable.

Social Welfare Appeals

44. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views that the delay in the hearing of appeals for mortgage interest supplement are causing difficulties and stalling court cases to which they are relevant; and the steps she will take to fast track these appeals. [10442/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The supplementary welfare allowance scheme, which includes mortgage interest supplement, is administered on behalf of the Department by the Community Welfare Services division of the Health Services Executive (HSE). Mortgage interest supplements provide 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. There are currently 18,500 households benefiting from a mortgage interest supplement payment, an increase of 350% over those in payment at end 2007. Applications for mortgage interest supplement and appeals in relation to these applications are made in the first instance to the HSE. Those dissatisfied with the outcome of this process may appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I am informed by that Office that 153 appeals in relation to Mortgage Interest Supplement were finalised by Appeals Officers in 2009, 140 in 2010 and 84 to date in 2011. The total number of appeals finalised by Appeals Officers in the same period were 10,027 in 2009, 17,499 in 2010 and 7,284 to date in 2011.

The overall number of supplementary welfare allowance appeals made to the Social Welfare Appeals Office was 789 in 2009 and 989 in 2010. While it is not possible to say how many of these related to Mortgage Interest Payments, the numbers decided show that it is quite low.

While in general, appeals are dealt with in strict chronological order, those appeals relating to basic supplementary welfare allowance payments are dealt with on a priority basis. The average time taken to process these appeals in 2010 was 6.9 weeks for those dealt with by way of a summary decision and 14.8 weeks for those given an oral hearing.

In an effort to reduce these processing times, the Department has made 9 additional appointments to the office in recent weeks. These assignments will augment the 3 appointments made to the Office in 2010, bringing the total number of Appeals Officers serving in the office to 29.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 42.

Social Welfare Benefits

46. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to introduce a

single social assistance payment for all persons of working age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10435/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Social assistance provision to people of working age was the subject of a review that was carried out by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and published in November 2010. The review considered the desirability and feasibility of introducing a single social assistance payment for all people of working age. The report examined the current system of social assistance payments against the background of the broader policy rationale for a single payment, which is based on the policy that people are given or directed to the supports or services that they need in order to return to or take up work or other training or educational opportunities, matched by a requirement that they avail of that support. In other words, the people seeking to avail of income support have both rights and matching responsibilities. This approach builds on the NESC report: *The Developmental Welfare State (2005)* and on EU and OECD research.

The principle of a single working age payment is also based on the rationale that the outcomes for people from a poverty and social inclusion point of view must be improved, and also that any changes to the current system must 'make work pay'. Such an approach would ensure that people are not further distanced from the labour market, especially in the current economic climate, and encourages people to maximise their potential.

However, I am aware that moving to a single social assistance payment is a complex task and would represent a fundamental overhaul of the assistance system.

The recently agreed Programme of Financial Support with the EU and IMF makes references to this report and that the DSP will build on it, together with other studies relating to the structural reform of the social welfare system, with a view to producing a comprehensive programme of reforms that can help better targeting social support to those on lower income, and ensure that work pays for welfare recipients, after consultation with stakeholders. To this end I propose to initiate consultations on the framework for a single social assistance payment and arrangements to hold a seminar for this purpose are currently being considered.

Creating jobs and tackling poverty are two of the key challenges that we face. It is essential that our tax and social protection systems play their part in addressing these problems. As outlined in our Programme for Government, a commission on taxation and social welfare will be established to consider a number of issues arising out of the operation of the tax and social welfare systems, including the elimination of disincentives to employment. The Government is currently considering the scope of the commission's work and the practical arrangements around its operation. An announcement on these will be made as soon as possible.

Social Welfare Fraud

47. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection her target for fraud savings 2011; the measures needed to achieve same; and the cost of these measures. [10431/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): For 2011 the Department has a target of reviewing 780,000 individual welfare claims and to achieve €540 million in control savings. This figure is the value of the control activity in the Department and if this work did not take place there would, over time, be a similar increase in total social welfare expenditure. 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

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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.

Measures to control fraud and abuse include desk reviews of claim papers, home visits, the issue of review forms to selected customers, database checking, medical reviews in the case of illness payments etc. The Department is also engaged in data matching with other Government Departments and public bodies for control purposes.

The Department supplements reviews of entitlement by the frequent use of direct mail shot letters, particularly in relation to eligibility for child benefit.

In the case of persons receiving illness and disability payments, recipients are reviewed on a systematic basis through medical assessments and examinations, the frequency of which relates to the nature of the illness of disability.

Residency checks on social welfare claims by non-Irish nationals are undertaken nationwide in order to determine whether their residency status in the State is fulfilled.

New claimants for jobseeker payments are now exclusively paid through post offices. The Department's Special Investigation Unit (SIU) carries out a wide range of control activities and projects to investigate social welfare fraud and abuse, some of which are jointly with the Revenue Commissioners and with NERA. This unit participates in multi-agency vehicle checkpoints with other agencies, including the Gardaí, Traffic Corps, Taxi Regulator and the Revenue Commissioners. Some areas in which this unit will be working this year include the hidden economy, cases of concurrent working and claiming, multiple claiming and personation cases.

Reports of suspected fraudulent social welfare claims can be made by calling Central Control Section. Alternatively, there is an on-line facility for members of the public to report their suspicions of social welfare fraud on www.welfare.ie. All reported cases of suspected social welfare are thoroughly investigated.

It is the Department's policy to consider for prosecution all cases of fraud against the social welfare system. In 2010, 209 cases were referred for criminal proceedings under social welfare legislation. In addition to the 209 cases, a further 132 cases of serious fraud involving multiple claiming of social welfare payments were referred to the Gardaí for consideration of criminal proceedings under the Criminal Justice (Fraud and Theft) Act 2001. The Department actively pursues the recovery of debts from all persons who have received social welfare payments to which they were not entitled. Officials from this Department are involved with the Cross-Border Operational Forum. This body comprises selected investigators from the social welfare agencies in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the UK, who liaise at an operational level. Case by case data matching takes place between the Department of Social Protection and the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency and the Department of Work and Pensions in the UK, on cases where social welfare fraud or abuse is occurring.

The new Public Service Card will include a photograph and signature. One of the advantages of the card is that it will help to reduce fraud and error which results from the incorrect identification of benefit claimants. Roll out of the card is planned to commence later this year.

Fraud and Error Surveys, undertaken by the Department, provide an indicator of the estimated risk of fraud on the schemes surveyed at that point in time. This enables the Department to enhance its procedures and processes in relation to risk and control across the relevant schemes.

The costs of these control measures would include the costs of the staff directly involved. There are some 620 staff whose work includes control activities, who work at local, regional

and headquarters level. Some 200 staff work full time on control work, while the other staff are responsible for routine investigations of new claims and reviews under the various schemes. The Special Investigation Unit comprise 89 inspectors whose exclusive function is that of fraud investigation.

Pension Provisions

48. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views that her decision to raise the age for the State pension will disproportionately affect those on low and irregular income who do not have access to a private or occupational pension or savings. [10444/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The challenges facing the Irish pension system are significant. In particular, the task of financing increasing pension spending will fall to a diminishing share of the population. There are currently six workers for every pensioner and this ratio is expected to decrease to less than two to one by 2050. Increasing State pension age is one of the ways in which we can sustain the pensions system and also maintain the value of the State pension at 35% of average earnings. Extending State retirement age will also encourage and support those who have private or occupational pensions to remain longer in the workforce. This will improve overall pension sustainability and reduce costs for the employer. People are living longer and healthier lives with average life expectancy set to rise even further in the future, up to 89 years for women and 83 for men. People will still, therefore, be spending at least the same amount of time in retirement as they are today, even with a later State pension age.

Therefore, as announced as part of the National Pensions Framework, State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This will begin in 2014 with the standardisation of the State pension age at 66 and will be increased to 67 years in 2021 and to 68 in 2028. As agreed under the EU/IMF Memorandum of Understanding, these changes will be provided for in legislation by mid 2011.

The aim of the Framework is to deliver security, equity, choice and clarity for the individual, the employer and the State. It also aims to increase pension coverage, particularly among low to middle income groups and includes proposals for an auto enrolment scheme to provide access to private pensions. The Framework also recognises that many people want to have the option to work longer and proposes, for those who wish to postpone drawing down their State pension, to put in place arrangements to enable them to receive an actuarially increased benefit. In addition, for those with contribution shortfalls at pension age, arrangements will be put in place to allow them to receive additional benefits if they continue to make paid contributions for pensions purposes while remaining in work or self- employment. The details and timeframes for these changes are set out in the National Pensions Framework, which was published on 3 March 2010. An implementation group chaired by my Department is developing the legislative, regulatory and administrative infrastructure required to put the necessary reforms into operation.

Given the changes to State pension age and the other proposals in the Framework, both employees and employers must be encouraged to change their attitudes to working longer. In the workplace, employers must seek to retain older employees and create working conditions which will make working longer both attractive and feasible for the older worker. Where this is not possible and people leave paid employment before State pension age, they will be entitled to apply for another social welfare payment until they become eligible for a State pension, as is the current situation.

Social Welfare Code

49. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way the latest agreement between the Government and the EU-IMF affects the programme for Government commitment to amend the 30 hour rule for rent supplement which acts as an unemployment trap; and the position regarding the progress of her plans in relation to same. [10440/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): 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. In recent years, a significant number of people have come to rely on rent supplement for extended periods, including people on local authority housing waiting lists. One of the measures introduced to address the issue of long-term rent supplementation is the rental accommodation scheme (RAS) which gives local authorities specific responsibility for meeting the long-term housing needs of people receiving rent supplement for eighteen months or more.

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 RAS, may return to full-time work, subject to a means test, without losing entitlement to their rent supplement payment.

The Programme for Government contained several commitments in relation to those who find themselves dependent on rent supplement with long term housing needs including the need to remove any remaining barriers to employment. The Department is committed to targeting social support to those on lower incomes, and ensuring that work pays for welfare recipients. However, in order to fully address these household's needs we have to reduce the reliance on rent supplement, with eligible recipients moving to accommodation provided by local authorities. I am currently in discussions with my colleagues in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government with a view to achieving this commitment and returning rent supplement to its original intention as a short term income support payment. The latest Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and the EU and the IMF does not directly impact upon these commitments.

Departmental Contracts

50. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to put the social welfare payments contract out to tender; and her views on comments by the Irish Postmasters' Union that this will lead to major job losses in An Post. [10432/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Government policy aims to facilitate the greater use of electronic payment systems in the economy in the interests of developing a modern payments environment in Ireland. In this regard, my Department is currently developing a Payment Strategy to enable the Department to continue to modernise the payment of welfare benefits in line with wider Government policies and objectives such as better public services, better and more effective e-payments and the National Payments Implementation Programme. As the Deputy is aware, An Post issues Electronic Information Transfer (EIT) payments on behalf of my Department in respect of various Social Welfare schemes. The contract under which An Post provides this service will expire on 31 December 2013.

Public sector contracts for the supply of products and services are usually awarded following a competitive tender process. This ensures that the taxpayer receives value for money and it

also ensures that all potential suppliers are given the opportunity to put forward for consideration and evaluation the most efficient, effective and competitive solutions.

The award of public sector contracts with a significant financial value is subject to various EU Directives. Because of the financial value of this particular service, the Department is required to tender for any new contract for the delivery of social welfare payments when the current contract with An Post expires in 2013.

It will of course be open to the current provider to bid for the business for the next period. The procurement process will be completed in advance of the termination of the contract, in order to ensure continuity of payments to our customers.

Social Welfare Code

51. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way the latest agreement between the Government and the EU-IMF affects the programme for Governments commitment to expand eligibility for the back to education allowance; and the position regarding the progress of her plans in relation to same. [10446/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The back to education allowance (BTEA) is one of a range of activation supports and policies with the objective of assisting social welfare recipients to improve their life chances by facilitating access to employment, work experience, education and training. The focus of BTEA is to assist those who are most marginalised and distant from the labour market to acquire the necessary education to improve their chances of becoming independent of the social welfare system. The BTEA scheme can offer 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 Programme for Government 2011-2016 includes a commitment to resource a Jobs Fund that will finance a number of measures which will play an important role in enhancing the employability skills of jobseekers. BTEA and all other relevant measures will be considered under this commitment. The EU/IMF programme of financial support does not directly impact on these commitments.

Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 42.

Social Welfare Benefits

53. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the programme for Government's commitment to maintain social welfare rates in view of the commitment to the EU and IMF that it will reduce social expenditure year on year starting in 2012. [10437/11]

66. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will make a commitment that the eligibility rules for existing social welfare schemes and payments will not be further restricted in advance of the comprehensive report due from her by the end of 2012 under the latest EU-IMF deal. [10438/11]

171. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will make a commitment that the eligibility rules for existing social welfare schemes and payments will not be further restricted in advance of the comprehensive report due from her Department by the end of 2012 under the latest EU-IMF deal [10539/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 53, 66 and 171 together.

The challenge for this new Government is unlike any faced before. The priority of this Government is to get our economy moving, restore confidence, fix our banking system and support the protection and creation of jobs.

The success of our economic plans will lay the foundation for the rest of our agenda for change and the jobs initiative being announced today is the first step in this regard.

Sustainable public finances are a prerequisite for economic stability and growth. To this end, the State must pursue a determined deficit reduction strategy. We believe it is appropriate, in order to enhance international credibility, to stick to the aggregate adjustment as set out in the National Recovery Plan for the combined period 2011- 2012.

This Government is committed to tackling Ireland's economic crisis in a way that is fair, balanced, and which recognises the need for social solidarity. This is explicitly recognized in the commitment in the Programme for Government to maintain social welfare rates.

At the same time, there will be an ongoing necessity to curtail expenditure in 2012 and in later years. Any changes to the wide range of schemes and services operated by my Department will be considered in a Budgetary context later this year. This consideration will be informed by the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE) currently underway which will be completed by September.

In addition, as provided for in the most recent Memorandum of Understanding with the EU/ECB/IMF, my Department will build on its recent studies on working age payments, child income support and disability allowance with a view to producing a comprehensive programme of reforms that can help better targeting social support to those on lower incomes, and ensure that work pays for welfare recipients. Consultation with stakeholders will take place. A progress report will be made by end-December 2011 and a programme of reforms will be submitted to Government at the end of the first quarter of 2012.

Community Employment Schemes

54. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans for community employment including any changes she will make to same. [10454/11]

60. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will raise the limit on the number of community employment participants in view of the fact that this is a positive activation measure. [10455/11]

73. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will restore the full FÁS training budget for community employment in order to maximise the activation potential of community employment. [10456/11]

190. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to increase the number of community employment places available. [7976/11]

192. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is committed to supporting special community employment schemes as provided for in the National Drugs Strategy. [7969/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54, 60, 73, 190 and 192 together.

From 1st January 2011 policy and funding responsibility for FÁS functions in relation to employment and community employment services was transferred to this Department in accordance with the provisions of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2010. The FÁS schemes involved include the Community Employment programme (CE). FÁS remains responsible for the day to day operation of CE in accordance with the terms of a Service Agreement/Framework Document which it has concluded with this Department.

The aim of the CE scheme remains as an active labour market programme with the emphasis on progression into employment and/or further education and training. The programme is managed within this context, subject to the availability of resources and the needs of participants and the community.

Within the current budgetary constraints, the number of places on CE was increased to 23,300 in 2010. The budgetary provision for CE in 2011 will allow FÁS to continue the programme at the same level as 2010. In delivering these places, FÁS will continue to operate flexibly in the management of this allocation in order to maximise progression to the labour market, while at the same time facilitating the support of community services. There have been no changes to the training budget of CE.

A number of special community employment projects operate under the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016. As part of the Strategy, FÁS is committed to providing 1,000 places on such projects as part of the overall funding for the community employment programme. The primary objective of the Strategy is to continue to tackle the harm caused to individuals and society by the misuse of drugs. It is my intention to ensure the continuation of such projects subject to the overall budgetary constraints for the community employment programme.

Public Services Card

55. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress made on the rollout of the introduction of the public services card. [10434/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): 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. 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 2009. A contract was agreed with Biometric Card Services (BCS) as the managed service provider from early January 2010. The contract is for a complete managed service for the production, maintenance and distribution of the PSC. In summary this entails:

- Production of the card
- Personalisation of the card
- Delivery of the card
- Provision of help-desk functionality

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

All to be undertaken under strict and secure conditions.

Since the project was recommenced, significant work has been undertaken including decisions regarding the final design of the card and the physical construction of a secure card personalisation and distribution centre in Bray Co. Wicklow. A specimen PSC was personalised on this site on 8th December 2010.

It is also necessary to develop a technical infrastructure within the Department to support the client registration as well as the management and administration of the cards. Development of some of this infrastructure is being undertaken by internal resources and this work began last year. Procurement for the remainder was finalised early this year and development work is currently ongoing. While, it is anticipated that the full suite of this functionality will not be available until the Autumn of this year, the technical infrastructure to process client registration is expected to be ready by the end of July.

It is intended that initial registration will involve customers of the Department and will take a number of forms: face to face at DSP Local Offices, through utilising data already held by the Department in relation to the All Ireland Free Travel Scheme and through utilising relevant data already held by the State (e.g. photographs and signatures held by the Passport Office). Customers of the Department will be contacted to arrange for capture of the data required to produce and issue a PSC to them. 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. Other options that may exist for external registration are being explored.

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.

Departmental Schemes

56. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps she will take to develop the rural social scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7845/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of the rural social scheme is to provide income support for farmers and fisherpersons who are currently in receipt of specified social welfare payments. Persons are engaged for $19\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. Participants are paid the equivalent of the maximum rate of the social welfare payment they are entitled to plus €20 per week. The scheme is operated by the Department and delivered at local level by 35 local development companies and by Údarás na Gaeltachta in Gaeltacht areas. The scheme currently provides work opportunities for around 2,600 men and women and 130 supervisory staff. Some €46.1 million has been allocated to meet the costs of the scheme in 2011. Opportunities to develop the scheme are limited within the level of resources available and I have no plans to expand it further in the immediate future. However, significant latitude is allowed to each of the local development companies in the manner in which they deploy resources locally in response to identified community needs.

Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 42.

Social Welfare Code

58. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way the latest agreement

between the Government and the EU-IMF affects the programme for Government commitment to amend the 30 hour rule for mortgage interest supplement which acts as an unemployment trap; and the position regarding the progress of her plans in relation to same. [10441/11]

61. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when she expects to complete the implementation plan regarding the recommendations of the review of the mortgage interest supplement, June 2010; and the likely time frame for the implementation of same. [10447/11]

72. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection when she will publish an implementation plan incorporating the recommendations and findings from her Department's review with those from the reports from the mortgage arrears and personal debt review group. [10433/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58, 61 and 72 together.

The supplementary welfare allowance scheme, which includes mortgage interest supplement (MIS), is administered on behalf of the Department by the Community Welfare Services division of the Health Services Executive. MIS 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 mortgage repayments which relate to the essential purchase, repair or maintenance of the home.

There are currently 18,500 households benefiting from a MIS payment. This is at an estimated cost in 2011 of over €77 million, an increase of 350% over those in payment at end 2007.

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. The final review of the Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt Review Group was published in November 2010.

The Programme for Government contained a number of commitments in relation to helping homeowners in distress to weather the recession, and to ensuring that Ireland has a sustainable housing policy. These included commitments in areas such as taxation, welfare and banking.

The Department is currently formulating an implementation plan in relation to the various welfare commitments contained in the programme for Government, the review of the mortgage interest supplement scheme and report of the Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt Review Group. The plan will then be considered in the context of the resources available to the Government generally.

I can say that the Department is committed to targeting social support to those on lower incomes, and ensuring that work pays for welfare recipients. The latest Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and the EU and the IMF does not directly impact upon the commitment in relation to the 30 hour rule for mortgage interest supplement recipients.

Employment Support Services

59. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Social Protection if responsibility for the local employment service will transfer to her Department; and if so, the date of same. [10451/11]

63. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when she will establish the national employment and entitlements service; and if she will explain the way it will function. [9940/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 63 together.

The Programme for Government states that a new National Employment and Entitlements Service will be established under the management of the Department of Social Protection. The objective is to integrate the employment support services currently provided directly by the Department of Social Protection with those currently provided by FÁS into a single service. This service will also process payments in respect of employment related benefits and other benefits payable by the Department of Social Protection. The integration of employment services and related benefit payment services within the Department of Social Protection will provide a 'one stop shop' for people wishing to establish their benefit entitlements, seek employment and / or seek advice about their training options. The focus will be very much on the individual, his / her rights to a payment, his / her access to an opportunity to engage in employment, training or upskilling, as appropriate and his / her responsibility to engage with such opportunities as they are provided. This should improve a person's life chances.

The Local Employment Service (LES) operates mainly through Local Area Partnership Companies on contract from FÁS. The objective of the LES is to focus on the provision of services to those most disadvantaged in the labour market as a direct response to the local context within which it operates. The intention is that this service will continue and that the relationship that the LES currently has with FÁS is the same relationship it will have with my Department in the future.

It should be noted that responsibility for skills training undertaken by FÁS currently resides with the Department of Education and Skills. The future development of the training and skills services of FÁS is a matter for the Minister for Education and Skills.

With regard to the timeline for the development of the National Employment and Entitlements Service, I am determined that this will be completed in the most expeditious manner possible and my officials are already actively engaged in a programme of work towards this end. While this will be a multi-annual programme of work requiring the development of the new service, the assignment of functions to the Service and the development of its organisational processes and operational systems, many aspects of the new service will be delivered within the coming 12 months.

The administration of the supplementary welfare allowance scheme has already been transferred to the Department of Social Protection with the secondment of the Community Welfare Service from the Health Service Executive at the beginning of this year. The intention is to have the staff fully transferred into the Department by the end of September this year. This will enable us to integrate the payment of all benefits into one organisation simplifying customer processes.

Planning for the transfer and integration of the Employment Services and Community Employment Services of FÁS to the Department has already commenced and it is envisaged that the transfer of staff will commence later this year. Again this will enable us to simplify and integrate the delivery of employment support services to customers.

A key objective of the Government in relation to the new service is that it will offer users a high level of personalised employment support and prioritise the provision of more intensive support for those on the live register who are identified as being most at risk of long-term unemployment. This will be achieved through the use of proactive approaches and modern case management systems. A number of pilot projects have already commenced in relation to the development of case management, the identification of those who are most at risk of falling into long-term unemployment, and the provision of appropriately tailored responses to their

needs. These pilot projects will be completed and evaluated in the coming months after which approaches will be developed for their rollout nationwide as part of the National Employment and Entitlements Service.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 54.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 58.

Departmental Estimates

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is satisfied that adequate financial resources are available to her to meet the current year's budgetary needs in view of the ongoing economic situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10390/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Estimates for the Department of Social Protection, as published last February in the 2011 Revised Estimates Volume, are based, in the main, on an analysis of trends as regards likely numbers of recipients and average value of payments in 2011. Actual trends on individual schemes are closely monitored on an ongoing basis. Given the demand led nature of the wide range of schemes operated by my Department, it is too early to accurately estimate the projected out-turn for 2011.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 59.

Social Welfare Appeals

64. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of disallowed social welfare claims for the years 2009 and 2010 which were subsequently overturned on appeal; the categories of claims into which they fall; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10414/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am informed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the breakdown of the number of disallowed social welfare claims for the years 2009 and 2010 which were subsequently overturned on appeal by Appeals Officers and the categories into which they fall is given in the table. Overall, the number of appeals determined by Appeals officer which had a favourable outcome for appellants (i.e. either allowed or partially allowed) were 3,695 (37%) of 10,027 determined in 2009 and 4,747 (27%) of 17,499 determined in 2010. 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 Allowed or Partially Allowed by Appeals Officers

	2009	2010
Blind Pension	1	1
Carers Allowance	277	520
Carers Benefit	15	29
Child Benefit	57	135
Disability Allowance	762	979
Illness Benefit	447	626
Domiciliary Care	6	235
Deserted Wives Benefit	2	—
Farm Assist	20	32

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

	2009	2010
Bereavement Grant	1	—
Family Income Supplement	24	27
Invalidity Pension	244	347
Liable Relatives	2	—
One Parent Family Payment	120	97
State Pension (Contributory)	2	5
State Pension (Non-Cont)	53	36
Occupational Injury Benefit	6	4
Occupational Injury Ben (Med)	11	5
Disablement Pension	151	69
Incapacity Supplement	—	2
Guardian's Payment (Con)	6	8
Guardian's Payment (Non Con)	1	3
Pre-Retirement Allowance	2	—
Jobseeker's Allow (Means)	645	620
Jobseeker's Allowance	365	534
Jobseeker's Benefit	202	160
Respite Care Grant	39	49
Insurability of Employment	20	7
Supplementary Welfare All	207	212
Treatment Benefits	—	1
Widow's Pension (Con)	2	1
Widow's Pension (Non Con)	4	3

65. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 161 and 162 of 19 January 2011, if she will provide a breakdown of the total number of appeals received by the Social Welfare Appeals Office for each payment respectively in 2010 and to date in 2011; the number awaiting decision per payment; the current average processing time for each scheme by summary decision and by oral hearing; the number of staff employed by the office in 2010; the number currently employed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10471/11]

175. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the form of calculation used to calculate the average waiting times for appeals. [10292/11]

183. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to eradicate the long delays for social welfare appeals. [10404/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 65, 175 and 183 together.

Figures in regard to the numbers of cases received and awaiting decision, by scheme for 2010 and 2011, the average time taken to process appeals by summary decision and by oral hearing by scheme type and the number of staff in the Social Welfare Appeals Office are given in the tables attached to this reply.

I am informed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the overall average waiting time for an appeal dealt with by way of a summary decision in 2010 was 27.4 weeks, while the average time to process an oral hearing was 45.6 weeks. These processing times are calculated

from the registration date of the appeal to the date of its finalisation and include all activities during this period including time spent in the Department for comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal put forward by the appellant and any further investigation, examination or assessment by the Department's Inspectors and Medical Assessors that is deemed necessary. A considerable period of time is added to the process when an oral hearing is required because of the logistics involved in this process.

In an effort to reduce these processing times, the Department has made 9 additional appointments to the office in recent weeks. These assignments will augment the 3 appointments made to the Office in 2010, bringing the total number of Appeals Officers serving in the office to 29. In addition, since July 2010, 8 retired Appeals Officers, equating to a further full-time officers, have been assisting on a strictly part-time basis with the backlogs of appeals and it is intended that they will be employed until the end of the year.

In addition to the provision of extra staff, more emphasis is now placed on dealing with appeals on a summary basis so as to increase productivity. As a result, the number of appeals dealt with by way of oral hearing was reduced from 59% in 2009 to 31.5% in 2010.

As a result of the various initiatives taken, a total of 17,499 appeals were finalised by Appeals Officers in 2010 in comparison to 10,027 for 2009. When revised decisions and withdrawn cases are taken into account the total number of cases finalised in 2010 was 28,166 in comparison to 17,787 for 2009.

There has been a very significant increase in the number of appeals received by the Social Welfare Appeals Office since 2007 when the intake was 14,070 to 2010 when the intake rose to 32,432. In order to be fair to all appellants, appeals are being dealt with in strict chronological order.

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.

	Appeals Received by Scheme 2010	Appeals awaiting decision at 1/1/2011	Average time take to process appeals by summary decision by scheme in 2010	Average time taken to process appeals following oral hearing by scheme in 2010
Adoptive Benefit	2	2	32.6	—
Blind Pension	13	7	19.8	39.4
Carers Allowance	2,969	2,145	26.9	47.3
Carers Benefit	180	73	21.6	44.2
Child Benefit	1,050	1,187	48.4	63.1
Disability Allowance	4,568	3,046	30.8	51.1
Illness Benefit	5,313	2,658	39.2	56.4
Domiciliary Care Allowance	1,827	1,386	26.8	49.1
Deserted Wives Benefit	14	14	33.9	29.0
Farm Assist	244	163	23.2	50.7
Bereavement Grant	59	30	25.1	—
Family Income Supplement	224	105	21.4	29.0
Invalidity Pension	998	612	40.9	59.7
Liable Relatives	16	22	35.9	—
One Parent Family Payment	1,085	819	30.2	49.4

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

	Appeals Received by Scheme 2010	Appeals awaiting decision at 1/1/2011	Average time take to process appeals by summary decision by scheme in 2010	Average time taken to process appeals following oral hearing by scheme in 2010
Maternity Benefit	29	21	37.7	—
State Pension (Contributory)	258	110	29.6	49.2
State Pension (Non-Cont)	353	230	26.5	49.9
State Pension (Transition)	7	11	30.7	—
Occupational Injury Benefit	22	18	55.7	53.8
Occupational Injury Ben (Med)	22	49	32.5	67.9
Disablement Pension	343	334	27.4	51.9
Incapacity Supplement	15	15	—	30.7
Guardian's Payment (Con)	26	26	25.3	48.3
Guardian's Payment (NonCon)	7	9	24.3	42.2
Pre-Retirement Allowance	2	1	—	—
Jobseeker's Allow (Means)	4,000	2,496	22.2	46.9
Jobseeker's Allowance	5,488	3,312	23.6	43.0
Jobseeker's Benefit	1,292	766	22.6	36.0
Respite Care Grant	162	114	30.5	49.1
Insurability of Employment	121	112	31.3	67.4
Supplementary Welfare All	989	343	6.9	14.8
Treatment Benefits	8	4	21.9	57.8
Widow's Pension (Con)	20	14	35.2	53.6
Widow's Pension (NonCon)	12	13	31.9	54.6
Widows Parent Grant	3	1	20.9	—

	Appeals Received by Scheme 2011 (To 30/4/2011)	Appeals awaiting decision at 1/5/2011	Average time taken to process appeals by summary decision by scheme in 2011 (to 30/4/2011)	Average time taken to process appeals following oral hearing by scheme in 2011 (to 30/4/2011)
Adoptive Benefit	1	1	27.9	—
Blind Pension	3	5	22.4	—
Carers Allowance	836	2,343	33.5	61.6
Carers Benefit	53	79	21.8	65.5
Child Benefit	257	1,148	48.6	68.5
Disability Allowance	2,032	3,686	26.1	61.5
Illness Benefit	1,107	2,645	35.5	58.2
Domiciliary Care Allowance	742	1,479	22.6	58.6
Deserted Wives Benefit	11	14	16.9	76.2
Farm Assist	75	173	23.2	53.9
Bereavement Grant	16	21	21.9	—
Family Income Supplement	68	101	20.2	28.5
Invalidity Pension	512	886	36.1	72.2
Liable Relatives	4	18	26.6	73.1
One Parent Family Payment	372	835	23.2	63.4

	Appeals Received by Scheme 2011 (To 30/4/2011)	Appeals awaiting decision at 1/5/2011	Average time taken to process appeals by summary decision by scheme in 2011 (to 30/4/2011)	Average time taken to process appeals following oral hearing by scheme in 2011 (to 30/4/2011)
Maternity Benefit	11	24	25.0	65.3
State Pension (Contributory)	33	90	29.3	47.9
State Pension (Non-Cont)	131	224	19.1	50.9
State Pension (Transition)	8	11	33.0	—
Occupational Injury Benefit	10	15	23.7	48.5
Occupational Injury Ben (Med)	4	49	77.8	80.8
Disablement Pension	86	355	30.4	64.3
Incapacity Supplement	1	14	—	34.3
Guardian's Payment (Con)	6	25	27.5	65.5
Guardian's Payment (NonCon)	2	4	48.3	60.8
Pre-Retirement Allowance	1	2	—	—
Jobseeker's Allow (Means)	1,183	2,386	18.9	56.5
Jobseeker's Allowance	1,427	2,921	19.0	51.6
Jobseeker's Benefit	450	744	15.7	32.0
Respite Care Grant	55	86	21.2	66.0
Insurability of Employment	22	106	27.0	66.2
Supplementary Welfare All	295	254	10.2	19.1
Treatment Benefits	—	1	30.3	—
Widow's Pension (Con)	6	17	23.2	70.4
Widow's Pension (NonCon)	14	20	14.5	39.8
Widows Parent Grant	1	1	39.0	—

Staff of Social Welfare Appeals Office

Grade	2008	2009	2010	2011 (at 1/5/2011)
Chief Appeals Officer	1	1	1	1
Deputy Chief Appeals Officer	1	1	1	1
Office Manager	1	—	—	—*
Appeals Officers	16.4	18.4	19.6	26.6
Retired Appeals Officers (from July 2010)			3	3
Higher Executive Officers	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8
Executive Officers	8.9	8.9	9.2	9.2
Staff Officers	5	5	5	5
Clerical Officers	18.4	18.4	22.6	22.6
Total	54.5	56.5	64.2	73.2

* From February 2009, the position of Office Manager has been subsumed into the duties of the Deputy Chief Appeals Officer.

Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 53.

Employment Support Services

67. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans for labour activation measures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10472/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): 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. 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. 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.

The Programme for Government states that a new National Employment and Entitlements Service will be established under the management of the Department of Social Protection. The objective is to integrate the employment support services currently provided directly by the Department of Social Protection with those currently provided by FÁS into a single service. This service will also process payments in respect of employment related benefits and other benefits payable by the Department of Social Protection. The integration of employment services and related benefit payment services within the Department of Social Protection will provide a 'one stop shop' for people wishing to establish their benefit entitlements, seek employment and / or seek advice about their training options. The focus will be very much on the individual, his / her rights to a payment, his / her access to an opportunity to engage in employment, training or upskilling, as appropriate and his / her responsibility to engage with such opportunities as they are provided.

A key objective of the Government in relation to the new service is that it will offer users a high level of personalised employment support and prioritise the provision of more intensive support for those on the live register who are identified as being most at risk of long-term unemployment. This will be achieved through the use of proactive approaches and modern case management systems. A number of pilot projects have already commenced in relation to the development of case management, the identification of those who are most at risk of falling into long-term unemployment, and the provision of appropriately tailored responses to their needs. These pilot projects will be completed and evaluated in the coming months after which approaches will be developed for their rollout nationwide as part of the National Employment and Entitlements Service.

Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 42.

Pension Provisions

69. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views that forcing older persons to remain in the workforce longer by raising the age for the State pension will reduce the number of job opportunities for the very high number of persons of current working age who are unemployed. [10443/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The challenges facing the Irish pension system are significant. In particular, the task of financing increasing pension spending will fall to a diminishing share of the population. There are currently six workers for every pensioner and this ratio is expected to decrease to less than two to one by 2050. Increasing State pension age is one of the ways in which we can sustain the pensions system and also maintain the value

of the State pension at 35% of average earnings. As announced as part of the National Pensions Framework, state pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This will begin in 2014 with the standardisation of the state pension age at 66. State pension age will be increased to 67 years in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

Recent research on intergenerational solidarity by the OECD demonstrates that the rate of employment of younger people has no relationship with the rate of employment of older people. Describing what is termed the 'lump-of-labour fallacy' the OECD state that 'the idea that public policy can re-shuffle a fixed number of jobs between workers of different ages is simply not true in anything but the very short-term'. 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. 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 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.

Social Welfare Benefits

70. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans for the future of child benefit. [10453/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child benefit payments assist parents in contributing to the costs associated with raising children and play a very important role in the objective of reducing child poverty. A value for money review of child income support policies and associated programmes was published by the Department in November 2010. The review covered policy around child benefit, qualified child increases and the family income supplement payments as well as aspects of some other child-related payments. The Department is undertaking some follow-up work, including a recent consultation seminar with interest groups on the review, which gathered the views of stakeholders as to the future direction of policy on these payments. Creating jobs and tackling poverty are two of the key challenges that we face. It is essential that our tax and social protection systems play their part in addressing these problems. As we stressed in the preamble to our Programme for Government, in order to address the very substantial problems that we face, it is essential that new ways, new approaches and new thinking will form the constant backdrop to the work of the Government. For this reason we will seek to benefit from the expertise of a commission on taxation and social welfare that will consider a number of issues arising out of the operation of the tax and social welfare systems, including the issue of family and child income supports. The Government considers it a priority that a more fundamental examination of our system of family and child income supports is required. Consequently, the commission will be asked to examine and make recommendations on these payments, with particular emphasis on addressing the cycle of child poverty. The Government is currently considering the scope of the commission's work and the practical arrangements around its operation. An announcement on these will be made shortly.

Social Welfare Code

71. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views that the habitual residence rule discriminates against persons with disabilities. [10439/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The habitual residence condition was introduced in order to ensure that a person, who has had no attachment to the work force since arrival in Ireland and whose habitual residence is elsewhere, would not be entitled to payment under certain exchequer-funded schemes on arrival in Ireland. Decisions concerning habitual residence are subject to five factors which have been laid down by the European Court of Justice, and which are now incorporated into our domestic social welfare legislation. The five factors are:

(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.

I am satisfied that the habitual residence condition is achieving its intended purpose, allowing access to our social welfare schemes to persons who are genuinely and lawfully making Ireland their habitual residence. I am not aware of any particular difficulties arising regarding the habitual residence condition and persons with disabilities. If the Deputy has particular cases in mind, I will have these examined.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 58.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 54.

Expenditure Reviews

74. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Taoiseach if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10663/11]

The Taoiseach: There are no such assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by my Department under the terms of the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support.

Consular Assistance

75. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) is stranded at a location and the steps he will take to secure their exit. [10329/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I can confirm to the Deputy that the person mentioned by him contacted the Department of Foreign Affairs in March 2011 regarding his difficulties entering Egypt from Gaza. The person concerned had in this instance been travelling on his US passport but has refused to seek consular assistance from the US authorities. Notwithstanding the complications arising from his travelling on a non-Irish passport, my Department has been providing consular assistance to him, through our Embassies in Cairo and Tel Aviv and our Consular Assistance Section, on the basis that he is also an Irish citizen. I can confirm that our Embassy in Cairo is making every effort, including

making direct representations to the Egyptian authorities, in an effort to facilitate his proposed exit from Gaza and will continue to work to this end.

It is the case, however, that my Department has been advising Irish citizens against all travel to the Gaza strip and if citizens do decide to travel, against this advice, then they must take personal responsibility for the consequences of their actions in this regard and that the provision of consular assistance in those situations may be very limited.

I would also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has, over recent months, provided extensive assistance to the person mentioned by him in circumstances where he has, in our opinion, put his own personal safety at risk. I understand that officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv visited him in detention and assisted his safe departure from Israel when he was deported in June 2010. In addition an official from our Embassy in Ankara met him in Istanbul following his deportation to ensure his access to medical treatment and to facilitate his return home. I am informed that our Passport Office made personal arrangements with him regarding the replacement of his passport. I am also informed that last November 2010, our Embassy in Athens came to his assistance when he reported that he had been kidnapped by boat and taken from Libya to Greece, and was arrested and charged upon arrival.

My Department, through our Embassies mentioned above, have made representations to members of local police, judiciary and Foreign Ministries on behalf of this individual. I am aware that staff from the Embassies have also been dispatched to ports and airports to assist him. I also understand that consular access to visit him in detention has been demanded on his behalf in both Greece and Israel. In addition, I believe that our Embassies have assisted him on several occasions with emergency travel documents to enable him to return home.

This extensive consular support has been provided at considerable cost to the taxpayer and disruption to the normal working of our Embassies and Consulates.

My Department will nevertheless continue to liaise with the Egyptian authorities on this person's behalf.

Diplomatic Representation

76. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of embassies established; if he has plans to add to this number; the number of staff employed in each; the year on year cost to operate each embassy over the past four years; his plans to promote trade through the use of the embassies; the way the promotion of trade will be linked to Enterprise Ireland; and the work being undertaken by that agency. [10623/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Irish Diplomatic Network is made up of 76 overseas Missions, in addition to offices in Armagh and Belfast. The network consists of 58 Embassies, 7 multilateral Missions and 11 Consulates General and other offices overseas. In addition to their country of primary accreditation, many Ambassadors are also accredited to additional countries on a non-resident basis. The size and scale of our diplomatic network is considered by the Government on an ongoing basis. Any decision to open a new Mission overseas is undertaken having regard to clear national priorities and available resources, and must be on the basis of an anticipated and ongoing significant return for the State. There are no plans to open any new Embassies in the near term.

A detailed table giving staffing and costs of overseas Missions as requested is set out below.

The staffing figures include diplomatic staff and local staff engaged by the Mission. They also take account of officers of other Government Departments serving in our Missions abroad, most notably Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels and in Visa Offices

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operated within Embassies by staff seconded from the Department of Justice and Equality. Those include some staff whose salaries and other costs are borne by their parent Departments. Figures marked with an asterisk include some positions filled by personnel engaged through local employment agencies and not directly employed by the Missions.

The annual costs as set out in the table for 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 are the administrative costs of operating the mission. The figures do not include the salaries of the Irish based staff as these are a charge on the overall salaries budget of the Department rather than on a specific Mission. In addition to the administrative costs of operating a Mission, many Embassies fund programmes in their respective countries, in particular the Missions which fund Irish Aid activities. For example, in 2010, while the Embassy in Mozambique had administrative costs of almost €1 million, it managed an aid programme of €37.5 million through the Mission that year.

The administrative costs of offices in Irish Aid Programme Countries (highlighted in bold) are often high due to issues such as the additional security required in a developing country context. In addition to the normal staffing of Irish Aid offices, which generally consists of a small number of Irish diplomats, working with a maximum of three specialist technical staff from Ireland and a small number of locally-recruited administrative staff, there are often additional staff required to engage in programme activities or staff who are hired to provide specific services such as security — such staff are not included in the table below.

Also, from time to time Missions may incur significant capital expenditure in relation to their premises or for upgrading of essential infrastructure. These capital costs are not included in the annual administrative costs as detailed below.

The promotion of Ireland's economic interests overseas is a key focus of my Department. Ireland's network of 76 Missions will continue its work to restore Ireland's international reputation, which has been affected by the economic and financial crisis, and to support Ireland's economic growth.

My Department and the Embassy network works in close co-ordination with the State agencies to advance our economic goals in existing and emerging markets. Emerging markets and the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries in particular, provide significant trading opportunities for Irish companies. The Embassies and State Agencies in these countries, and other priority markets, have detailed market plans and are already very active in the promotion of Ireland's economic interests there. The Government will be looking at visits to key markets over the course of this year. In particular, the Taoiseach plans to lead a major trade mission to China later this year.

While the specific contribution of Embassies will necessarily differ depending on market conditions and other factors, all bilateral Missions have a role to play in promoting trade and investment. The role of the Embassies in trade promotion includes:

- promoting an awareness of Ireland and its business potential;
- assisting Irish companies in gaining and maintaining access for their goods and services;
- r eporting on economic and business trends and developments;
- assisting in the resolution of problematic regulatory issues;
- maintaining a network of high-level business related contacts

- providing assistance and support to other Government Departments, agencies and, as appropriate, individual companies

The further development of the trade promotion role for my Department is a key priority. Discussions are currently taking place between officials in my Department and in the current Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation in this regard. I anticipate that these will result in an enhanced relationship between my Department and Enterprise Ireland.

Ireland's Embassies and Consulates continue to work closely with Enterprise Ireland abroad towards the advancement of Irish business and economic interests and there is also a very good working relationship between my Department and Enterprise Ireland here at home.

Mission	Mission Staff Numbers	Administrative Costs of Operating Mission			
		2007	2008	2009	2010
ABU DHABI (opened 2009)	12 (including visa office)	—	—	429,990	600,261
ABUJA	17 (including visa office)	260,424	548,135	372,660	556,374
ADDIS ABABA	9	1,199,888	1,064,185	898,000	898,685
ANKARA	7	412,851	429,022	405,487	422,633
ATHENS	7	532,525	477,093	484,116	525,292
ATLANTA (opened 2010)	2	—	—	—	26,885
BEIJING	26* (including visa office)	789,116	838,728	973,084	841,615
BERLIN	12	999,025	1,181,612	1,009,825	930,500
BERNE	5	331,968	463,006	507,174	450,170
BOSTON	5	365,638	353,824	472,391	392,032
BRASILIA	6	540,443	510,761	450,012	579,964
BRATISLAVA	5	384,325	380,840	416,857	354,215
BRUSSELS (EMBASSY and P.F.P.)	13	1,202,904	1,126,087	1,230,063	930,301
BRUSSELS (PR-EU)	82	3,582,121	3,457,843	3,805,678	4,194,314
BUCHAREST	7*	566,044	577,947	484,421	457,869
BUDAPEST	6	485,572	511,156	495,581	444,950
BUENOS AIRES	5.6*	351,725	372,254	383,751	454,202
CAIRO	10	445,209	569,536	500,311	460,651
CANBERRA	9.5	742,471	743,869	681,238	788,271
CARDIFF (closed 2009)	—	213,966	182,170	79,757	—
CHICAGO	5.4	383,173	358,542	325,799	342,853
COPENHAGEN	6.4	540,031	476,526	430,412	448,180
DAR ES SALAAM	8	819,916	1,242,513	1,049,784	720,238
DILI	3	205,402	189,962	211,483	148,716
EDINBURGH	3	319,133	261,682	227,646	236,941
FREETOWN	3	197,673	204,871	215,114	199,440
GENEVA	13	1,124,538	1,096,146	1,134,003	1,142,564
HANOI	8	609,377	743,614	580,390	607,332
HELSINKI	5	655,345	634,690	637,618	539,507

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Mission	Mission Staff Numbers	Administrative Costs of Operating Mission			
		2007	2008	2009	2010
HOLY SEE	5	740,532	498,334	437,683	455,820
KAMPALA	8	1,376,603	1,915,553	1,338,000	1,140,515
KUALA LUMPUR	7.5	380,607	418,700	359,821	409,445
LILONGWE	5	413,536	717,165	623,196	445,750
LISBON	5	496,611	548,396	437,493	376,459
LJUBLJANA	5	454,887	489,219	428,186	451,370
LONDON	51 (including visa and passport office)	5,610,590	4,669,648	4,065,867	3,702,234
LUSAKA	6	1,293,799	1,499,747	1,586,698	1,097,048
LUXEMBOURG	5	716,923	709,845	738,042	724,074
MADRID	14	1,242,986	1,273,566	1,239,494	1,106,768
MAPUTO	8	1,377,425	1,717,913	1,427,000	983,406
MASERU	4	700,082	795,256	523,259	512,812
MEXICO	8	696,226	598,562	475,576	528,437
MOSCOW	19* (including visa office)	970,958	896,238	873,407	1,064,758
NEW DELHI	18 (including visa office)	669,453	839,809	611,455	967,485
NEW YORK — C.G.	17	2,281,554	1,903,026	1,920,283	1,915,099
NEW YORK — PMUN	16	2,443,225	2,681,074[1]	1,546,199	2,081,792
NICOSIA	5	406,801	428,485	417,208	419,656
OSCE — VIENNA	10	455,567	459,195	434,483	504,823
OSLO	5	715,292	787,891	634,870	601,640
OTTAWA	8	658,038	605,680	700,330	590,775
PARIS (incl OECD)	21	1,867,828	1,852,135	1,804,602	1,817,710
PRAGUE	8	524,173	573,544	604,233	612,292
PRETORIA	13*	1,407,145	1,318,279	968,255	1,111,600
RAMALLAH	6	419,099	373,828	286,792	354,106
RIGA	3*	437,135	438,808	372,586	360,659
RIYADH	10	404,299	386,430	547,777	381,231
ROME	11.8	1,292,690	1,270,120	1,202,705	1,180,581
SAN FRANCISCO	5	500,358	628,525	417,187	428,014
SEOUL	6	643,540	767,822	438,633	833,161
SHANGHAI	7*	512,507	466,888	511,801	667,532
SINGAPORE	7*	913,131	865,908	805,922	833,820
SOFIA	6*	617,814	452,737	425,518	367,670
STOCKHOLM	6	458,461	426,780	435,176	591,585
STRASBOURG	5	523,150	454,730	439,469	424,895
SYDNEY	5	546,538	511,344	489,353	587,275
TALLINN	3	445,663	426,396	352,791	415,288
TEHRAN	6	315,881	361,419	347,641	417,048
TEL AVIV	6	666,237	574,527	737,733	623,858

Mission	Mission Staff Numbers	Administrative Costs of Operating Mission			
		2007	2008	2009	2010
THE HAGUE	9	1,066,280	1,079,734	949,973	921,078
TOKYO	11	1,543,374	1,604,708	2,079,774[2]	1,637,651
VALLETTA	3*	369,535	329,452	330,122	372,090
VIENNA	8	677,684	664,055	633,729	662,725
VILNIUS	4.5*	677,347	545,639	452,692	425,124
WARSAW	8	909,879	996,352	713,657	842,848
WASHINGTON DC	20	1,540,392	1,268,050	1,250,786	1,329,159

* Includes positions filled by personnel engaged through local employment agencies and not directly employed by the Mission.
[1]Operating costs for PMUN New York in 2008 reflects rent costs paid in advance for 2009 (which achieved significant savings).
[2]Operating costs for Embassy Tokyo in 2009 reflects rent costs paid in advance for 2010 (which achieved significant savings).

Expenditure Reviews

77. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10659/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): There are no particular reviews being carried out in my Department related to the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support. However, the general reviews under way, such as the recently-announced Comprehensive Spending Review, embrace my Department in the normal way.

Passport Applications

78. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs the steps he has taken to inform the public of the new changes for a passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10677/11]

79. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs the changes in the method of the application for passports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10678/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 79 together.

All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passport Act, 2008. Section 6 of that Act provides, *inter alia*, that an applicant is required to submit any information and documents in relation to that person that is deemed necessary by the Minister for the purpose of processing passport applications.

Changes in the method of application for adult first time applicants and for those adults seeking to replace a lost/stolen passport were introduced on 17 January, 2011. The aim of the new requirements was to strengthen procedures to best protect against identity theft and fraudulent passport applications. Given the importance of strengthening procedures, it was decided that the new requirements had to be introduced without delay.

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The new requirements were publicised on the Passport Office website www.passport.ie and on the Passport Office telephone information line. Information regarding the new requirements was also issued to An Garda and to An Post, who operate the Passport Express Service used by over 60% of passport applicants. Public notices were published in national newspapers to inform the public of the new requirements.

Details of these changes are not, however, reflected in the current version of the Passport Application Form Notes which accompanies each application form. There would have been a significant cost to destroying existing stock of forms and printing new forms. Given that those affected by the new requirements represent a relatively small percentage of overall applicants and in order to achieve maximum value for money, it was considered disproportionate to recall and destroy all existing stock at that time. All offices dispensing passport forms were informed of the changes. Revised information notes and application forms which include information on the new requirements introduced in January since that time are currently being developed. The new forms will be available from June 2011. A decision to re-introduce passport fees for citizens, aged 65 or over, was taken by the previous Government. This measure, which was announced in the Budget last December, took effect from 11 April 2011, which was the date set out in Statutory Instrument 47/2011 signed by the then Taoiseach and acting Minister for Foreign Affairs on 3 February 2011.

This Statutory Instrument also provided for an increase of €15 on the current fee of €80 for passports, where applications are submitted through the ordinary post or over the counter at the Passport Offices. It is important to note that this increase does not apply to those passport applications submitted through the 'Passport Express' system (and Northern Ireland Passport Express — NIPX). Nor does it apply to applications received from overseas. Details of the new passport fees were publicised on the Passport Office website www.passport.ie. Public notices were also published in national newspapers to inform the public of this change.

Diplomatic Representation

80. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will support the case of a person (details supplied) who is detained at a location without charge since September 2009. [10731/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department in September 2007, via our Embassy in New Delhi, was informed that the person mentioned by him was arrested on arrival at Colombo Airport, "under suspicion for involvement in terrorist activities" under order from the Ministry of Defence of Sri Lanka. I am informed that to date the person concerned has not been formally charged and the Sri Lankan authorities have indicated that the investigations into his activities are active and ongoing.

As mentioned in the Deputy's correspondence, my Department, through our Embassy in New Delhi and our Consular Assistance Section has provided extensive consular assistance to the person concerned and to his family here in Ireland. Our current and our previous Ambassador in New Delhi and our Honorary Consul in Sri Lanka has visited him in prison on numerous occasions and continue to raise his case at the highest level with the authorities there. I can assure the Deputy that my Department continues to call for him to be brought to trial or released as soon as possible and we maintain a high level of interest and involvement in his case.

I can confirm to the Deputy that my officials remain in close and direct contact with his wife and family and we continue to provide all possible consular assistance and advice to her on any development on his case.

Legislative Programme

81. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to amend the Construction Contracts Bill 2011 to ensure that contracts less than €200,000 are not excluded from the Act in order that the majority of small and medium contractors and specialists contractors benefit from the Act; and his plans to amend the Act to ensure that the adjudicators decision is binding when the dispute is referred to arbitration to protect the most vulnerable people serving the construction industry. [10264/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that the Construction Contracts Bill 2010 was introduced by Senator Feargal Quinn and passed Committee and Remaining Stages in the Seanad on 8 March 2011. It is now placed before the Dáil. In relation to the exemption of contracts below €200,000 from the Construction Contracts Bill 2010, I understand that the Senator pointed out in the Seanad that this threshold was proposed to reduce the administrative burden on contractors involved in smaller contracts.

I understand that the provision making the decision of an adjudicator non-binding where the dispute is referred to arbitration was included in the Senator's Bill to ensure that the State had the right to appeal a decision to protect the taxpayer. These two concerns remain valid, nonetheless, I am now examining the Bill and will then decide how best to proceed. It is important that a solution to the problem of non-payment must not place an unnecessary regulatory or cost burden on the parties to the dispute, other parties involved in the project, or the State.

Tax Code

82. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the universal social charge in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10523/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The position is that all Department of Social Protection payments are exempt from the Universal Social Charge (USC). As the individual in question is aged greater than 70 the following rates are applicable to his private pension:

— 2% up to €10,036

— 4% income above €10,036

It is assumed that the person in question does not have income from self-employment in excess of €100,000. In addition, I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that in early 2011 Revenue issued a notice directly to all pension providers advising them of the rates and thresholds of the USC.

Insurance Industry

83. **Deputy Ann Phelan** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the widespread practice of mis-selling of insurance protection policies imposed by lending agencies on mortgages and other borrowing products in past years, which in some cases amounted to an extortive demand; and if he will investigate the matter by seeking details from all such lending institutions from all their data on these products with the aim of compensation to those who were or are victims of this shameful and unjust practice. [10590/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code requires that a regulated entity must ensure that, in all its dealings with customers and within the context of its authorisation, it acts honestly, fairly and professionally, in the best interests of its customers the integrity of the market, and acts with due skill, care and diligence in the best interests of its customers. Any breach of the Consumer Protection Code may be

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considered under the Central Bank's Administrative Sanctions Procedure. If a consumer feels that he/she has been improperly treated, or that he/she has grounds for complaint for some other reason, he/she may complain to the institution directly. If he/she feels that the complaint has not been addressed to his or her satisfaction he/she may refer the complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman, who deals with individual consumer complaints. The Ombudsman will adjudicate on the complaint on the basis of the regulatory requirements on the firm.

The Consumer Protection Division of the Central Bank of Ireland is conducting a themed inspection of Payment Protection Insurance (PPI) policies sold to individuals who subsequently had their claims turned down. The scope of this themed inspection is limited to establishing whether PPI policies were sold to consumers who would not have been eligible to make a redundancy/unemployment claim under the policy and the information should have been known or gathered at the time of the sale. This will be achieved by reviewing both the claim file for declined claims alongside the relevant sales file for the policy. Feedback will be issued in the form of a letter to the industry following the review, together with suggested proposed changes (if any are identified) to current practices. In addition, if it is necessary and if it is found that firms are not in compliance the appropriate regulatory action will be taken.

In 2009 the Financial Regulator (now the Central Bank of Ireland) conducted an examination of the claims handling processes for PPI policies. The examination sought to identify possible claims-related issues before they arise and assess whether reasons for declining to pay out on policies were appropriate. It did not focus on the sales process of PPI products which are typically sold through banks, building societies, credit card providers, credit unions and, to a lesser extent, independent brokers.

The examination found that:

- Where claimants have satisfied the terms and conditions of the policy, the insurance companies have carried out the claims handling process in an efficient and fair manner.
- The highest number of declined claims on illness/disability grounds related to claimants' pre-existing medical conditions, while the highest number of declined claims on unemployment/redundancy grounds related to employment criteria not being met by claimants.
- In the course of the onsite inspections it was noted that some claims can be delayed while the firm is waiting on verification from third parties such as doctors and previous employers.

The Financial Regulator wrote to all providers to inform them of the findings of the themed inspection and advised firms that:

- Sellers of these products should ensure that the relevant exclusions, together with qualifying periods at the start of policies, are highlighted to the consumer at the point of sale.
- Insurance companies should ensure that the sellers of regular premium PPI products are aware that the premiums for these policies are not necessarily fixed and may increase. As this may affect whether the consumer can afford the premiums in the subsequent years, firms need to impress on the PPI sellers that this should be highlighted in any product sales material.
- The present practice across the PPI industry is that, unlike, for example, life assurance policies, firms do not gather information from customers on their state of health or medical history. This information is analysed at the time of a claim being assessed.

Firms must ensure that this practice, and its consequences in relation to claims handling, are fully explained to consumers at point of sale.

- Firms should endeavour to ensure that consumers are not disadvantaged due to excessive delays on the part of third parties in supplying claim related information. My Department will consult with the Central Bank on ongoing monitoring in this regard.

Tax Relief

84. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if disabled driver VRT exemption qualification criteria will be widened to include passengers with Down's syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10684/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and Vehicle Registration Tax (up to a certain limit), and exemption from motor tax, on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities. The disability criteria for these concessions are set out in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994. To get a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of these Regulations. Some 13,500 people benefited under the scheme in 2010 at an overall estimated cost of €55 million. I have no plans to widen the exemption qualification criteria.

85. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he intends to bring forward regarding mortgage interest relief for the categories of principal residence, second homes and investment properties; the distinction between a second home and an investment property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10186/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is a commitment in the Programme for Government to help homeowners in distress to weather the recession. One of these proposals relates to increasing mortgage interest relief to 30% for First Time Buyers who bought between 2004 and 2008 and to finance this in part by abolishing mortgage interest relief for new buyers from June 2011.

When this proposal has been thoroughly examined and analysed and the findings and recommendations are presented to me, I will decide on the appropriate action to be taken. However, it is unlikely that any measures will be introduced before Budget 2012. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the terms "second home" and "investment property" are not defined in the tax code for mortgage interest tax relief purposes and, as such, it is not possible to be definitive on the distinction between the two. However, in so far as a second home is generally understood to refer to a property that an individual uses as a home but which is not his or her principal private residence — for example, a holiday home or an apartment used by family members during the academic year — there is no provision in the tax code for interest relief on loans to acquire or improve a second home and I have no plans to introduce any new interest tax relief for this category.

In so far as a residential investment property is generally understood to be a property from which the owner seeks to derive profits through lettings, a deduction is allowed (subject to certain conditions) for interest on borrowed money employed in the purchase, improvement or repair of the premises concerned. However, for interest accruing on or after 7 April 2009, the deduction is restricted to 75% of the interest otherwise allowable. Like all proposals for new tax or expenditure measures, this will fall to be considered in the context of the ongoing development of budgetary and economic policy. I would add that the status of a property for tax purposes can vary over time. For example, a second home in use during the academic year

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might be let at other times of the year. Alternatively, a letting by an individual of a room in his/her principle residence would not give rise to a restriction of mortgage interest relief where the letting is under the rent-a-room scheme.

86. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm that support for Irish produced bio-fuel E85 has been discontinued; if he will introduce future support for this fuel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10188/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Biofuel (Mineral Oil Tax) Relief scheme that was operated by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources provided for excise relief for 16 companies selected by means of an open competitive process. The scheme ran for around five years and ended on 31 December 2010. Consequently, with effect from 1 January 2011, all biofuels, including E85, are subject to full mineral oil tax rates; however, unlike conventional fuels, biofuels are exempt from the carbon charge. The promotion of biofuel is primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

The National Biofuel Obligation, which is operated by the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA), is now the Government's means of supporting the use of biofuel in the future. The National Biofuel Obligation requires suppliers of road transport fuels to ensure that 4% of their volumes sold on the Irish market is biofuel; it will underpin delivery of the national biofuel target and will take full account of EU biofuels policy, including the sustainability criteria. Experience in Ireland and elsewhere has shown that short-term fiscal measures cannot provide sufficient certainty to producers, and that only an obligation type system can ensure that Ireland seizes the opportunity to take advantage of biofuel, and that the considerable opportunities for the indigenous production of biofuel are exploited .

Sports Grants

87. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding documents (details supplied) to be processed in order to progress an application for a sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10204/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that there are two instruments in this particular case and, as is standard practice in cases of this type, the stamp duty liabilities on both instruments were subject to the adjudication process. This process has been completed and the Commissioners have stamped one instrument and will be in a position to stamp the other instrument on receipt of a response to their adjudication process finding on the stamp duty to be paid.

Insurance Industry

88. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to Quinn Insurance and the State's ability to cover its losses, the position regarding the funds collected over the years by way of levies charged on general insurance premiums; and if levies ranging between 1%-3% were charged on every Irish general insurance premium each year. [10228/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In order to protect policy holders in the event of their insurer becoming insolvent, money can be raised by the Central Bank through the placing of a levy of up to 2% of an insurance company's aggregate income under Section 6 of the 1964 Insurance Act. A levy of 2% of gross premium income was introduced on 1 January 1984 following the collapse of PMPA in October of the preceding year. The levy was paid by all non-life insurers at this rate until 31 December 1991 and a reduced levy of 1% applied for the period 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1992, when it was discontinued as

sufficient moneys had been collected to successfully complete the administration of the former PMPA.

This insurance levy is separate from the stamp duty on non-life insurance premiums introduced in 1982. The rate of stamp duty when introduced was 1%, rising to 2% in 1993 and further increased to 3% in the 2009 Supplementary Budget. This stamp duty forms part of general stamp duty receipts and is paid into the Central Fund along with other tax receipts.

Banking Sector Regulation

89. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance if he will publish details of the employment contracts of all the senior management in financial institutions covered by the State guarantee; if he has satisfied himself that in the event of him requiring termination of the employment of these senior managers that there will not be a repeat of the recent incident arising form the termination of the employment of the chief executive of the AIB; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10242/11]

93. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance if he will publish details of the contract of employment and provisions therein of the former Chief Executive of the AIB; if he will provide details regarding the provisions therein dealing with their severance package; if he will instruct AIB not to comply with the provisions of the contract and such reimbursement of funds paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10377/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 93 together.

The Deputy will appreciate that there would be serious obstacles to be addressed to allow for publication of the individual details of the contracts of employment of senior management in financial institutions of the covered institutions and I am not convinced that this would serve, at this stage, the public interest. The Deputy will also appreciate that what we are dealing with here are legacy issues. For example, the payments to the former Managing Director of Allied Irish Banks took place before this Government took office.

What this Government has decided to do to address these issues is to ask the National Treasury Management Agency to oblige the covered institutions to undertake a review of their remuneration practice including an analysis of severance payments. The institutions were also instructed not to commit to further termination payments until the review is completed. When this information is to hand the Government will decide what approach to take on the matter.

In relation to the payments to the former Managing Director alluded to by the Deputy, I have stated that the amount of money paid is an absolute disgrace and undermines the concept of social solidarity we need to engender if we are to emerge from our present extremely challenging circumstances. While I have outlined some of the facts of this matter — which all took place on the watch of my predecessor — I am not convinced that the Government is in full possession of all of the facts. I am presently addressing this deficit with a view to seeing what actions may be available for consideration. I would point out that I can give no assurances that there will not be legal issues which may act as impediments to either recovering moneys already paid or in preventing similar payments.

Tax Code

90. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance if it is his intention to alter the requirement whereby the tenant is required to satisfy the taxation obligations in regard to rental income of absentee landlords; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10285/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, under section 1041 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, a tenant who pays rent on property located in the State directly to a person whose usual place of abode is outside the State and who has not appointed an agent in the State to collect the rent, is required to deduct tax from the gross rent at the standard rate of income tax, which is currently 20%. The tax deducted by the tenant is effectively a withholding tax at source. The property owner, however, is responsible for his/her own tax affairs and must prepare and submit rental accounts and pay any additional tax due where appropriate.

This provision, which governs the commercial rented sector as well as the residential rented sector, has a number of valid and important functions. Firstly, it is a control measure designed to promote greater compliance in this area, having regard to the obvious risk factors associated with non-resident taxpayers. Secondly, it also ensures that a minimum tax payment is made by non-resident landlords in respect of rental income arising here. In the absence of a withholding tax, it would be relatively easy for non-resident landlords to evade tax as Revenue would have no mechanism to recover the tax due as there is no way to force such non-residents to make an Irish tax return and to declare their income.

Following a commitment given during the Committee Stage debate on the 2008 Finance Bill, the legislation was reviewed with a view to establishing if alternative arrangements could be put in place that would minimise the risk of opening up opportunities for tax evasion. The conclusion was that a withholding tax remained the most effective approach and that an alternative arrangement that would minimise the risk of opening up such opportunities simply did not present itself. It is accepted, however, that the section 1041 provision could give rise to some practical difficulties in some cases. In recognition of this, where a tenant acts in good faith and is genuinely unaware of the obligation to deduct tax, or of the residence status of the landlord, Revenue will only seek to apply the legislation from a current date. This practical approach is reflected in Revenue's operational instructions in this area.

Departmental Staff

91. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Finance the public sector employment vacancies that exist to be filled and the grades in Sligo and Mayo by staff transfers between Departments, State agencies and local authorities pursuant to the Croke Park Agreement. [10345/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under the terms of the moratorium posts may only be filled by recruitment or promotion with the sanction of the Minister for Finance but this does not preclude public service organisations from internally reorganising work or redeploying staff internally to accommodate changes in work priorities. The deployment and management of staff in a Government Department or Office is primarily a matter for the head of that Department in the first instance, having regard to policy and operational priorities and the budgets available. Changes in the services provided and in their delivery, in the allocation of work and in the use of information technology are taking place on an ongoing basis within Departments. The current Programme for Government includes a range of initiatives which are intended to lead to savings in the public service pay bill through the reduction of numbers, while the 2011 Budget provides inter alia for the reduction in day to day spending, among other significant policy changes. All of these measures would have a significant bearing on the need for additional staff, and their recruitment and allocation. For this reason, it would not be possible to adduce the number of vacancies in particular grades or locations.

Departmental Expenditure

92. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Finance if he will ensure that non-teaching

staff in a private school whose wages are not paid by the Exchequer are excluded in the reduction in public sector wages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10366/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009 provides for the reduction in the pay rates of all persons employed by public service bodies, as defined under the Act, with effect from 1 January 2010. Such reductions apply irrespective of whether a particular post is funded in whole or in part through non-Exchequer funds or income. The non-teaching staff referred to in the question are, whether employed in a recognised public or a recognised private school, deemed to be public servants within the meaning of and for the purposes of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009. This position has been confirmed by legal advice.

The former Minister for Finance approved a temporary exemption under Section 6 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act for certain categories of workers in the education sector until 31 December 2010. Accordingly, the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act has been applied to those specific categories of workers in the education sector since 1 January 2011 only.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 89.

Legislative Programme

94. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance the date on which the remit of the Ombudsman will be extended to third level institutions. [9857/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Ombudsman (Amendment) Bill 2008 will significantly extend the remit of the Ombudsman to a much wider range of public bodies including third level institutions. The Bill completed all stages in the Dáil in June 2010 and is currently awaiting second stage in the Seanad.

Consultancy Contracts

95. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance the positions held by a person (details supplied) and the consultancy contracts undertaken by a company on behalf of his Department over the past ten years. [10416/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The individual who is the subject of the Deputy's question was appointed on 01/01/2008 following an open public competition by the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) to the position of Assistant Secretary in the Public Expenditure Division (PED), later the Sectoral Policy Division (SPD) in my Department. Subsequently, he was appointed by the Government to the position of Secretary General of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on 26/04/2011. Prior to his appointment in 2008, it is understood that the individual was employed by the company mentioned in the Deputy's question from 31/03/2001. The table details amounts paid to the company in question during the years 2002-2011

Year	Amount	
	€	
2002	64,450	Public Transport Evaluation
2005	162,626	Review of certain property based tax incentive schemes
2007	42,592	Update of review of scheme of tax relief for residential units associated with nursing homes
2007	92,111	Review of Section 481 Film Relief Scheme

Departmental Staff

96. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the job description being used for the recruitment of ministerial drivers; if these positions will be advertised publicly; if applicants will have to be registered with FÁS; the efforts being made to make these posts available to the general public, including those currently on the live register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10426/11]

97. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the steps that are being taken to ensure that ministerial driver positions will not be filled by persons already in receipt of a State or occupational pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10427/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96 and 97 together.

The Government decided that Ministers and Ministers of State, the Attorney General and the Ceann Comhairle can appoint two civilian drivers on a contract of employment that is co-terminus with their period of appointment as Office Holder. Alternatively, Office Holders have the option to appoint civilian drivers to a twelve month contract if they prefer.

The right of selection rests with an Office Holder and such appointments are personal appointments, under excluding order, as unestablished civil servants. When a Minister of the Government or Minister of State ceases to hold that office for any reason (including a Minister of State becoming a Minister of the Government or vice versa) the contract of his or her personal appointees terminate on that date. Given the nature of the working relationship between Minister and civilian driver this system of selection and appointment will remain in place for the current round of appointments.

In the case of the recent HSE Voluntary Early Retirement scheme, persons availing of the scheme are not eligible for re-employment in the public health sector or in the wider public service or in a body wholly or mainly funded from public moneys. The same prohibition on re-employment applies under the HSE Voluntary Redundancy Scheme also, except that the prohibition will be for a period of 7 years, after which time any re-employment will require the approval of the Minister for Finance.

National Asset Management Agency

98. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will intervene with the National Asset Management Agency to ensure that the 128 jobs under threat at two retail units in counties Tipperary and Kilkenny (details supplied), currently under the NAMA umbrella, are saved in view of the fact that these jobs in two viable businesses are under threat due to NAMA's attitude to job protection and retention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10481/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): NAMA informs me that the retail businesses referred to in the Deputy's question are owned by a partnership and that differences have emerged among some of the partners as regards the ongoing management of the businesses. NAMA is committed to contributing to the purposes of the Act which, inter alia, require it to contribute to the social and economic development of the State in addition to protecting the interests of the taxpayer by ensuring that the value of any assets securing its loans is not diminished. In this context, NAMA assures me that it is a particular priority for NAMA, in situations such as this, to minimise the adverse impact on the viability of any of the businesses involved or on the sustainability of any jobs that may be at stake. NAMA fully recognises the

importance of ensuring the continued viability of businesses, which can generate cash flow to repay debt and provide sustainable employment.

Tax Code

99. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reintroduce the excise duty rebate (details supplied) to coach operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10482/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A derogation under EU Directive 2003/96 on Energy Taxation allowed the application of a reduced rate of Mineral Oil Tax to fuel used for the purposes of certain road passenger services. That derogation has expired and the arrangement was, therefore, terminated by the Finance Act 2008. It would not be possible, having regard to the relevant provisions of EU law, to re-introduce a scheme of that nature for those services.

100. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Finance, further to Parliamentary Question No. 47 of 21 April 2011 wherein he stated that section 64, Finance Act 2011 removes the exemption on a conveyance of property by or to a housing authority or the Affordable Homes Partnership, if he will confirm the accuracy of his reply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10497/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My officials have informed me there was an inaccuracy in the reply to the earlier question. I apologise to the Deputy for any inconvenience or confusion this may have caused. Section 106B Stamp Duty Consolidation Act 1999 previously provided for a stamp duty exemption on a conveyance of property either by or to a housing authority or the Affordable Homes Partnership.

This section was amended by section 64 Finance Act 2011, which removes the Stamp Duty exemption on a conveyance of property by a housing authority or the Affordable Homes Partnership but provides that the maximum duty on an instrument effecting such a transfer shall be €100. However, Stamp Duty continues not to be chargeable on a conveyance of property to a housing authority or the Affordable Homes Partnership.

Interest Rates

101. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will make any intervention in relation to guaranteed Irish banks that are increasing the interest rate on commercial mortgages to borrowers that request to pay interest only for a short period due to cash flow shortage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10512/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government is conscious of the difficult environment commercial mortgage holders are facing. Operating in this challenging economic climate is not easy for businesses. As I informed the Deputy in the House last week, I will ask the regulatory authorities to examine this area to see if something can be done.

Tax Code

102. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the timeline for introducing the increase in mortgage relief to 30% for first time buyers who purchased their homes from 2004 to 2008 as set out in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10575/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is a commitment in the Programme for Government to help homeowners in distress to weather the recession. One of these proposals relates to increasing mortgage interest relief to 30% for First Time Buyers who bought between 2004 and 2008 and to finance this in part by abolishing mortgage interest relief for new buyers from June 2011. When this proposal has been thoroughly examined and analysed and the findings and recommendations are presented to me, I will decide on the appropriate action to be taken. However, it is unlikely that any measures will be introduced before Budget 2012.

National Anthem

103. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance, further to Parliamentary Question No. 109 of 3 May 2011, if the State will consider purchasing the copyright to the national anthem when the copyright runs out in December 2019 or amending the Copyright Act in order that the national anthem is vested in the State and therefore ensuring it cannot be used, abused or misused if the copyright were lost to the State. [10593/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy's question, my Department is aware that the copyright to the National Anthem will expire in December 2012. I can assure the Deputy that consideration will be given prior to that date to protect the National Anthem to ensure that is not used in an inappropriate context and without due deference, such as to render it an object of scorn or derision.

Public Sector Pay

104. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance the progress being made in relation to the implementation of the Croke Park agreement; if he will meet all targets within the timeframe required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10643/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government is determined that public service management will be proactive and ambitious in delivering on the full range of productivity and change measures envisaged in the Public Service Agreement (Croke Park Agreement), and accepted as necessary by all parties to it. The Government is on record as saying that it would like to see an accelerated implementation of the ambitious reform agenda set out in the Agreement. Progress under the Agreement is overseen by the Implementation Body established in July 2010. The Body comprises the independent chair, Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick, whose appointment was agreed by the parties, and nominees representing both public service management and the Public Service Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

In line with paragraph 1.16 of the Agreement, a review of implementation is to be undertaken on an annual basis by the Implementation Body to determine the sustainable savings that have been achieved. The first such annual review is currently underway. In the immediate weeks ahead, the Body will be assessing detailed submissions from each sector on the progress to date on delivering the actions set out in their sectoral Action Plans and well as details on sustainable savings achieved over the past twelve months. Arising from this review, the Body will finalise a comprehensive report which it is expected will be submitted to Government in the coming weeks and published shortly thereafter. As the Deputy will appreciate, it would be inappropriate to comment further on these issues pending receipt of this detailed report on progress from the National Implementation Body.

Expenditure Reviews

105. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance if he will identify all assessments,

reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10658/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Given the nature of the EU/IMF Programme and the resulting content of the Programme documents, there are numerous references to assessments, reviews and reports. Most of these concern regular reporting requirements that Ireland has to comply with or the quarterly reviews of Programme compliance by the EU, ECB and IMF (Troika). However, there are references to a number of assessments, reports, reviews and studies where these represent, or are pivotal to, the delivery of an action/condition.

The texts of the Memorandum on Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) and the Memorandum of Understanding on Specific Economic Policy Conditionality (MoU) are generally clear on deadlines and responsibility for the item in question is normally clear from the issue it relates to. Furthermore, there are also references in some cases to "independent" reviews, reports or assessments. The Government is committed to ensuring that the deadlines specified in the Programme are complied with. Both the MEFP and the MoU have been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and circulated to all Deputies in a composite document that also includes the letters of intent to the Troika.

With regard to the areas under the responsibility of my Department, and that of my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr Brendan Howlin T.D., I would draw the Deputy's attention to the following:

- The Government is preparing legislation to introduce a new single pension scheme for all new entrants to the public service. In framing the legislation, a review was carried out by my Department of accelerated retirement for certain categories of public servants and indexation of pensions to consumer prices. The results of the review have informed the preparation of the new scheme which, under the programme, must be legislated for by the end of September 2011.

- There are several references to the Comprehensive Review of Public Expenditure, which comes under the aegis of Minister Howlin. This review, which is ongoing, is expected to be completed next September.

- Minister Howlin's Department will also have primary responsibility to review by the end of September 2011 whether the achieved and projected savings arising from administrative measures to increase efficiency and from public service numbers reductions will meet the projected level required to achieve the fiscal consolidation targets in the Programme.

Finally, the Central Bank of Ireland also has to complete a number of reports, etc. under the EU/IMF Programme. These include:

- An independent advisor is in the process of validating the methodology used in the estimation of future credit losses of Anglo and of performing a three year lifetime loan loss forecast for INBS. The Central Bank will release the conclusions of this exercise in May.

- A detailed action plan to strengthen the Central Bank's capacity to supervise credit institutions is to be prepared by end-June 2011. A comprehensive progress report on implementing this action is required quarterly for the duration of the programme.

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

- Six-monthly progress reports on loan-to-deposit ratios are to be submitted to the external authorities from July 2011, with updates to be provided on the intervening quarters.
- Quarterly progress reports on implementing the strategy for the reorganisation of Irish credit institutions are to be submitted to the external authorities from the end of this Quarter.
- A report on the treatment of loans in arrears under the Code of Conduct for Business Lending to Small and Medium Enterprises is to be published by the Central Bank by the end of September 2011.
- A report on the evolution of the capital within the banks covered by the Prudential Capital Assessment Review (PCAR) must be prepared by the end of the year and annually thereafter.
- A progress report of the banks' deleveraging plans under the Prudential Liquidity Assessment Review (PLAR) 2011 is to be discussed with the external authorities by the end of the year and every six months thereafter.
- The Prudential Capital Assessment Reviews for 2012 and 2013 have to be completed by end-June 2012 and 2013 respectively.

Tax Code

106. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance the measures in place to prevent persons from using business VAT numbers to make purchases free from VAT in Northern Ireland; if the Revenue Commissioners investigate these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10687/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that traders in any EU Member State who sell goods at the zero rate of VAT to traders in another EU Member State have legal obligations in relation to verifying the VAT numbers of the purchasers; this may be done through the European Commission website at *http://ec.europa.eu/taxation—customs/vies/*. Traders also have obligations in relation to justifying the application of the zero rate of VAT. The goods must be dispatched or transported from the State in question and the trader has an obligation to confirm that the purchaser of the goods is, in fact, the holder of the VAT registration number quoted at the time of supply.

The purchaser of goods under these intra-Community transactions is then legally obliged to account for and pay over the VAT due on the goods at the rate of VAT applicable to the goods in the Member State of that purchaser. Thus, for example, traders in the State who purchase goods from Northern Ireland traders must account for and pay over to the Revenue Commissioners the Irish VAT due on those goods. The EU VAT directives provide that any VAT-registered trader who exports goods to a VAT-registered person in another Member State must complete a VIES statement detailing all the VAT-registered customers in other Member States to whom he/she has supplied goods in respect of which that customer is liable for payment of the VAT due. The VIES statements form the basis of tax compliance programmes in Member States. Council Directive 2008/8/EC (amending Directive 2006/112/EC) provides for the more frequent filing of VIES statements and provides that traders may submit statements on a quarterly or monthly basis. The increased frequency of filing of VIES statements will assist in countering cross-border evasion of VAT.

In the case of cross-Border transactions between the UK and this State, checking the validity of VAT registration numbers, and indeed other tax compliance information, with their counterparts in Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in Northern Ireland in particular, is part of the checks carried out by Revenue officers during audits and assurance checks where risk or suspicions arise. These checks are carried out using the EU VAT Mutual Assistance Programme, which has been designed specifically to tackle cross-border VAT fraud. This programme allows for exchanges of information between EU Member States in relation to VAT matters, and it also allows the presence of officials from one Member State in another Member State while inquiries are being carried out.

Checks of the control procedures in place between the State and Northern Ireland form part of the work programmes of Revenue's Investigations and Prosecutions Division and the Revenue Regions. Revenue is currently engaged in a number of investigations involving suspected cross-border VAT fraud.

Special Educational Needs

107. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that children with hearing loss or absence receive signing lessons from early on in order to understand the concept of language. [10290/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy may be aware that Section 2 of the Official Languages Act 2003 states that "the official languages" of the State are (a) the Irish language (being the national language and the first official language) and (b) the English language (being a second official language) as specified in Article 8 of the Constitution. I wish to advise the Deputy that Irish Sign language (ISL) has formal recognition in the Education Act, 1998. Under the Act, it is a function of the Minister for Education and Science (Skills) to ensure, subject to the provisions of the Act, that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person. This includes provision for students learning through ISL.

A number of initiatives which seek to promote, develop and implement ISL in order that it will achieve greater recognition and use in the education system are currently in place. These include:

- the special schools for the deaf have been encouraged in relation to the use of sign language in class.
- funding for an ISL weekly home tuition service whereby deaf tutors visit the homes of deaf pre-school children and deaf school-going pupils to provide training in ISL for the deaf children, pupils, their siblings and parents.

In addition, the Visiting Teacher Service for Children and Young People with a Hearing Impairment is provided by my Department from the time of referral through to third level education. The Visiting Teacher service provides advice and support to ensure that the needs of children and young people with hearing impairment are met. This service is available at pre-school, primary and post-primary levels. Specifically, the service works in partnership with parents of pre-school children with hearing impairment, visiting their homes and/or meeting them in groups to inform, advise and offer guidance in matters pertaining to their education and overall development and in helping their children to derive maximum benefit from the educational opportunities available.

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

The Deputy may be aware that assessment, rehabilitation and information services for children with hearing impairment and their families are funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE), either directly or indirectly. Services provided include communication therapy and lip-reading classes as well as sign language classes. My Department, through the Higher Education Authority (HEA), has established and funds a Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College, Dublin which provides diploma courses for ISL/English interpreters, deaf tutors and in deaf studies. The course modules deal with issues such as sign linguistics, bi-lingualism and socio-linguistics of sign language. The course is delivered in seminar sessions/group work and the award of the diploma is based on continued assessment and a project and course design. The HEA has allocated €387,000 in core funding to the Centre in the current academic year.

Finally, I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has commissioned an external, high-level review of the issues surrounding deaf education. This review will focus on models of provision with reference to evidenced-based outcomes and the implications of adopting different approaches. I look forward to receiving the policy advice from the NCSE in this regard.

108. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs assistant whole time equivalent posts funded by him in the school year 2009-10 and also the same figures for 2010-11; the savings if any of the reduction in WTE posts between these two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10189/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The number of wholetime equivalent Special Needs Assistants funded by my Department was 10,342 in the 2009/2010 school year and 10,543 for the 2010/2011 school year. The figure quoted is the December figure for each year. The Deputy will note that there has in fact been an increase in the number of SNA posts. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating special needs resources to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. The NCSE will continue to support schools, parents, children and teachers and special needs assistants will continue to be deployed to schools to meet children's needs in line with my Department's policy.

School Staffing

109. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will support the following matter (details supplied) regarding adult education. [10198/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): When the moratorium was introduced the Government exempted Principal and Deputy Principal posts in all primary and post-primary schools and these continue to be replaced in the normal manner. The impact of the moratorium is therefore limited to the Director of Adult Education, Assistant Principal and Special Duties allowances payable to teachers on promotion. Vacancies at this level arise due to retirements in the specific grades and typically also from the knock on effect of filling Principal and Deputy Principal posts. Some further limited alleviation was introduced for schools that are acutely affected by the impact of the moratorium. The alleviation arrangements are set out in Circular 42/2010.

Schools Refurbishment

110. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a summer works scheme in respect of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 3. [10199/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy applied for funding under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme. A list of 453 successful schools was announced on 30 March 2011 and I regret that the application made by the school in question was not selected. A letter to this effect has issued to the school.

Applications from schools for gas, mechanical and electrical works were prioritised for Summer Works funding this year. Unfortunately, due to the scale of demand for funding under the scheme, it was not possible to grant aid all applications and accordingly it has been necessary to prioritise some categories of works over others. My Department has sought to prioritise the funds that are available towards works that are most relevant to the health and safety of staff and students alike in our schools.

In light of further funding being made available under the Jobs Initiative, projects submitted under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme by primary and post primary schools will be considered further. My Department will be writing to schools that will be included in this latest round of funding in the near future.

Schools Building Projects

111. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a new school (details supplied) in Dublin 3. [10200/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that construction has already commenced on the project to which he refers.

112. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for building works in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; when a decision will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10226/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The project for the school to which the Deputy refers is included in the 2011 School Building Work Programme to complete tender documents and proceed to tender this year. Planning Permission has been secured and my Department is currently awaiting submission of the stage 2(b) report, including tender documents, from the school and its design team. When the stage 2(b) submission has been received and examined and assuming no issues arise, the project will then proceed to tender stage.

113. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will make a provision in the building plan of the new primary school at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry to allow for the initial foundations onto the school wing and future construction on a phased basis in view of the fact that prefabricated buildings proposed to cater for the needs is illogical and poor value for money. [10235/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that in relation to the above mentioned school in Kenmare, the construction of 12 classrooms (GRD) has commenced. I can confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers has applied to my Department seeking funding to provide additional accommodation for increased enrolments and to accommodate a Special Class for Autism. The application is currently being assessed and officials in my Department will convey a decision on the application to the school authority when the assessment process has been completed.

Higher Education Grants

114. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if grant aid will be

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made available to a person (details supplied) in County Cork to complete their studies. [10255/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Under my Department's student grant schemes, eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution as defined in the relevant scheme. I understand the college referred to by the Deputy is a private college and is not on the list of approved institutions for the purpose of the student grant schemes. However, Section 21 of the Finance Act 2000 provides for the introduction of tax relief for fees paid in publicly funded colleges here and in other EU Member States as well as in private colleges in this state. This relief, which applies at the standard rate of tax, is available to full time and part time students and includes distance education courses offered by publicly funded colleges in other EU Member States. Further details on claiming this relief are available from local tax offices or on the Revenue Commissioners website www.revenue.ie.

School Transport

115. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reverse the changes to the school transport scheme introduced as part of budget 2011 that have placed an additional burden on working families in rural communities. [10260/11]

116. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will honour his historical commitment under the closed school rule to families in some rural communities and reverse the plans announced in budget 2011. [10261/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 and 116 together.

The changes to school transport services were announced in the 2011 Budget by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government and derive from a recommendation in the recently published Value for Money Review of the scheme. Given the major financial constraints facing the country, I regret that I cannot reverse the changes to school transport as announced by the previous government. We all have to understand the legacy of economic mismanagement which the last Government gave to the country.

Higher Education Grants

117. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a third level grant will be awarded to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10295/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): While the decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter for a student's local grant awarding authority, my Department understands that a delay has arisen in processing the grant application from the student in question because the application was not accompanied by some of the necessary supporting documentation. The grant awarding authority has advised my Department that it has sought this documentation from the student and that it will be able to take a decision on the application as soon as this is received.

Schools Refurbishment

118. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision

will issue on an application for additional accommodation in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10305/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that Scoil Naomh Pádraig was approved funding towards the provision of an additional Mainstream classroom. On foot of this approval, the Board of Management of the school submitted an appeal requesting that additional funding be granted to the school to replace an old rented prefab with a permanent structure. Officials of my Department have been in contact again with the Board of Management of Scoil Naomh Pádraig and have requested additional information in relation to the location of the Puraflo Treatment System and floor plans to be submitted. Once the information and floor plans requested have been received, the matter will be considered further.

119. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will issue on an application under the emergency works scheme in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10309/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): An application under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme for roof works has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy. The purpose of the Emergency Works Scheme is solely for unforeseen emergencies or to provide funding to facilitate inclusion and access for special needs pupils. An emergency is deemed to be a situation which poses an immediate risk to health, life, property or the environment which is sudden, unforeseen and requires immediate action and in the case of a school if not corrected would prevent the school or part thereof from opening.

As the scope of works for this project is outside the terms of the Emergency Works Scheme it cannot be considered for emergency funding. The school has been informed of the decision. In light of further funding being made available under the Jobs Initiative, projects submitted under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme by primary and post primary schools will be considered further. My Department will be writing to schools that will be included in this latest round of funding in the near future.

Schools Refurbishment

120. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will issue on an application under the emergency works scheme in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10310/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): An application under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme for roof works has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy.

The purpose of the Emergency Works Scheme is solely for unforeseen emergencies or to provide funding to facilitate inclusion and access for special needs pupils. An emergency is deemed to be a situation which poses an immediate risk to health, life, property or the environment which is sudden, unforeseen and requires immediate action and in the case of a school if not corrected would prevent the school or part thereof from opening.

As the scope of works for this project is outside the terms of the Emergency Works Scheme it cannot be considered for emergency funding. The school has been informed of the decision.

121. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will issue on an application under the emergency works scheme in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10311/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): An application under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme for roof works has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy.

The purpose of the Emergency Works Scheme is solely for unforeseen emergencies or to provide funding to facilitate inclusion and access for special needs pupils. An emergency is deemed to be a situation which poses an immediate risk to health, life, property or the environment which is sudden, unforeseen and requires immediate action and in the case of a school if not corrected would prevent the school or part thereof from opening.

As the scope of works for this project is outside the terms of the Emergency Works Scheme it cannot be considered for emergency funding. The school has been informed of the decision.

In light of further funding being made available under the Jobs Initiative, projects submitted under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme by primary and post primary schools will be considered further. My Department will be writing to schools that will be included in this latest round of funding in the near future.

122. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) was not awarded a summer works grant when other schools in the area were; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10325/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy applied for funding under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme.

A list of 453 successful schools was announced on 30 March 2011 and I regret that the application made by the school in question was not selected. A letter to this effect has issued to the school.

Applications from schools for gas, mechanical and electrical works were prioritised for Summer Works funding this year. Unfortunately, due to the scale of demand for funding under the scheme, it was not possible to grant aid all applications and accordingly it has been necessary to prioritise some categories of works over others.

My Department has sought to prioritise the funds that are available towards works that are most relevant to the health and safety of staff and students alike in our schools.

In light of further funding being made available under the Jobs Initiative, projects submitted under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme by primary and post primary schools will be considered further. My Department will be writing to schools that will be included in this latest round of funding in the near future.

Schools Building Projects

123. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide second level educate together schools; if funding will be made available for such a secondary school in Kilkenny City; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10341/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has recently announced plans to open at least 13 new post-primary schools over the next five years in the following locations — Gorey, Doughiska (Galway), Lucan (Clonburris), Kingscourt, Ashbourne, Mulhuddart, Blanchardstown West, Drogheda, Claregalway, Maynooth, Naas, Navan and North County Dublin/South County Louth.

The Forward Planning Section of my Department is currently examining all areas of the country to determine where additional provision will be required at both primary and post

primary level up to 2017. Overall post-primary requirements in the Kilkenny area will be fully considered in this context.

The Programme for Government gives a commitment to move towards a more pluralist system of patronage at second level, recognising a wider number of patrons. It is my intention to address this policy and I will consider the role that all patron bodies, including Educate Together, can play in ensuring our education system caters for a pluralism of choice which reflects the needs of Ireland today and into the future.

School Transport

124. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if any consideration has been given by him to allowing on an optional pilot basis for two teacher and three teacher schools for a one year period the option of receiving a block grant for school transport and allowing school in consultation with the local rural transport provider to provide the service themselves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10352/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Rural Transport Services are already considered by Bus Éireann, as one of the range of options currently available, for transporting children to and from school under the school transport scheme.

In the School Transport Value for Money Review, a number of possible approaches were considered through which the State could seek to support transport to school. The preferred option, as recommended in the report, is to continue with the organisation, on behalf of the State, of a school transport system as currently operated.

Foireann Scoile

125. **D'fhiafraigh Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna ag tagairt do fhreagra ar cheist scríofa Uimhir 101 an 19 Aibreán 2011, sonraí an naisc ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne a thugann an t-eolas a d'iarr mé i gceist Uimhir 101; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10355/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Ar leathanach baile shuíomh gréasáin mo Roinne tá nasc dar teideal "Iarraidh ar Aighneachtaí ar athbhreithniú ar an luach airgid um bhunscoileanna beaga" (Bunscoileanna a raibh níos lú ná 50 dalta acu i 2009-10) agus tá an t-eolas atá iarrtha ag an Teachta san áireamh ann.

School Staffing

126. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that non-teaching staff in a private school whose wages are not paid by the Exchequer are excluded in the reduction in public sector wages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10367/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I assume that the Deputy is referring to Circular 0070/2010 issued by my Department on 26 November 2010, which outlined that adjustments in salary should be applied, with effect from 1 January 2011, to all relevant staff in the employment of recognised schools or VECs who were not already affected by the pay reductions introduced under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No 2) Act 2009. Some of the categories of staff affected by this Circular included non-teaching staff in all recognised schools (including recognised private schools).

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The Deputy should be aware that this measure was introduced by the previous Government. I am aware of the impact this has had on non-teaching staff in recognised schools. Workers across the public sector have taken pay cuts in recent years and the current Government has stated that it will seek to avoid the introduction of further paycuts in return for full implementation of the Public Service (Croke Park) Agreement.

The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009 determined the criteria for reducing the pay of public servants with effect from January 2010. However, when the Act was introduced, there was a question as to how a public servant should be determined for the purposes of this Act. Subsequently, following receipt of legal advice, it has now been determined that all staff employed by a recognised school or VEC come within the definition of "public servant" solely for the purposes of the Act. The legislation does not exempt any individual or groups save for the Judiciary and the President due to provisions in the Constitution. Section 6 does provide a limited power to the Minister for Finance to exempt or vary the reduction in pay rates provided for in the legislation where exceptional circumstances exist or because of an arbitration award. In view of the time lapse involved in reaching a determination on this issue, the previous Minister for Finance allowed for a temporary exemption from the application of the Act for these categories of staff up until 31 December 2010.

Accordingly, my Department outlined that adjustments in salary should be applied with effect from 1 January 2011, to all relevant staff in the employment of recognised schools or VECs, who were not already affected by the pay reductions introduced under the Act.

Higher Education Grants

127. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a higher education grant appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford. [10378/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant grant awarding authority i.e. the applicant's local authority or VEC. The grant awarding authority in question has advised my Department that an application for a grant from the student referred to by the Deputy was unsuccessful. I understand that the student appealed this decision to the grant awarding authority. Following a review of the application, the grant awarding authority upheld its original decision.

Where a grant awarding authority decides to reject an appeal, the applicant may appeal this decision to my Department by submitting an appeal form clearly outlining the grounds for the appeal. I understand that the relevant form in this regard has issued to the student. No appeal has been received by my Department from the student to date.

Teaching Council

128. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the purpose of the Teaching Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10379/11]

129. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is considering the abolition of the Teaching Council. [10380/11]

130. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual budgetary allocation of the Teaching Council. [10381/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128, 129 and 130 together.

The Teaching Council was established under the Teaching Council Act 2001, in March 2006 to promote teaching as a profession and the professional development of teachers, to maintain and improve the quality of teaching in the State, to provide for the establishment of standards, policies and procedures for the education and training of teachers, to provide for the registration and regulation of teachers and to enhance professional standards and competence.

The Teaching Council became a self funding body from the 28th March 2008. The Council raises its funding, in the main, from teachers' initial registration and renewal of registration fees. There is no annual budget allocation from the State.

I am fully committed to working with the Teaching Council to bring change and improvement and my Department works closely with the Council on an ongoing basis for the betterment of education generally in the State. To that end, I am not considering the abolition of the Teaching Council.

The Department of Education and Skills believes all children should be taught by qualified teachers. The purpose of the Teaching Council is to ensure that all teachers employed in Irish schools have appropriate qualifications and that the high quality of the teaching profession is maintained.

The Teaching Council is similar in purpose to other regulatory bodies for the legal and architectural professions.There is a need to maintain the high quality of our education system and the Teaching Council is part of this framework.

The Department of Education and Skills will continue to review the best way of maintaining rigorous educational standards within our education system and the wider teaching profession while ensuring that this is done in a cost effective manner for both the taxpayer and teacher alike.

School Transport

131. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review a school bus route (details supplied). [10398/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Under the terms of the Primary School Transport scheme pupils are eligible for free transport if they reside 3.2 kilometres or more from, and are attending, their nearest national school or school of amalgamation.

Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport scheme on behalf of my Department, has advised that the pupils referred to by the Deputy are not attending their school of amalgamation and are therefore not eligible for school transport under the Closed School Rule (CSR).

The Deputy may be aware that the cessation of the Closed School Rule (CSR) as it relates to primary school transport eligibility was announced in the 2011 Budget by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government and derives from a recommendation in the published Value for Money Review of the scheme.

This change is scheduled to take effect in September 2012 and will apply only in the case of pupils commencing their primary education from that date.

Available statistics, based on sampling undertaken as part of the Value for Money Review, indicate that the impact of this change will be limited as the majority of pupils categorised under the closed school rule are in fact attending their nearest school. Before implementing this change which is proposed for 2012, my Department has requested Bus Éireann to conduct

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a detailed analysis of the "on the ground" impact for individual schools and the rural communities they serve. This analysis will be based on the most up to date information available on current school transport usage patterns and I expect to have this information available to me this summer.

I will then have an opportunity to carefully examine the likely affects of this change well in advance of the 2012 implementation date.

Higher Education Grants

132. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the operation of the non-adjacent rule in relation to third level grants in view of the fact that it seems to discriminate against urban based low income mature students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10406/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I understand that the changes to the student grant schemes introduced under Budget 2011 by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party government were designed to manage additional cost pressures arising from a significant increase in the number of students qualifying for grants, a proportionate increase in the number of students qualifying for higher rates of grants and payment of the Student Service Charge on behalf of grant-holders.

These changes include removal of the automatic eligibility of mature students to the higher non-adjacent rate of grant. This will come into effect from the start of the 2011/12 academic year.

I regret that given current economic circumstances I am not in a position to reverse any of the 2011 budgetary changes to the student grant schemes including that relating to the qualifying distance criteria for the non-adjacent rate of grant.

The Deputy may wish to know that, qualifying mature students, as with all other qualifying students, will continue to receive student grants at the current rate applicable to their individual circumstances together with full support for payment of fees and the Student Contribution. Those on particularly low incomes will also continue to receive a "top-up" in the special rate of maintenance grant. In addition, some €5m remains available through the access offices of third-level institutions to assist students in exceptional financial need.

In addition, qualifying mature students who reside 45 kilometres or more from their higher education institution will be eligible for the higher non-adjacent rate of grant.

I understand the concerns of students with regard to the 2011 measures and I will take account of these in considering any future changes as part of the budgetary process for 2012 and beyond, having regard to the position of the public finances.

School Curriculum

133. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the thought process behind the adoption of the project maths model for all junior certificate and leaving certificate students and if he will make clear the implementation costs of project maths, including the costs of the new syllabi, teacher training materials, days and cover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10420/11]

134. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the considerable difficulties the new project maths syllabus poses to students

with learning difficulties, in view of the verbose nature of proposed examination questions. [10421/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 134 together.

Project Maths is designed to encourage better understanding of mathematics, to reinforce its practical relevance to everyday life, and to ensure better curriculum continuity across the system. A key objective is to improve attainment levels in Maths and to encourage more students to take the subject at higher level. The reforms are being implemented on the recommendations of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and build on research on international practice, which was published in 2006 by the NCCA (International Trends in Post Primary Mathematics Education — Perspectives on Learning Teaching and Assessment). There are particular concerns that Irish students' performance in OECD PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is not in keeping with the needs of the knowledge society, and that students find particular difficulty in applying mathematical concepts in non familiar contexts.

Project Maths has been widely welcomed by the partners in education, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, the National Competitiveness Council, Engineers Ireland, the Task Force on Innovation, and by higher education and industry interests. Improving understanding of and attainment in mathematics is a critical part of the strategy to promote Ireland as a smart economy Project Maths is being implemented on a phased basis over a three period across 5 strands of mathematics as follows:—

- Phase 1: Strand 1 — Statistics and Probability + Strand 2 — Geometry and Trigonometry;
- Phase 2: Strand 1+2+ Strand 3 — Number + Strand 4 — Algebra;
- Phase 3: Strand 1+2+3+4+ Strand 5 — Functions Strands 1 and 2 began in all schools in September 2010 for first examination in 2012 at Leaving Certificate and 2013 at Junior Certificate. Strands 3 and 4 will begin in 2011, and strand 5 will start in 2012. The programme builds on the experiences of 24 schools which started the initiative in September 2008.

Examinations in Mathematics continue to be offered at three levels in the system — Ordinary, Higher and Foundation levels, designed to meet the diverse needs of the student population. Given that a key objective is for students to be able to apply mathematical understanding and concepts in familiar and unfamiliar contexts, the format of questions sets out greater detail on the nature of the problem to be addressed, and questions are more "wordy" than heretofore as a consequence. However, every effort is being made to keep the language at a level appropriate to the age of students and the level being studied.

With regard to costs for the programme of professional development, the table below includes average salary and team costs, the cost of seminars and professional development events for some 6000 teachers, the cost of administrative support, the development of materials etc.: 2008, €386,058; 2009, €1,757,620; 2010, €2,163,104; 2011, €2,321,157.

The costs shown above exclude substitution costs, and the additional costs of post graduate programmes for teachers who need intensive support.

The Department proposes to tender for these courses shortly. Since 2010, up to €2m per year has been made available for substitution costs for teachers attending professional develop-

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ment events in school time. Substitution is claimed by schools on a needs basis and the drawdown for this area of expenditure varies in accordance with school needs at any given time.

Costs for the next 2 years are expected to be similar to those for 2011. Costs for further years of the project will be determined at a later date, following consideration of any further requirements for professional development support at that time, and the available resources.

School Staffing

135. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of language support teachers in schools in County Meath in each of the years 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 in tabular form; the number of language support teachers per school in this academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10490/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): There are over 1,120 language support posts at primary level and 280 wholetime equivalent posts at post primary level in the current school year. The figures for the number of language support posts across the country in previous years are provided as follows.

Year	Primary	Post Primary
2007-2008	1,517	479
2008-2009	1,620	560
2009-2010	1,180	365

The additional information sought by the Deputy, would take some time to provide in the format requested. I regret that my Department is not able to provide the requested breakdown on a county by county basis at this time. The main focus of the Teacher Allocation Section within my Department, is the allocations process for the 2011/12 school year and the redeployment of surplus teachers into vacancies.

School Accommodation

136. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the future of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 11 which is currently in a rented building and receiving only a small proportion of its funding from the State but is growing year on year and requires considerable works to its premises. [10494/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has provided significant funding to enhance the accommodation currently occupied by the school to which he refers. The school is located in a former primary school and I am pleased to confirm that my Department provided in excess of €360,000 in 2010 for heating upgrade and improvement works to toilet facilities under the Emergency Works and Summer Works Schemes.

In addition, my Department also grant aids the rental of the existing school accommodation at a cost of €85,000 per annum. In light of further funding being made available under the Jobs Initiative, a number of projects submitted under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme by primary and post-primary schools, including the school referred to by the Deputy, will be considered further. My Department will be writing to schools that will be included in this latest round of funding in the near future.

School Staffing

137. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will deal with an issue regarding the supervision-substitution scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry. [10535/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The issue referred to by the Deputy relates to the allocation of the 5% administration fee provided for in the Supervision/Substitution scheme. The current arrangements for the allocation of the 5% administration fee provide for the allocation of the fee on the basis of 2.5% towards VEC administration staff and 2.5% to schools. These arrangements are set out in my Department's Circular 26/2009 and only apply with effect from the commencement of the 2008/09 school year.

These arrangements were put in place following agreement with the relevant staffing and management interests, namely the Teachers' Union of Ireland, IMPACT and the Irish Vocational Education Association. Accordingly, there is no scope for my Department to apply these terms retrospectively.

The arrangements in place for the administration of the Supervision/Substitution scheme in VEC schools prior to the 2008/09 school year are a matter for individual VECs. In the case referred to by the Deputy that is Co Kerry VEC (Kerry Education Service). My Department does not have any role in determining the arrangements made by Co Kerry VEC in respect of the distribution of the administration fee prior to the 2008/09 school year.

Bullying in Schools

138. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the guidelines in place for addressing bullying in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10542/11]

140. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to conduct a nationwide survey to ascertain the level of bullying in primary and post-primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10544/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 and 140 together.

I take the issue of bullying in schools very seriously and am committed to ensuring that schools tackle bullying in all its forms. Under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, all schools are required to have in place a Code of Behaviour and this code must be drawn up in accordance with the guidelines of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). The NEWB guidelines were issued to schools in 2008 and make it clear that each school must have policies to prevent or address bullying and harassment and schools must make clear in their code of behaviour that bullying is unacceptable. The guidelines further state that as well as making explicit that bullying is prohibited in the school, and having an anti-bullying policy, the code of behaviour should indicate what action the school will take in relation to alleged breaches of the school's bullying policy.

Every school therefore must have in place a policy which includes specific measures to deal with bullying behaviour, within the framework of the school's overall school code of behaviour. Such a code, developed through consultation with the whole school community and properly implemented, can be the most influential measure in countering bullying behaviour in schools. The Department has also issued Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour as an aid to schools in devising measures to prevent and deal with instances of bullying behaviour. These

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guidelines were drawn up following consultation with representatives of school management, teachers and parents, and are sufficiently flexible to allow each school authority to adapt them to suit the particular needs of their school.

As a further aid to post primary schools, the Department published a template that can be used by post-primary schools in developing an anti-bullying policy. The anti-bullying policy template is based primarily on the key document Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour. However, it also takes account of more recent legislative and regulatory changes, and reference is made to issues of contemporary concern such as the need to tackle text bullying, cyber-bullying and homophobic bullying.

I have no plans to conduct a survey of schools in relation in this area. Responsibility for tackling bullying falls to the level of the individual school, as it is at local level that an effective anti-bullying climate must be established and at that level that actions should be taken to address allegations of bullying.

The Deputy may be aware that when a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) is conducted by my Department's Inspectorate, the code of behaviour, including its anti-bullying policy is reviewed by the inspection team to check that it is in line with the Department's guidelines. Inspectors normally meet with the principal, the board, post-holders, year heads, class teachers, programme co-ordinators, the pastoral care team, representatives of the students and parents. During these meetings there is a particular emphasis on the quality of student care and support. The inspectors' evaluation is also informed by observations in classroom settings and throughout the school. Where there are weaknesses in a school's policy or implementation of policies clear recommendations for improvement are made and are included in the published report of the inspection.

Revised procedures for WSE in schools have recently been put in place. A new element of the revised WSE process involves the issuing of questionnaires directly to pupils and parents. Children and parents will be asked to respond to questions about how the school deals with bullying, discipline in the school and whether or not the school provides a safe environment for children. This enhanced engagement with parents and pupils through questionnaires aims to further support all schools to implement effective measures to counter bullying.

The education of students in both primary and post-primary schools in relation to anti-bullying behaviour is part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. SPHE is now a compulsory subject both at primary level and in the junior cycle of post-primary schools. Since 2001, national professional development support services have provided ongoing support to schools in planning policies on child protection and the code of behaviour and in supporting teachers and principals in the implementation of SPHE. In addition, training on The Stay Safe Programme is offered on an ongoing basis to primary schools.

Other measures in place include the Webwise Internet Safety Initiative, the EU Safer Internet Programme campaign and the establishment of the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) which is currently working with over 70 Post Primary Schools to promote and support positive student behaviour.

139. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a requirement for primary and post-primary trainee teachers to receive training on dealing with bullying in the classroom prior to their qualification; the nature of such training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10543/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The content of initial teacher education courses is, currently, a matter for the individual providers and the methodologies used to address bullying varies amongst the providers. In accordance with Section 38 of the Teaching Council Act 2001, the Teaching Council is empowered to review and professionally accredit programmes of initial teacher education. The Teaching Council has initiated reviews of a range of initial teacher education programmes and will consider course content in this context.

In general, at primary level, the issue is addressed extensively in a number of different subject areas/modules including Teaching Studies, Professional Development, Social, Personal and Health Education and Psychology. The topics covered include the nature and incidence of bullying in classrooms, types of bullying, effects of bullying, signs and symptoms of bullying, prevention of bullying, dealing with bullying and school policy and bullying. More generally, students cover the area of emotional intelligence, self-esteem etc.

At post primary level, as stated above provision varies from provider to provider. However the topic of bullying is addressed in specific modules and seminars related to professional practice of student teachers e.g. Classroom Management, Classroom Mediation Skills, Psychology and Sociology of education. The topic of bullying is also integrated across subject areas. Some providers also run a number of professional development seminars designed to relate to issues student teachers face on teaching practice which cover the topic of bullying. The topic is also dealt with by tutors of teaching practice on an ad hoc basis.

My Department's Guidelines on Countering Bullying in Primary and Post Primary Schools (1993) require all schools to have an anti bullying policy. The anti-bullying policy is subject to school inspection. My Department's Template for Developing an Anti Bullying policy makes reference to the nine grounds listed in equality legislation. Schools are advised to include reference to issues of contemporary concern such as text bullying, cyber-bullying and homophobic bullying.

The SPHE Support Service provides advice and guidance to schools at Post Primary level on developing and updating their anti-bullying policies. The SPHE Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator is available to give schools in depth advice and support on issues to do with bullying at their request and in addition runs training courses on positive strategies for managing bullying issue.

Question No. 140 answered with Question No. 138.

Special Educational Needs

141. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions in place to provide education for academically gifted children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10545/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the 1998 Education Act requires Boards of Management of each school to publish the policy of the school relating to participation by students with special educational needs, including students who are exceptionally able. The measures schools take in this regard are required to be stated in the school plan. It is the duty of the Board of Management to ensure that appropriate education services are made available to such students.

Schools at both primary and second level use strategies such as curriculum differentiation, curriculum enrichment and acceleration to facilitate the development of pupils who are exceptionally able.

Syllabi and curricula for second-level schools have been designed in such a way to enable teachers cater for the wide range of pupil ability. The revised primary curriculum, which has

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been supplied to every primary teacher, recognises the importance of developing the full potential of the child and caters for pupil diversity, including meeting the needs of exceptionally able pupils.

Content is outlined in the curricula at both levels and process is also heavily emphasised. Enabling children to learn how to learn is stressed and facilitated. The development of language skills, investigatory and problem- solving skills, higher-order thinking skills and working individually, and as a member of a group, are all encouraged at both levels. While the use of information and communication technologies and the use of class and school libraries are of benefit in project work with all pupils, they have a special importance for pupils who are exceptionally able.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), in collaboration with its counterparts in Northern Ireland, the Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment (CCEA), has produced draft guidelines for teachers of exceptionally able students. These guidelines issued to all Primary and Post Primary schools in November 2007 along with a questionnaire for feedback.

The NCCA/CCEA guidelines are designed to raise awareness of the social, emotional and academic needs of exceptionally able students and to assist teachers in planning their teaching and learning. The guidelines provide advice to schools on identification of gifted children, set out profiles of students, and whole school and classroom strategies and case studies which demonstrate how schools can best meet the needs of such students. The general strategies include differentiated teaching, acceleration and enrichment approaches in the context of participation in mainstream schools.

The Special Education Support Service (SESS) is a service under the management of my Department which provides support for teachers to assist them in meeting the needs of all pupils with special educational needs, including those pupils who are exceptionally able. The service is available to schools who may be seeking advice or support relating to a specific special education issue in the school. More information on the range of programmes offered by the SESS is available on *www.sess.ie.*

In addition, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), also under the management of my Department, provides training in differentiation, in terms of differentiating for all pupils, whether less able/more able. Issues around exceptional ability and giftedness are addressed as part of the school planning process which is facilitated by the PDST.

Finally, I wish to advise the Deputy that the Programme for Government sets out this Government's commitment to examining supports in place for gifted students and specifically to the creation of improved links with third level institutions on a regional basis, to provide gifted students with access to new programmes or educational resources.

School Transport

142. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in issuing the March payment under the school transport grant in respect of persons (details supplied); when payment will issue; when they can expect the April payment to be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10550/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The grant payment for March has been processed and will issue to the relevant parents later this week.

Meanwhile, the request for the April grant payments, which was received by my Department last Friday, is being processed and will issue shortly.

Special Educational Needs

143. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a special needs assistant will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10558/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating resource teachers and SNAs to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. This now includes a requirement for the NCSE to have regard to an overall cap on the number of SNA posts.

The NCSE has issued a circular to all schools advising of the allocation process for the 2011/2012 school year. A key feature of the amended scheme will be to provide for an annual allocation of Special Needs Assistant support to eligible schools.

The NCSE asked schools to submit all applications for SNA support to it by 18th March 2011 and intends to inform schools of their annual SNA allocation as soon as possible, in advance of the coming school year.

144. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a special needs assistant will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10559/11]

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The NCSE asked schools to submit all applications for SNA support to it by 18th March 2011 and intend to inform schools of their annual SNA allocation as soon as possible, in advance of the coming school year.

Special Educational Needs

145. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will investigate the needs of a person (details supplied) whose school requires additional funding in order to allow them to complete their junior and leaving certificates; and if funding will be made available to secure their place at the school for three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10562/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that Special Schools funded by my Department are intended to cater for children and young persons with special educational needs from 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year. At that point, the Department of Health and Children/Health Service Executive

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assumes direct responsibility for young adults with special educational needs who are over 18 years. My Department, at that stage, may allocate resources towards an education component of such provision.

However, my Department will consider requests from schools who wish to retain students who are over 18 years of age, for an extra school year, in circumstances where they are following courses leading to accreditation at a level of FETAC 3 or above. Applications received from schools in respect of individual pupils will be considered in the context of my Departments policy in this regard, as set out above.

I understand that the student in question will remain in her present school for the 2011/2012 school year as she will not reach 18 years of age until 2012.

My Department encourages parents and school authorities to engage locally regarding pupils' education. It is open to the parents concerned to raise any queries they may have relating to their child's special educational needs, including education planning, directly with the school authorities.

Schools Building Projects

146. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for accommodation works in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10579/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school to which the Deputy refers has made an application to my Department for funding for large scale capital works. The application has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and assigned a Band 2 rating.

Information in respect of the current school building programme along with all assessed applications for major capital works, including the project for the school in question is now available on the Department's website at *www.education.ie*.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered in the context of the Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the capital budget of the Department, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

Site Acquisitions

147. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding land acquisition adjoining a school (details supplied) in County Galway for a planned school extension in view of the fact that there is local concern that this land is to be sold at public auction. [10595/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The proposed acquisition of land adjacent to the school referred to by the Deputy is agreed, in principle, subject to contract. The Chief State Solicitor's Office has had recent interactions with the vendor's solicitor in relation to standard pre-contract enquiries on my Department's behalf and both parties are actively working together on this matter.

Departmental Funding

148. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will set

out in tabular form the amount of Exchequer funding provided, or intended to be provided, to fee-paying post-primary schools for each year from 2007 to December 2011 and, side by side with that, if he will set out in tabular form the amount of money provided, or intended to be provided, from the Dormant Accounts Fund to post-primary schools serving children from disadvantaged areas DEIS schools for each year from 2007 to December 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10601/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I will send the information requested to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Fee-Charging Schools

	Current Funding	Capital Funding	Assistive Technology	ICT	Total
	€	€	€	€	€
2007	8,693,353	3,184,665	67,879	101,312	12,047,208
2008	9,936,385	2,239,518	49,601		12,225,503
2009	6,723,021	3,317,215	26,271		10,066,507
2010	6,376,955	3,169,210	17,626	2,551,492	12,115,284
2011 (to date)	4,351,614	423,994	11,656		4,787,264
2011 (projected)	2,148,386				2,148,386
Total	38,229,714	12,334,602	73,033	2,652,804	53,390,152

Gross salary payments to staff in fee-paying schools from 1/9/06 to 31/12/10

	Teachers' Salaries	Clerical Officers	SNA's Salaries	Total
	€	€	€	€
2006-2007	91,406,969.00	276,552.02	1,275,137.81	92,958,658.83
2007-2008	124,963,508.14	288,512.40	1,673,844.63	126,925,865.17
2008-2009	117,104,702.72	315,555.41	1,839,855.55	119,260,113.68
2009-2010	105,744,788.82	305,905.87	1,660,380.31	107,711,075.00
1/9/10 to 31/12/2010	32,520,039.67	96,489.89	624,168.53	33,240,698.09
Total	471,740,008.35	1,283,015.59	7,073,386.83	480,096,410.77

DEIS Schools Dormant Accounts

Year	Total
	€
2007	452,863
2008	4,381,828
2009	1,655,483
2010	82,529
2011 (projected)	189,000
Total	6,761,703

School Transport

149. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reverse the charges proposed to the primary school transport scheme from September 2011 in view of the fact that to maintain a school transport service for a minimum number of seven eligible school going children for pupils in rural areas when no other public transport option is available, the charges will have a disproportionately negative impact on these children and their families. [10608/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The changes to school transport services were announced in the 2011 Budget by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government and derive from a recommendation in the recently published Value for Money Review of the scheme.

The charge, which applies to all eligible primary pupils, is being introduced to ensure that school transport provided for these pupils is fully utilised in a cost efficient manner.

Given the major financial constraints facing the country, I cannot reverse the changes to school transport as announced by the previous Government. We all have to understand the legacy of economic mismanagement which the last Government gave to the country.

Expenditure Reviews

150. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10655/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): There are no assessments, reviews or reports specific to my Department under the terms of the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support.

The Comprehensive Review of public expenditure, recently announced by Government, will shortly be incorporated in the revised EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland. This follows the successful conclusion of the first and second quarterly reviews of the programme with the EU Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. As part of this review my Department will prepare a comprehensive Expenditure Report by the end of June in respect of the Department and its associated agencies, to identify expenditure programme savings, scope for savings arising from efficiency and other reforms, proposals for reducing and/or merging of agencies and associated reductions in staff limits. The Comprehensive Spending Review process will feed into the Budgetary process for 2012 and beyond.

School Closures

151. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine in detail the concerns expressed by a school (details supplied) in relation to the abolition of the closed school rule which if introduced will involve the children in the community attending school in another county and outside their parish; his views that this type of change will decimate communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10666/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Deputy may be aware that the cessation of the Closed School Rule (CSR) as it relates to primary school transport eligibility was announced in the 2011 Budget by the previous Fianna

Fáil-Green Party Government and derives from a recommendation in the published Value for Money Review of the scheme.

This change is scheduled to take effect in September 2012 and will apply only in the case of pupils commencing their primary education from that date.

Available statistics, based on sampling undertaken as part of the Value for Money Review, indicate that the impact of this change will be limited as the majority of pupils categorised under the closed school rule are in fact attending their nearest school.

Before implementing this change which is proposed for 2012, my Department has requested Bus Éireann to conduct a detailed analysis of the "on the ground" impact for individual schools and the rural communities they serve. This analysis will be based on the most up to date information available on current school transport usage patterns and I expect to have this information available to me this summer.

I will then have an opportunity to carefully examine the likely affects of this change well in advance of the 2012 implementation date.

Departmental Schemes

152. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to change the conditions of the remote area grant scheme to allow transition year students to attend a Gaeltacht college outside of their area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10667/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The purpose of the Remote Area Boarding Grant is to give pupils who are educationally disadvantaged because of their remoteness from schools an opportunity to attend school on the same basis as other pupils not so disadvantaged. Grants are paid for pupils whose normal place of residence is outside the range of public transport services to a school providing suitable free second-level education. To qualify for a boarding grant, an applicant must be:

- normally resident in the State; and
- resident at least 4.8 km from a second-level school where suitable free second-level education is available and more than 3.2 km from a pick-up point on a transport service to such a school; and
- unable to obtain a place in a suitable second-level school within 25 km of his/her normal place of residence.

Pupils resident on off-shore islands that do not have a school providing suitable free second-level education may also qualify for assistance under the scheme.

I do not have any plans to amend the scheme to permit pupils who do not otherwise qualify for the grant to attend Irish-medium schools during transition year.

School Transport

153. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a response will issue regarding a school transport query in respect of a person (details supplied). [10669/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Bus Éireann, which operates the School Transport Schemes, on behalf of my Department has advised that the pupil referred to resides less than 3.2 kilometres from the school in question. The pupil is currently availing of school transport under the Closed School Rule (CSR).

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Changes to school transport services, which were announced in the 2011 Budget by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government, will take effect from the beginning of the 2011/12 school year and will mean that the distance criterion will be applied to all pupils attending primary schools. This means that pupils categorised for transport under the CSR who reside less than 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) from the school of attendance will lose their transport eligibility. This change to school transport provision means that the distance eligibility criterion will be applied uniformly and equitably on a national basis.

Primary school pupils who are not eligible for school transport may apply for concessionary transport subject to the terms of the scheme. Parents should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office regarding the availability of concessionary school transport.

Schools Building Projects

154. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for building works in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary and when a decision will issue. [10676/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers made an application to my Department recently to construct a G.P. room/PE Hall, which was rejected as this school had already submitted an application for large scale capital funding for a project which included the construction of a G.P. Room. That application was assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects and assigned a band 2.4 rating, reflecting the fact that the deficit in mainstream accommodation represents a significant proportion of the schools overall needs.

The priority attaching to individual projects is determined by published prioritisation criteria, which were formulated following consultation with the Education Partners. There are four band ratings under these criteria, each of which describes the extent of accommodation required and the urgency attaching to it. Band 1 is the highest priority rating and Band 4 is the lowest. Documents explaining the band rating system are also available on my Department's website.

The Forward Planning Section of my Department has identified 43 priority areas throughout the country where significant additional accommodation will be required at primary and post-primary level in the medium term. Factors considered included population growth, demographic trends, current and projected enrolments, recent and planned housing developments and capacity of existing schools to meet demand for places. The area to which the Deputy refers has not been included on this list.

The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered in the context of my Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. At that point, options to meet the schools needs will be considered further. 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 now available on my Department's website at *www.education.ie*.

However, in light of current competing demands on the capital budget of the Department, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

Schools Refurbishment

155. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details

supplied) in County Kerry will qualify for emergency works funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10685/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): An application under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme to replace water tanks and internal water pipes was received from the school referred to by the Deputy. The purpose of the Emergency Works Scheme is solely for unforeseen emergencies or to provide funding to facilitate inclusion and access for special needs pupils. An emergency is deemed to be a situation which poses an immediate risk to health, life, property or the environment which is sudden, unforeseen and requires immediate action and in the case of a school if not corrected would prevent the school or part thereof from opening.

As the scope of works for this project is outside the terms of the Emergency Works Scheme it cannot be considered for emergency funding. The school has been informed of the decision.

156. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that were approved funding under the summer works scheme 2010 in County Cavan; the number of applications received from County Cavan for the 2011 summer works scheme and the number approved for 2011. [10698/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that 36 applications from schools in County Cavan were approved funding under the Summer Works Scheme 2010.

A total of 58 applications from schools in County Cavan were made for funding under the Summer Works Scheme 2011 and 8 schools were successful in their applications. In light of further funding being made available under the Jobs Initiative, projects submitted under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme by primary and post primary schools will be considered further

My Department will be writing to schools that will be included in this latest round of funding in the near future.

157. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that were approved funding under the summer works scheme 2010 in County Monaghan; the number of applications received from County Monaghan for the 2011 summer works scheme and the number approved for 2011. [10699/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that 34 applications from schools in County Monaghan were approved funding under the Summer Works Scheme 2010.

A total of 42 applications from schools in County Monaghan were made for funding under the Summer Works Scheme 2011. Of these, 12 schools were successful in their applications for funding. In light of further funding being made available under the Jobs Initiative, projects submitted under the 2011 Summer Works Scheme by primary and post primary schools will be considered further.

My Department will be writing to schools that will be included in this latest round of funding in the near future.

School Curriculum

158. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce politics as a new leaving certificate subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10728/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has been progressing the development of a new subject "Politics and Society", which is proposed as an optional examinable full subject in the Leaving Certificate. A draft syllabus has been developed by the Council and was published for consultation. The syllabus is currently being revised in the light of the feedback. After this process has been completed, the Council's formal proposals on the matter will be submitted to me, and will be considered in the light of overall system needs and priorities.

It should be noted that education for citizenship is covered extensively in the curriculum for primary schools as part of Social Personal and Health Education, and History, Geography and Science. At second level, these themes are continued, and Civic Social and Political Education is a mandatory subject for all pupils in the junior cycle. It is examined in the Junior Certificate by means of a written terminal examination and an innovative action project which is designed to give students a practical experience of active citizenship.

FÁS Training Programmes

159. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the assistance available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare regarding their re-employment course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10183/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): This is a day to day matter for FÁS under the Labour Services Act 1987.

Employment Rights

160. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he will support a Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers at the International Labour Organisation Conference in Geneva in June 2011. [10187/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): At the forthcoming International Labour Conference to be held in Geneva, in June 2011, the proposal for a draft Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers is a significant and important agenda item. In accordance with standard procedure in respect of the negotiation of any such international labour instruments at the International Labour Organisation (ILO), this matter will be the subject of discussion on a tripartite basis involving Governments, Employer Representative Bodies and Worker Representative Bodies over a three-week period. The possible adoption of any such international labour instruments such as an ILO Convention supplemented by a Recommendation will be subject to the outcome of these discussions at the Conference in June.

The Deputy will appreciate that in advance of the detailed discussion and negotiation on the text of any such international instrument, it would be inappropriate to anticipate our position on a draft Convention, the final text of which is not yet settled.

However, it is worth pointing out that the full suite of employment rights that apply to workers in Ireland are equally applicable to domestic workers. Indeed, Ireland has been cited internationally as an example of good practice in this area, not least through the introduction of a voluntary Code of Practice entitled *Code of Practice for Persons Employed in Other People's Homes* in 2007. Moreover, during Ireland's tenure on the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation, the Irish Government representative supported the inclusion of an ILO standard-setting instrument in this area on the agenda for consideration by the International Labour Conference.

In the context of the forthcoming International Labour Conference, in June, Ireland will continue to play an active role and it is hoped that the ILO will be in a position to adopt a Convention on decent work for domestic workers.

Local Authority Charges

161. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he has proposals to reduce the burden of rates on small businesses. [10275/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The setting of commercial rates is a matter for Local Authorities which come under the remit of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Local Authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes, in accordance with the details entered into the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation.

The levying and collection of commercial rates are matters for each individual Local Authority. The Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) is applied to the valuation of each property to obtain the amount payable in rates. The ARV is decided by the elected Members of each Local Authority in their annual budgets, and its determination is a reserved function of the Local Authority.

The issue of reducing the burden of rates on small businesses, as suggested by the Deputy, would be a policy matter for consideration by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, in consultation with the Local Authorities and the Minister for Finance.

However, I can report that preliminary results from a review carried out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on commercial rates for 2011 show that 32 of 88 Local Authorities have decreased their annual rate on valuation this year, while 53 kept the same rate as 2010. This follows a similar pattern to last year, when 31 Local Authorities reduced their ARV and 55 maintained the same ARV as 2009.

I have had detailed discussions with the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government on how we can work together to maximise opportunities for local business development and to keep all costs which impact on business as low as possible. This work will continue and will include the exploration of options for further reducing Local Authority charges to business.

City and County Enterprise Boards

162. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the position regarding proposals to restructure the county and city enterprise boards; if he envisages a closer link between the enterprise boards and the local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10399/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The County and City Enterprise Boards have been the principal deliverers of State support to the micro-enterprise sector since their establishment in 1993. The CEBs support the micro-enterprises, employing up to 10 people, in the start-up and expansion phases and also promote economic activity and entrepreneurship at local level. The CEBs deliver a series of Programmes to underpin their role and they can provide both financial and non-financial assistance to an eligible micro-enterprise. The micro-enterprise sector is a key component of the indigenous small business sector and, I am confident, that it will be key to our economic recovery.

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

In relation to the restructuring of the CEBs there is no doubt but that the County Enterprise Board model has served the micro-enterprise sector very well over the years but there is also no doubt that some restructuring of that model is now required. There have been many changes to the social, economic and technological landscape of Ireland since the establishment of the Boards in 1993 and so it is timely to restructure. However any restructuring must not compromise the State's engagement with and support for our important micro-enterprise sector and in particular must not make it more difficult for the end-user to access the support services available for the Sector.

The question of restructuring of the CEBs has been an issue in the public domain since the publication of the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (the "McCarthy Report") in July 2009. Subsequent to the publication of the McCarthy Report, a variety of consultations and discussions with the main stakeholders involved have taken place, including CEB senior staff and Boards, Enterprise Ireland and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

As Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation I want to ensure that there is a coherent and cohesive delivery of State support to the indigenous business sector based on clear enterprise policy principles laid down by my Department and to ensure that any structural or institutional changes do not compromise the State's support for indigenous businesses. There are a number of schools of thought on the best way forward in relation to any CEB restructuring. All options are being considered at this stage and I am engaging with my officials and with other Government colleagues in order to determine the best way forward

Ministerial Appointments

163. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the appointments that were made to State boards and State agencies under his remit during the period 29 September 2004 to 7 May 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10515/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): It has not been possible in the time available and with limited resources to compile the specific information sought by the Deputy. However, I would refer the Deputy to Dáil Question No. 181 of 3 February 2010 and to a table which has been forwarded to him and which contains most of the information requested. Additional information about appointments to boards of State agencies under the aegis of my Department is published and available in the annual reports of those bodies.

Irish Language

164. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the cost of compliance, in terms of preparing and implementing schemes under the Official Languages Act in accordance with sections 11 and 15, to his Department and to all bodies under its remit since the coming into force of the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10521/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The cost of compliance in terms of preparing and implementing Schemes under the Official Languages Act for my Department and its Offices was €180,052 from the coming into force of the Act in 2003 to the end of April 2011.

My Department is fully committed to the implementation of the Official Languages Act 2003, and is currently in the process of rolling-out the enhancement of services to be provided in the Irish Language, as provided for in my Department's Irish Language Scheme 2010-2013, which was prepared in accordance with Section 11 of the 2003 Act.

I am not in a position to provide similar information in relation to the State Agencies associated with my Department, as that would be a day-to-day matter for the Agencies concerned.

Public Procurement Guidelines

165. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the procurement guidelines followed by the National Standards Authority of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10556/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) follows the appropriate competitive process under EU and national rules in discharging procurement processes. These rules are detailed in the Public Procurement Guidelines published by the Department of Finance and available on the national etendering website. NSAI provide a feedback service to tenderers and is available to provide clarification on any specific enquiry, if required.

Industrial Development

166. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation the efforts that have been undertaken by the Industrial Development Agency to bring foreign direct investment to Balbriggan, County Dublin, noting that Balbriggan has a highly educated and multi-skilled workforce readily available and has more than 40 acres of land zoned commercial and industrial by Fingal County Council ready to be built upon whenever required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10574/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Balbriggan, in Fingal, North County Dublin forms part of IDA Ireland's East Region, which comprises Dublin City and County as well as the counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow, and is the largest region in Ireland and one of the fastest growing economic zones in Western Europe. The East Region is now home to 60,935 FDI jobs.

IDA Ireland promotes Fingal for foreign direct investment as part of the East Region. In addition the Agency continues to work with significant client companies in the Balbriggan area, in order to support them in transforming their Irish operations to ensure jobs can be maintained and losses minimised.

The Fingal area is well equipped to compete with other areas for potential foreign direct investment with high quality property solutions. IDA Ireland promotes all land and property solutions in the Fingal area, irrespective of ownership to potential FDI clients as opportunities arise. In addition the Agency is represented on the Fingal Development Board and the Fingal Economic Forum and works to promote Fingal for Foreign Direct Investment in partnership with those agencies.

In selecting locations to show companies, IDA Ireland seeks to include locations which have been affected by closures/job losses. Typically, a company is shown three or four selected towns, which can meet its requirements for skills, labour, site and/or buildings, infrastructure, etc. While IDA Ireland seeks to influence the selection of location, the final decision on location is taken in all cases by the promoting company.

Expenditure Reviews

167. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10656/11]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of the review mission of the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland which took place in April a number of revisions to the Programme were agreed. This revised Programme contains agreed actions for Ireland across the whole of Government, some of which will require assessments, reviews or reports.

A number of Structural Reforms fall within the remit of my Department, mainly in the following 3 areas:

1. *To facilitate adjustment in the labour market*

Under the terms of the revised Memorandum of Understanding with the EU /IMF, the Government is committed to reversing the recent reduction in the national minimum wage.

The commitment to reverse the recent cut in the national minimum wage will require primary legislation. I intend publishing Heads of a Bill to give effect to this commitment as soon as possible.

In addition an independent review of the Framework REA (Registered Employment Agreements) and ERO (Employment Regulation Orders) arrangements was initiated on 8 February last and was undertaken jointly by Kevin Duffy, Chairman of the Labour Court acting in an *ad hoc* capacity, and Dr Frank Walsh, School of Economics, UCD, under specific terms of reference. The review is a commitment under the EU/IMF programme, which provided not only for agreement with the European Commission Services on the terms of reference but also for follow up discussions on the programme of actions arising.

The report of the independent review team has been completed and was submitted to me on 28 April last. I intend publishing it following consideration by the Government. It is proposed to have early discussions with the European Commission Services on the main findings of the review, in line with the provisions in the EU/IMF Programme. Arising from these discussions, I will present a time-bound comprehensive action plan to follow up on the report's recommendations before the completion of the 4th Review of the EU/IMF Programme due later this year, setting out proposals for any legislative action that may be necessary to give effect to reform measures.

2. *To enhance competition in open markets*

In relation to the commitment on strengthening competition law by ensuring the availability of effective sanctions for infringements of Irish Competition Law, my Department is in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General in the matter with a view to meeting the commitment deadline (end Q3 2011).

3. *To encourage growth in the retail sector*

The original EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland obliged the Government to conduct a study on the economic impact of eliminating the cap on the size of retail premises with a view to enhancing competition and lowering prices for consumers and to

discuss implementation of its policy considerations with the EU Commission's services. My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, commissioned Forfás to carry out this study. Forfás recently completed its study and forwarded a report of its findings to both myself as the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and to the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government on 28 April 2011. Implementation of the commitment in the revised EU/IMF plan on this issue is a matter for my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to pursue, within whose remit planning guidelines rest.

My Department is currently taking part in the Comprehensive Spending Review, due to be considered by the newly established Economic Council in September 2011.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 42.

Social Welfare Benefits

169. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the Health Service Executive pay rent allowance to owners of properties at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 8. [10569/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the Department's computer records, rent supplement is payable in respect of a number of tenancies at the location in question.

Employment Action Plan

170. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the measures she will introduce to help highly educated unemployed persons re-enter the workforce. [10528/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): 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. 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. 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.

The Programme for Government states that a new National Employment and Entitlements Service will be established under the management of the Department of Social Protection. The objective is to integrate the unemployment payments elements currently provided directly by the Department of Social Protection and the employment services currently provided by FÁS into a single service. This integration of employment services and related benefit payment services within the Department of Social Protection will provide a 'one stop shop' for people wishing to establish their benefit entitlements, seek employment and / or seek advice about their training options. The focus will be very much on the individual, his / her rights to a payment, his / her access to an opportunity to engage in employment, training or upskilling, as appropriate and his / her responsibility to engage with such opportunities as they are provided.

A key objective of the Government in relation to the new service is that it will offer users a high level of personalised employment support and prioritise the provision of more intensive support for those on the live register who are identified as being most at risk of long-term

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unemployment. This will be achieved through the use of proactive approaches and modern case management systems. The cohort referred to by the Deputy will benefit from this approach.

Question No. 171 answered with Question No. 53.

Social Welfare Benefits

172. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for rent supplement for a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10196/11]

185. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a case (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10408/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 and 185 together.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that on 4th April 2011 it refused the person concerned's application for rent supplement on the grounds that the rent payable was in excess of the prescribed rent limits pertaining to his family circumstances. Furthermore it advised that the person concerned had not provided documentation presenting evidence of an assessment of his housing need completed by his local housing authority.

This decision was subsequently upheld by the HSE's designated Appeals Officer. The HSE has further advised that it is preparing papers on this case for submission to the Department's Chief Appeals Office. A decision on entitlement will be made by that office in due course.

Question No. 173 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Appeals

174. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [10276/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): 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.

There has been a very significant increase in the number of appeals received by the Social Welfare Appeals Office since 2007 when the intake was 14,070 to 2010 when the intake rose to 32,432. This has significantly impacted on the processing time for appeals which require oral hearings and, in order to be fair to all appellants, they are dealt with in strict chronological order. In the context of dealing with the considerable number of appeals now on hands, the Department has made a further 9 additional appointments to the office in recent weeks.

While every effort is being made to deal with the large numbers awaiting oral hearing as quickly as possible, it is not possible to give a date when the person's oral hearing will be heard, but s/he will be informed when arrangements have been made.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 175 answered with Question No. 65.

176. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will reconsider her decision to withdraw illness benefit in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10300/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that, an Appeals Officer, having considered all the available evidence, disallowed by way of summary decision the illness benefit appeal of the person concerned.

Following the submission of additional medical evidence, the case has been forwarded to the Chief Medical Advisor for his opinion. The person concerned will be informed of the outcome.

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.

177. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection when will the social welfare appeals office set a date for an oral hearing for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10323/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): 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.

There has been a very significant increase in the number of appeals received by the Social Welfare Appeals Office since 2007 when the intake was 14,070 to 2010 when the intake rose to 32,432. This has significantly impacted on the processing time for appeals which require oral hearings and, in order to be fair to all appellants, they are dealt with in strict chronological order. In the context of dealing with the considerable number of appeals now on hands, the Department has made a further 9 additional appointments to the office in recent weeks.

While every effort is being made to deal with the large numbers awaiting oral hearing as quickly as possible, it is not possible to give a date when the person's oral hearing will be heard, but s/he will be informed when arrangements have been made.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the circumstances whereby invalidity pension was terminated in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if the appeal will be listed at an early date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10337/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Following a medical review of ongoing entitlement to invalidity pension for the person concerned, she was found not eligible for invalidity pension from 28 April 2011. Subsequently, on foot of further medical evidence submitted, her case was reviewed by the deciding officer but it was decided that the position remained unchanged and the disallowance should stand.

The person concerned has appealed this decision to independent Social Welfare Appeals Office and arrangements have now been made for her to attend an appeal medical examination on 3 June 2011. Her future entitlement will considered in the light of the outcome of this examination.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

179. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the increase in funding that has been given by her to the Money and Budgeting Advisory Service in 2011; the fees being charged to MABS by the Citizens Information Board for 2011; if these have increased over 2010 and the amount of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10348/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): 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.

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*. Some 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.

Responsibility for MABS transferred to the Citizen Information Board (CIB) in July 2009. There is no fee charged to MABS by CIB, rather CIB are the funding body for all MABS companies. In 2010, the CIB allocated a total budget of some €18.2m for the delivery of money advice and budgeting services and this figure was increased to €18.3m in 2011.

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

180. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection if applicants for the position of supervisor on the Tús scheme have to be on the live register or in receipt of jobseeker's allowance to be eligible for these positions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10349/11]

188. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the criteria for the awarding of a supervisory position under the Tús scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10489/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 188 together.

The then Minister for Finance announced the introduction of a community work placement initiative for up to 5,000 persons in his Budget statement to Dáil Éireann on the 7th December 2010. The initiative, known as Tús, was launched on the 21st December 2010 and work on developing the necessary implementation structures has been underway since then. The aim of Tús is to provide short-term, quality work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. Some €30 million has been provided in the Department's Estimates in 2011 to fund the roll-out of the initiative.

Participants will, in the first instance, be identified by the Department of Social Protection by applying the following conditions:

- A person must be unemployed and in receipt of a jobseeker's payment for at least 12 months, and
- Currently in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, and

- Fully unemployed.

Persons with disabilities and in receipt of disability allowance and persons in receipt of one-parent family payment are not eligible for participation on Tús.

Social Welfare Appeals

181. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reasons an application for a domiciliary care allowance payment was refused in respect of a person (details supplied); if the person can appeal at this stage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10387/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received on the 25th 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 on 21st October 2010 refusing the allowance. This decision was subsequently appealed and the person concerned was informed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 16th March 2011 that the appeal had been disallowed.

The decision/appeal process for this application is now complete. If the person concerned has additional information which was not made available to the deciding officer and appeals officer when they made their decision, it is open to him to re-apply.

Social Welfare Code

182. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to expand the eligibility for the back to education allowance. [9832/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The back to education allowance (BTEA) is one of a range of activation supports and policies with the objective of assisting social welfare recipients to improve their life chances by facilitating access to employment, work experience, education and training. The focus of BTEA is to assist those who are most marginalised and distant from the labour market to acquire the necessary education to improve their chances of becoming independent of the social welfare system. The BTEA scheme can offer 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 Programme for Government 2011-2016 includes a commitment to resource a Jobs Fund that will finance a number of measures which will play an important in enhancing the employability skills of jobseekers. BTEA and all other relevant measures will be considered under this commitment.

Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 65.

Social Welfare Appeals

184. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [10405/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): 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.

There has been a very significant increase in the number of appeals received by the Social Welfare Appeals Office since 2007 when the intake was 14,070 to 2010 when the intake rose

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to 32,432. This has significantly impacted on the processing time for appeals which require oral hearings and, in order to be fair to all appellants, they are dealt with in strict chronological order. In the context of dealing with the considerable number of appeals now on hands, the Department has made a further 9 additional appointments to the office in recent weeks.

While every effort is being made to deal with the large numbers awaiting oral hearing as quickly as possible, it is not possible to give a date when the person's oral hearing will be heard, but she will be informed when arrangements have been made.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 172.

186. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an appeal (details supplied) has been received; when the appeal process will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10409/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 3rd May 2011. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Social Welfare Services on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer for consideration.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

187. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason an appeal for carer's allowance lodged in January 2011 is taking over six months to process in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10410/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 7 January 2011. 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 in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 20 April 2011 and the appeal will be referred to an Appeals Officer, in due course, 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.

Question No. 188 answered with Question No. 180.

Social Welfare Benefits

189. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive a decision on their application for carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10491/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for carer's allowance on 13 January 2011. The case has been referred to an investigative officer of this Department for means assessment and confirmation that the conditions necessary for receipt of the allowance are satisfied. On completion of the necessary investigations a decision will be made and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

Question No. 190 answered with Question No. 54.

Question No. 191 answered with Question No. 42.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 54.

Social Insurance

193. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of employees in each year from 2007 to date in 2011 whose earnings meant that their employers were liable for the low rate of employers PRSI of 8.5%; the steps she will take to ensure that the lowering of the rate of PRSI will not encourage employers to reduce wages to come within the qualifying criteria for this new measure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9655/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Workers whose weekly earnings are below €356 and for whom employers pay PRSI contributions at the rate of 8.5%, fall into PRSI Sub-classes AO and AX. (Sub-class AO applies to employees whose weekly earnings are between €38 and €352. Sub-class AX applies where weekly earnings are between €352.01 and €356.00).

The numbers of contributors insurable at PRSI Sub-classes A0 and AX for the years 2007, 2008 and 2009 are set out as follows.

	2007	2008	2009
AO	624,353	612,483	576,255
AX	33,280	6,490	4,066
Total	657,633	618,973	580,321

Returns for subsequent years are not available. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to halve the lower 8.5% rate of PRSI up to end 2013 on jobs paying up to €356 per week.

A lower rate of employers' PRSI for workers earning below €356 per week, has been in operation for a number of years. There is no particular evidence to suggest that the existence of a lower rate of PRSI encourages employers to reduce wages to come within the qualifying criteria to attract the lower rate.

Social Welfare Benefits

194. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of civil and public servants who are in receipt of family income supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9666/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are currently approximately 24,646 people in receipt of a weekly family income supplement (FIS) payment of which 2,574 (or just over 10%) are civil or public servants.

Social Welfare Appeals

195. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a review of a decision regarding a domiciliary care allowance will be determined in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [10518/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received on 17 January 2011. 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 on 9 February 2011 advising the person concerned of the decision. The person concerned subsequently lodged an appeal and supplied additional information in support of her claim. As part of the appeal process, the application, along with the additional information was reviewed by a second Medical Assessor on 28 April. The application was again deemed to be medically ineligible. The case will now be referred to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for the appeal to be considered.

Social Welfare Benefits

196. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of money paid by her in rent supplement in the years 2009 and 2010; the projected spend for the year 2011 and a breakdown of the spend according to local authority. [10547/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A breakdown of expenditure on rent supplement by local authority is not available. The total expenditure on rent supplement was €511 million in 2009 and €516m in 2010. The Revised Estimates Volume have provided for expenditure of €465m for 2011.

Departmental Schemes

197. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Social Protection if persons with disabilities in receipt of disability allowance and persons in receipt of lone parents allowance will be eligible to seek employment in the Tús scheme. [10565/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The then Minister for Finance announced the introduction of a community work placement initiative for up to 5,000 persons in his Budget statement to Dáil Éireann on 7 December 2010. Work on developing the necessary implementation structures has been underway since then. The aim of Tús is to provide short-term, quality work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. Some €30 million has been provided in the Department's Estimates in 2011 to fund the roll-out of the initiative.

Participants will, in the first instance, be identified by the Department of Social Protection by applying the following conditions:

- A person must be unemployed and in receipt of a jobseeker's payment for at least 12 months, and
- Currently be in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, and
- Be fully unemployed.

The purpose of the new scheme is to focus on those people who are long-term unemployed. For this reason, eligibility is at present confined to those on the Live Register for 12 months and in receipt of jobseeker's allowance. These provisions are to ensure a targeted approach to those currently affected by long-term unemployment.

People in receipt of a disability allowance or one parent family payment have access to a range of other supports such as family income supplement, back to work enterprise allowance, back to education allowance and earnings disregards. There are also supports available from FÁS for people with disabilities wishing to access the labour market.

Community Employment Schemes

198. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) cannot be accepted on a community employment scheme. [10573/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned should contact their local office of FÁS to verify the reasons that that they are ineligible to participate in the community employment programme. The eligible criteria are published by FÁS and are available locally. As Minister for Social Protection I do not have a role in determining the eligibility of individual cases in regard to the operation of CE. The administration of individual cases and the determination of eligibility is the responsibility of FÁS as part of its responsibility under the Labour Services Act 1987 as amended by Part 3 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2010.

Social Welfare Appeals

199. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an appeal of a disability allowance application will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10581/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that, the appeal from the person concerned has been referred to an Appeals Officer who proposes to hold an oral hearing on 10 May 2011. The person concerned has been notified of the arrangements.

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

200. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a claim for supplementary welfare allowance will be expedited and approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny and if a separate application for the purpose of assistance with the purchase of special footwear will also be approved. [10625/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme an exceptional needs payment (ENP) may be made by the Health Service Executive (HSE) to help meet an essential, once-off cost which the applicant is unable to meet out of his/her own resources. There is no automatic entitlement to this payment. Each application is determined by the HSE based on the particular circumstances of the case. Eligible people would normally be in receipt of a social welfare or HSE payment. The HSE has advised that an application for assistance was made by the person concerned on 29 April 2011

A decision regarding the person's needs will be made by the local community welfare officer in the HSE in due course.

Question No. 201 withdrawn.

Expenditure Reviews

202. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by her under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by her or independently; when she expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10662/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Programme of Financial Support for Ireland will be monitored through quantitative performance criteria and structural benchmarks. There are quarterly reviews of the arrangement with the EU/ECB and IMF. The reviews will assess progress in implementing the programme and reach understandings on any additional measures that may be needed to achieve its objectives.

My Department provides financial data on expenditure and Social Insurance Fund income to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on a monthly basis. This is incorporated in the overall monthly report on adherence to budget targets as provided for in the Memorandum of Understanding.

In addition, as provided for in the most recent Memorandum of Understanding with the EU/ECB/IMF, my Department will build on its recent studies on working age payments, child income support and disability allowance with a view to producing a comprehensive programme of reforms that can help better targeting social support to those on lower incomes, and ensure that work pays for welfare recipients. Consultation with stakeholders will take place. A progress report will be made by end-December 2011 and a programme of reforms will be submitted to Government at the end of the first quarter of 2012.

Finally, officials from my Department have met representatives of the EU, ECB and IMF on a number of occasions and briefed them on developments in the social protection area generally.

Social Welfare Appeals

203. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon. [10670/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Payment of illness benefit, to the person concerned, was disallowed by a Deciding Officer following an examination by a Medical Assessor of the Department who expressed the opinion that she was capable of work. An appeal was opened and in the context of that appeal her case was reviewed by a second Medical Assessor who also expressed the opinion that she was capable of work.

I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that, following receipt of the grounds of appeal from the person concerned, the relevant Departmental papers and comments of the Department have been sought. On receipt of its response the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer for consideration.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 204 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Benefits

205. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an

application for rent allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10679/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Health Service Executive has advised that the application for rent supplement has been refused as the person concerned has not provided documentary evidence from the relevant local housing authority to show she has been assessed as having a housing need.

Vóta na Roinne

206. D'fhiafraigh **Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Coimirce Sóisialaí cén t-eolas airgeadais a cuireadh ar fáil di don tréimhse 1/1/2011 go 31/3/2011, cén chaoi a bhfuil cúrsaí caiteachais agus ioncaim go dáta i gcomparáid leis na meastacháin a foilsíodh ag tús na bliana agus leis na próifílí caiteachais a réitíodh don bhliain, an gcuirfidh sí cóip den eolas a tugadh di ar fáil dom; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [10743/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Bhí mionteagasc ar na Meastacháin don bhliain 2011 san áireamh sa Mhionteagasc Aire a d'ullmhaigh an Roinn dom ar mo cheapadh im' Aire Coimirce Sóisialaí. Tá an mionteagasc sin ar fáil ar shuíomh Gréasáin na Roinne.

Foilsíonn an Roinn Airgeadais anailís mhíosúil ar an nGlanchaiteachas Vótáilte de réir Vót-Ghrúpa. Mí Aibreáin atá faoi chaibidil san anailís is déanaí agus taispeánann sé go raibh feidhmíocht i gcomparáid le próifíl i gcás mo Vóta-sa €48 milliún (nó 1.1%) faoi phróifíl. Tá na sonraí sin ar fáil ar shuíomh Gréasáin na Roinne Airgeadais.

Employment Support Services

207. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress made with the revised pilot employment action programme that was been rolled out during the tenure in office of the previous Minister, the number of people contacted, the number who turned up for interview, the number referred for the Tús scheme and the number who have had payments ceased or suspended and any other relevant information; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10745/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The then Minister for Finance announced the introduction of a community work placement initiative for up to 5,000 persons in his Budget statement to Dáil Éireann on the 7th December 2010. The initiative, known as Tús, was launched on the 21st December 2010 and work on developing the necessary implementation structures has been underway since then. The aim of Tús is to provide short-term, quality work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. Some €30 million has been provided in the Department's Estimates in 2011 to fund the roll-out of the initiative.

Following the launch, the Department conducted two trials to develop the delivery of Tús. One trial was based in the Coolock area of Dublin City with the other based in Mullingar, County Westmeath. A total of 119 persons were randomly selected from the live register and offered the opportunity to participate. The results of both trials have been evaluated and the results have informed the development of the initiative.

The preliminary results of both trials are summarised in the table.

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

TABLE

	Coolock local office		Mullingar local office	
		%		%
Number of person invited	59	100	60	100
Initial replies received	49	83	51	85
Failed to reply/suspended	10	17	9	15
Signed off live register	1	—	0	—
Of those who replied:				
Expressed interest	41	69	44	73
Not interested	8	14	7	12
Interested after suspension	9	15	9	15
Of those referred to the Local Development Company/Partnership				
Total Referred	50	100	53	100
Expressed interest	50	100	46	86
Not interested in interview	0	0	7	14
Called to interview/meeting	50	100	46	100
Attended	50	100	33	75
Did not attend	0	0	13	25
Suitable for placement	40	80	18	58
Not suitable for placement	10	20	15	42

Arrangements are being made to offer work opportunities for those suitable in the coming weeks.

Promotion of Tús to potential work placement providers has been underway for some weeks as part of a process of identifying suitable work placements and local development companies are currently recruiting supervisory staff. The random selection of participants by the Department will commence in the coming weeks as the necessary arrangements become operational at local development company level.

An Caighdeán Oifigiúil

208. D'fhiafraigh **Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Turasóireachta, Cultúir agus Spóirt cén dul chun cinn atá déanta ag an gCoiste Athbhreithnithe ar an gCaighdeán Oifigiúil a bhunaigh an Rialtas anuraidh, an mbeidh an obair críochnaithe faoi lár na bliana seo mar a bhí beartaithe; an ndeimhneoidh sí go mbeidh aon eagrán nua den Chaighdeán atá le foilsiú amach anseo bunaithe ar shaothar críochnaithe an Choiste Athbhreithnithe; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10351/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Ag an bpointe seo, tá an próiseas athbhreithnithe dá dtagraíonn an Teachta dó ag teacht chun críche. Comhairlítear dom go ndearnadh 5 cinn de thréimhsí comhairliúcháin a reáchtáil agus gur thapaigh an pobal an deis le haighneachtaí a chur isteach ar na moltaí éagsúla. Tuigim go bhfuil i gceist go mbeidh dhá cruinniú eile den Choiste Stiúrtha ann agus go bhfuiltear ag súil leis go gcuirfear bailchríoch ar a gcuid oibre an mhí seo chugainn.

Mar a thuigfidh an Teachta, beidh sé mar ghnó don Rialtas cinneadh a dhéanamh i dtráth cuí maidir le Caighdeán Oifigiúil uasdátaithe a fhoilsiú.

Natural Heritage Areas

209. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport when special areas of conservation and natural heritage area appeals due in the Connemara area will be heard and decided (details supplied); and when a decision will issue. [10353/11]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I understand that the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board is in the process of scheduling the appeal hearing in relation to the second case referred to by the Deputy in the "details supplied". A decision will be made by my Department shortly on the appeal in the first case referred to, which is at the informal stage of the process.

Appointments to State Bodies

210. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport if he will consider a representative of a group (details supplied) to be a member of his newly established Peatland Council in view of the fact that currently there is no representative of domestic turf cutter. [10386/11]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): There are 139 raised bogs designated for protection within Special Areas of Conservation or Natural Heritage Areas. The Deputy will appreciate it would not be possible to include representation from interested parties on each of these bogs within the Peatlands Council. I have endeavoured to ensure national representation for turf cutters through the participation of the Irish Farmers Association, the Turf Cutters and Contractors Association and Irish Rural Link.

The input of groups such as that mentioned in the Deputy's Question will play an important role in the work of the Council. It is open to the group referred to by the Deputy to input to the deliberations of the Council directly or through the organisations mentioned above.

In that regard, I understand that the Council is willing to meet with interested community or representative groups in order to hear their views, concerns and potential approaches to the long-term management of these sites.

The Council may be contacted at the following address: The Secretary, Peatlands Council, 7 Ely Place, Dublin 2, by e-mail at peatlandscouncil@environ.ie or by phone at 01 8883207.

Proposed Legislation

211. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport his plans to initiate legislation to ban the importation of alien plants and potentially invasive species which pose a threat to inland fisheries and marine life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10525/11]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Under the Wildlife Acts, it is against the law to release any species of wild animal, including wild birds, with the intention of establishing a new wild population, unless under a licence. In addition, the planting or growing in a wild state of any species of flora is prohibited without a licence.

However, the spread of invasive species continues to be threat to biodiversity. As well as threatening native wildlife and flora, invasive species can have seriously detrimental effects on a number of sectors including agriculture, forestry angling and tourism. It is my Department's intention, therefore, to include enhanced provisions in the forthcoming Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations which will provide for appropriate regulatory measures to be taken to control

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movement, sale, possession and dispersal of ecologically harmful and invasive species of plants and animals in Ireland.

Planning Issues

212. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport if he will provide guidance on an issue (details supplied) regarding a quarry extension. [10529/11]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Issues in relation to the operation of the planning system are a matter for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Commemorative Events

213. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the date and venue for the Famine commemoration organised by the national famine commemoration committee which is normally held in the second or third week in May; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10624/11]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The National Famine Commemoration Committee was appointed for a second term of office in February of this year and has a broad role in terms of serving, on behalf of the Government, to generate ideas and to make recommendations regarding appropriate arrangements for the annual commemoration of the Great Famine and related events.

While the National Famine Commemoration is normally held in mid May of each year, the 2011 will take place at a later date than this in 2011. I can confirm to the Deputy that the National Famine Commemoration Committee, which I now chair, will meet during this month with a view to finalising the date and venue for the 2011 event and following that meeting, I envisage that I will be in a position to announce the date and venue of the 2011 event.

Departmental Schemes

214. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport the position regarding the sale of bogland in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim; and when it is envisaged that this person will receive payment for their bogland. [10672/11]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): In May 2010, the voluntary bog purchase scheme was closed to new applicants. However, there are a number of applications still on-hand.

In general, priority under the scheme is being given to applications pertaining to those 31 raised bog Special Areas of Conservation where turf cutting has already ended. The site in question is not within a Special Area of Conservation and it is not prioritised for payment.

My Department will be writing to existing applicants under the voluntary purchase scheme to outline their options in light of the availability of alternative compensation arrangements.

Íocaíochtaí Deontas

215. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Sport Turasóireachta, Cultúir agus Spóirt an bhfuil teorainn ama ghinearálta leagtha síos faoinar gá gach obair a bheith críochnaithe le bheith cáilithe le haghaidh íocaíochta deontais a ceadaíodh faoi Achtanna na dTithe (Gaeltacht), 1929 — 2001; an bhfuil sí sásta eisceacht a dhéanamh in aon chás; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10741/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Mar is eol don Teachta, tá an Scéim Tithíochta faoi Achtanna na dTithe (Gaeltachta) 1929–2001 ar fionraí anois ó mhí Aibreáin 2009. É sin ráite, nuair a cheadaítear deontas, tugtar tréimhse don deontaí chun an obair a dhéanamh. Tugtar bliain don deontaí chun oibreacha feabhsúcháin a dhéanamh agus dhá bhliain chun teach nua a thógáil.

Tá roinnt deontas atá ceadaithe ach nach bhfuil íoctha ag mo Roinn ag an bpointe seo. Tuigtear dom go mbeidh an chuid is mó de na cásanna sin críochnaithe agus íoctha roimh dheireadh na bliana seo.

Comhairlítear dom nach féidir síneadh ama a thabhairt ná eisceacht a dhéanamh in aon chás. Mura mbíonn an obair déanta faoin spriocdháta, is é nós mo Roinne-se ná an deontas, nó pé fuílleach atá fágtha ag an am, a chur ar ceal.

Expenditure Reviews

216. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10664/11]

Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): While my Department is not required to produce specific assessments, reviews or reports of the nature referred to by the Deputy under the terms of the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support, I can confirm that it will be engaging in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure to be carried out under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This will involve the review of expenditure areas in my Department, to be carried out in-house, and the preparation of reports over the period to end-July. I understand that the overall Review is expected to be completed next September.

Telecommunications Services

217. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will maximise the revenue to the State through an analogue spectrum auction in the context of the recent comments on this matter in the McCarthy report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10244/11]

218. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources following the McCarthy Report's investigation into all aspects of Irish spectrum licensing and availability, if he will produce plans to maximise revenue to the State by any further measures whether a spectrum auction or otherwise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10245/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 218 together.

The management of the radio spectrum is a statutory function of ComReg under the Communications Regulations Act 2002. In accordance with this function and with its obligations under EU law, ComReg designs and manages the spectrum assignment process bearing in mind its overarching objective of promoting competition in the market and protecting the interests of consumers.

ComReg has recently engaged in consultations on the proposed assignment of spectrum in the 800/900 MHz and 1800 MHz by means of a competitive auction. Based on expert indepen-

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dent advice, it has set a reserve price for the spectrum at a level that reflects the market value of the spectrum and has set a cap on the amount of spectrum that any one operator may bid for, in order to allow new operators to bid for the spectrum and thus increase the level of competition in the market. As the McCarthy Report states, the policy issues surrounding the granting of such licences, permits or rights extend, in some cases, beyond the narrow one of realising maximum market value. In this case, the opening up of the market to new operators resulting in more competitive prices and choice of services for the consumer is of paramount importance in meeting ComReg's overarching objective.

ComReg is independent in the exercise of this spectrum management function and I await the outcome of its deliberations in relation to this matter.

219. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the process involved in implementing a new national broadband scheme for areas outside the current scheme; the stage the process is currently at; the length of time the process will take to complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10263/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): It continues to be a priority of the Government that there will be broadband coverage across the entire country. I am aware that despite public and private investment, there continues to be a small percentage of premises throughout the country that are not currently 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 have earlier this week formally launched a Rural Broadband Scheme. This scheme aims to identify the remaining individual premises in rural Ireland, outside of the NBS areas that are unable to obtain a broadband service and to provide a basic broadband service to those premises, where requested. Information in relation to acceptance of applications and the process of qualification under the scheme is available on my Department's website (www.dcenr.ie), through contacting my Department on lo-call 1850 678100 and through a wide range of outlets associated with Regional and Local Authorities. Information on the Scheme has also been sent to all provincial newspapers.

220. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the availability of broadband in an area (details supplied). [10333/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): 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.

EU State Aid and competition rules govern how states can intervene in areas where there are existing service providers operating. Accordingly, the NBS is prohibited from providing a

service in served areas where to do so would give rise to an unacceptable level of market distortion.

I am pleased to say that broadband is now available under the NBS in all designated Electoral Divisions (EDs) in the NBS Coverage Area, including the designated EDs in the Longford Westmeath 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 are not currently 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 have earlier this week formally launched a Rural Broadband Scheme. This scheme aims to identify the remaining individual premises in rural Ireland, outside of the NBS areas that are unable to obtain a broadband service and to provide a basic broadband service to those premises, where requested.

Information in relation to acceptance of applications and the process of qualification under the scheme is available on my Department's website (www.dcenr.ie), through contacting my Department on lo-call 1850 678100 and through a wide range of outlets associated with Regional and Local Authorities. Information on the Scheme has also been sent to all provincial newspapers.

Departmental Reviews

221. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide the details of all reviews instigated by him and his Ministers of State since assuming office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10363/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Programme for Government/NewERA is a standing item at management meetings in my Department and 2011 Business Plans reflect this Programme.

Together with my colleague, Minister of State, Fergus O'Dowd, T.D., I am working to ensure delivery on the commitments of the Programme which fall within the remit of the Department and keep progress under regular review.

Recovery of Redundant Resources

222. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will examine the viability of a proposal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10561/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I would agree with the Deputy that if valuable recoverable copper or other material is lying dormant around the coastline every effort should be made to recover such material. If the material in question is the property of private companies, it would be a matter for those companies to seek its recovery and disposal.

While the recovery and disposal of redundant copper lines lying offshore or elsewhere is not an issue in which my Department has a function, I have asked my officials to contact the Deputy with a view to establishing who the owners of the material are in order that the potential value and recovery of the material might be considered.

Post Office Network

223. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he plans to close further post offices or if he is committed to maintaining the offices and services as they are at present. [10602/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Matters relating to the post office network, including post office closures, are an operational matter for the management and Board of An Post and one in which I have no statutory function.

Expenditure Reviews

224. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10652/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Under the terms of the EU/IMF programme the Government is committed to undertake an independent assessment of the efficiency of the electricity and gas sectors.

Arrangements are being put in place for the undertaking of this independent assessment in the context of the International Energy Agency's Country Review of Ireland later this year.

The assessment is timetabled to commence in Quarter 3 2011 with a view to a further strengthening of the regulatory and market reform programme for the energy sector by end Quarter 2 2012.

Caiteachas Ranna

225. **D'fhiafraigh an Teachta Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cumarsáide, Fuinnimh agus Acmhainní Nádúrtha cén t-eolas airgeadais a cuireadh ar fáil dó don tréimhse 1/1/2011 go 31/3/2011; cén chaoi a bhfuil cúrsaí caiteachais agus ioncaim go dáta i gcomparáid leis na meastacháin a foilsíodh ag tús na bliana agus leis na próifílí caiteachais a réitíodh don bhliain; an gcuirfidh sé cóip den eolas a tugadh dó ar fáil dom; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10744/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Seolfadh faisnéis airgeadais de chuid na Roinne agamsa don tréimhse 1/1/2011 go dtí 31/3/2011 chuig an Roinn Airgeadais. D'fhoilsigh an Roinn Airgeadais an Anailís go Deireadh Mharta 2011 den Ghlanchaiteachas Vótáilte do mo Roinnse mar a leanas:

	Próifíl Deireadh Mhárta (€m)	Táirgeacht Deireadh Mhárta (€m)	Aithreathas (€m)	Aithreathas (%)
Iomlán	54	40	-14	-25.7
Caiteachas Reatha	27	22	-5	-17.0
Caipeatal	27	18	-9	-34.3

Ar na mhórchuid éiríonn na haithreathais as cúrsaí uainiúcháin agus as caiteachas a bhí níos moille ná mar leagadh amach sna próifílí i leith scéimeanna áirithe a sholáthraíonn cistí ar

bhonn an éilimh. Meastar go bhfillfidh caiteachas mo Roinne-se ar an bpróifíl i gcaitheamh na bliana.

Departmental Contracts

226. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether a contract awarded recently by Bord na Móna (details supplied) was fully compliant with public procurement procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10746/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The procurement of services and goods by Bord na Mona is a commercial operational matter for the company and not one in which I have a function. It would be inappropriate for me or my Department to have an involvement in any tendering process leading to an award of contact by State bodies under my aegis.

Noise Pollution

227. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will outline the current law regarding noise as a public nuisance. [10202/11]

228. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will update the law regarding noise as public nuisance. [10203/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 and 228 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 273 of 5 April 2011 which sets out the current position on this matter.

Leader Programme

229. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if grant aid from Leader funds will be made available to a person (details supplied) to complete their studies. [10257/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Axes 3 and 4(LEADER) of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 have total funding of €427m available to be allocated to qualifying projects up to the end of 2013. One of the objectives of the RDP is to equip rural dwellers and communities with the appropriate range of skills and training to derive maximum social and economic benefit from the initiatives available under the Axes. Support in this regard is provided for in the Training and Information measure which has an overall programme allocation of €29.45m.

The types of support that may be provided under this measure include the provision of flexible learning opportunities in new technology for women, young people and minority groups in particular; the development of training facilities in rural areas both fixed and mobile; facilitation of distant learning through the use of new technologies and developing the capacity of rural dwellers to utilise ICT including the internet and other public/commercial electronic applications. However, the regulatory framework provides that support under this measure shall not include courses of instruction or training which form part of normal education programmes or systems at secondary or higher levels. Support for mainstream vocational education and training programmes specifically geared to the general labour market are the remit of the European Social Fund (ESF). Training available under the RDP is targeted towards responding

[Deputy Phil Hogan.]

only to local community niche needs specific to the measures contained in the programme, e.g. learning to utilise ICT to enhance a rural tourism project. In this context the course outlined in the question would not be eligible for support under the Rural Development Programme.

230. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of Leader applications under consideration by him because the proposed grant was more than €150,000; the date each request for approval was received by him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10354/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): To date 53 such applications have been received by my Department, 40 of which have received approval to proceed. A full and detailed assessment of each of these projects is required and my Department is awaiting clarifications in relation to two projects. A further four were returned for re-consideration to the relevant Local Action Group as the projects as proposed could not be approved. The assessment of the seven remaining projects is nearing completion following receipt of necessary clarifications from the relevant groups and these applications were received on the following dates:

22 December 2010

25 January 2011

28 February 2011 (two applications)

14 March 2011

31 March 2011

4 May 2011

Community Development

231. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the plans he has for the RAPID programme; if it is intended to develop the programme further; when the next meeting of the national monitoring committee will take place; if he will meet all the chairs, community representatives on the area implementation teams and the RAPID co-ordinators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10357/11]

232. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of RAPID area implementation teams he has met since assuming office and the details of the plans she has to meet AITs in the coming two months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10358/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Question Nos. 231 and 232 together.

Responsibility for the RAPID programme transferred to my Department on 1 May 2011. The RAPID Programme aims to ensure that priority attention is given to tackling the spatial concentration of poverty and social exclusion within designated RAPID areas nationally. It is a matter for individual Departments to report on the provision of funding and progress on delivery with regard to projects under their responsibility in the different RAPID areas.

My Department administers the RAPID Leverage Schemes, which seek to support small-scale projects identified locally by Area Implementation Teams in each of the RAPID areas. These schemes have been co-funded by the relevant agencies and projects have focused on

estate enhancement, graffiti removal, traffic calming, community closed-circuit television, health and sports facilities and the provision of playgroups.

The RAPID Programme faces significant challenges, given that the budget for the RAPID Leverage Schemes has reduced from an out-turn of €9 million in 2009 to a capital allocation of €2.5 million in 2011. In order to ensure the continued relevance of RAPID, my Department is assessing the case for changing the policy direction of the programme, with a greater focus, inter alia, on the coordination and local consultation roles of the programme, and enhancing the opportunities for input by residents in disadvantaged areas. As part of these deliberations, consultations with the National Monitoring Committee as well as the Chairs and Coordinators of the Area Implementation Teams will take place in due course.

Forbairt Pobail

233. D'fhiafraigh **Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Comhshaoil, Gnóthaí Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil cén fáth a bhfuil an t-iniúchadh atá ar bun ag Pobal ar MFG ag tógáil chomh fada ar siúl ó Eanáir 2010, agus an féidir léi a rá cén uair a bheidh bailchríoch air; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10361/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Beidh a fhios ag an Teachta go ndearna Pobal, a riarann an Clár Forbartha Áitiúil agus Pobail ar son mo Roinnse, iniúchadh ar Mheitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta Teo (MFG) i mí Eanáir 2010. Cé gur cuireadh na fionnachtana agus na moltaí a ghabhann leo in iúl do MFG i mí an Mheithimh 2010, tá aghaidh le tabhairt fós ag an gcomhlacht sin ar chuid de na ceisteanna a n-éiríonn sa tuarascáil.

Tá an comhlacht agus Pobal ag comhoibiú chun teacht ar réiteach ar na ceisteanna atá idir chamáin agus ina leith, tá sé socraithe go n-ainmneofar Feidhmeannach Neamhspleach do MFG chug aghaidh a thabhairt ar na ceisteanna atá idir chamáin agus chun teacht ar mheicníochtaí oiriúnacha chun iad a réiteach. Beidh tuarascáil an Fheidhmeannaigh Neamhspleach ag díriú freisin ar inniúlacht MFG cistí a dháilleadh ar an gcomhlacht trí Phobal a bhainistiú.

Ainmneofar an Feidhmeannach Neamhspleach trí phróiseas tairisceana iomaíoch. Táthar ag súil go mbeidh gcríoch leis an bpróiseas seo i rith na míosa seo chugainn agus go mbainfidh tréimhse trí mhí leis an gceapachán. Táthar ag súil go gcabhróidh an tuarascáil seo le Pobail moltaí a dhéanamh do mo Roinnse i leith airgeadú amach anseo agus i leith socruithe conarthacha le MFG. Tabharfaidh mé breis eolais don Teachta ar an ábhar seo ag an am sin.

Social Welfare Payments

234. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if any inspections of properties have taken place at a location (details supplied in Dublin 8) in terms of their habitability. [10569/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): According to the Department's computer records, rent supplement is payable in respect of a number of tenancies at the location in question.

Planning Issues

235. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to change the regulation regarding the erection of mobile phone masts, including the placing of these masts close to public buildings such as schools; and the output levels from these structures. [10681/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): In general, planning permission must be obtained for the erection of an antenna support structure or mast. A decision on a planning application is, of course, a matter for the relevant planning authority or An Bórd Pleanála on appeal.

Under Article 6 and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, certain classes of development carried out by a statutory undertaker authorised to provide a telecommunications service are, subject to specified conditions, exempted development from the requirement to obtain planning permission. These include the attachment of additional antennae to an existing antennae support structure; the erection of an antennae support structure in place of an existing antennae support structure; and the attachment of antennae to certain existing structures, such as lamp posts, flag poles, CCTV poles, electricity pylons and certain public or commercial buildings (other than education facilities and childcare facilities or hospitals).

The above exemptions are conditional, among other things, on the field strength of the non-ionising radiation emissions from the site not exceeding the limits specified by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg).

My Department published Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Telecommunication Antennae and Support Structures in 1996. The Guidelines are intended to assist planning authorities, An Bórd Pleanála, the licensed providers of mobile telecommunications services and the public by providing guidance on dealing with these developments within the planning system.

The Guidelines set out a locational hierarchy in relation to the siting of radio masts and advise that free-standing masts should only be located within or in the immediate surrounds of smaller towns or villages as a last resort. If such a location should become necessary, the masts and antennae should be designed and adapted for specific location. In the vicinity of large towns and in city suburbs, operators should endeavour to locate masts and antennae in industrial estates or in industrial zoned land. The Guidelines further advise that, only as a last resort, and if all the alternatives are unavailable or unsuitable, should free-standing masts be located in residential areas or beside schools. Under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, planning authorities are required to have regard to any Ministerial Guidelines in the performance of their functions. The issue of the potential health effects of mobile phone masts was the subject of an Expert Group Report commissioned by the Government and published in March 2007. This Report, entitled "Health Effects of Electromagnetic Fields", is available for download on my Department's website (*www.environ.ie*). The Expert Group reported that the majority scientific opinion to date is that no adverse short or long term effects have been demonstrated from exposure to electromagnetic fields at levels below the limits recommended by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). However, a minority group of scientists believe otherwise and extensive international research on the issue continues to be coordinated through bodies such as the World Health Organisation.

My Department's current advice to those living in close proximity to mobile masts or base stations, based on the conclusions of the Expert Group, is that there is no scientific basis or evidence of adverse health effects in children or adults as a result of exposure to electromagnetic fields below ICNIRP levels. This applies irrespective of the location of the mobile phone mast.

I have no current plans to amend the Regulations in this matter.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

236. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local

Government the grant aid or financial assistance available to households who have to upgrade their septic tank and sewerage treatment systems. [10912/11]

255. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the consideration he is giving to the licensing of septic tanks relating to one off houses in the countryside and when he proposes to proceed in this matter; if he is considering through any government or local government agency providing house holders of limited means grant aid towards the cost of upgrading any waste water treatment units. [10570/11]

256. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the Environmental Protection Agency will consider undertaking a review of the 2010 Code of Practice: Waste water Treatment Systems for Single Houses before the end of 2011; if the EPA were to conduct a review, if this would include a recommendation of treatment systems for specific soil types>90 referred to in section 6.5 in the code rather than the current recommendation that such sites may be deemed suitable for treatment system discharging to surface water in accordance with a Water Pollution Act licence. [10571/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236, 255 and 256 together.

In October 2009, the European Court of Justice ruled that Ireland failed to adopt the necessary legislation to comply with Articles 4 and 8 of Council Directive 75/442/EEC, known as the Waste Directive, regarding domestic waste waters disposed of in the countryside through septic tanks and other individual waste water treatment systems. I expect to announce the details of proposed legislation to address the judgment, following Government consideration of the matter.

The introduction of a grants scheme for any purpose must be managed within current budgetary constraints. Insofar as support for the upgrading of septic tanks is concerned, this matter is being considered by my Department in the context of developing the overall response to the ECJ judgment.

The question of carrying out a review of the Environmental Protection Agency's Code of Practice: Waste Water Treatment Systems Serving Single Houses is a matter for the Agency. The Agency is authorised under Section 76 of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Act, 1992 (as amended), to prepare and publish codes of practice for the purpose of providing guidance with respect to compliance with any enactment or otherwise, for the purposes of environmental protection. The Code stipulates that site suitability assessors should carry out all assessments in accordance with the guidance provided in the Code and that the site suitability assessment methodology set out in the Code should be used by planning authorities to satisfy the requirements of Article 22(c) of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2006. The EPA has indicated that the Code of Practice will be subject to ongoing review with regard to emerging on-site wastewater treatment system technologies. However, the frequency and nature of such reviews are matters for the EPA.

It should be noted that the Code of Practice provides that where a site is deemed unsuitable for discharge to ground, any alternative options may be discussed with the relevant planning authority. The Code of Practice also provides that innovative products and technologies may be used in Ireland if they have the appropriate certification, are fit for purpose in the conditions in which they are used and meet the performance requirements of the Code.

Finally, I understand that the EPA is funding a research project regarding the use of on-site wastewater treatment systems in low permeability soils and subsoils. This project may contribute solutions to the difficulties posed by sites with difficult percolation conditions.

Housing Aid for the Elderly

237. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the 2011 housing aid for older people, housing adaption grants and mobility aid grants scheme in Louth County Council was suspended on 1 April 2011; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that this is creating great hardship for elderly, ill and disabled people; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact there is a huge demand for these schemes and due to a decrease in financial support the suspension of the schemes will result in a deterioration of their health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10193/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): My Department's involvement with the Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability relates primarily to the recoupment of a proportion of local authority expenditure on the payment of individual grants. The grant schemes are funded by 80% recoupment available from my Department together with a 20% contribution from the resources of the local authority. The detailed administration of the schemes, including the assessment, approval of applications and the level of funding to be directed to each of the various grant measures is the responsibility of the relevant local authority.

To assess the overall level of demand for grant assistance under the suite of grants my Department requested local authorities to submit details of their funding requirements for 2011, broken down into contractual commitments in respect of works underway, value of applications currently on hand and value of anticipated applications in 2011, with a view to determining the allocations for this year as soon as possible after the publication of the 2011 Revised Estimates for Public Services.

Exchequer allocations totalling almost €64m were notified to local authorities under the grant schemes on 17 February 2011, giving a combined allocation of almost €79.5m. The allocation to Louth County Council for 2011 is €1.08m. This compares to an exchequer allocation in 2010 of €2.16m of which €2.14m was drawn down by year end, relating to the payment of 244 grants. So far, Louth County Council has not drawn down any of the 2011 allocation.

Local Authority Staff

238. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of persons employed in local authorities in County Louth in each of the years 2007 to 2010 and to date in 2011. [10194/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The numbers of Whole-Time Equivalent staff employed in Local Authorities in County Louth in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 to date, are set out in the table.

Local Authorities in County Louth	Permanent	Temporary	Total
December 2007	681	60	741
December 2008	710	24	734
December 2009	679	13	692
December 2010	667	7	674
March 2011	662	9	671

Housing Grants

239. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the person who has final responsibility for the decision of who will receive a home improvement grant for the replacement of windows, which are no longer fit for purpose, awarded by local authorities. [10206/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): My Department's involvement with the suite of Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability relates primarily to the recoupment of a proportion of local authority expenditure on the payment of individual grants. The grant schemes, introduced in November 2007, are funded by 80% recoupment available from my Department together with a 20% contribution from the resources of the local authority.

Three separate schemes are available. The housing adaptation grant for people with a disability assists people with a disability to have necessary adaptations, repairs or improvement works carried out in order to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. Eligible works include the provision of access ramps, stair lifts, accessible toilet and shower facilities, wheelchair access and extensions. The effective maximum grant under the scheme is €30,000, which may cover up to 95% of the approved cost of works for applicants, including those in full-time employment, who have gross household incomes of up to €30,000 per annum, tapering to 30% for those with incomes of €54,001 to €65,000.

The mobility aids grant scheme is available to fast track grants of up to €6,000 to cover a basic suite of works to address the mobility problems of a member of a household. Qualifying works include the provision of stair lifts, level access showers, access ramps, grab rails and some minor adaptation works to the fabric of the house such as adaptation of downstairs room/closet to provide sanitary facilities etc. The effective maximum grant available is €6,000 and may cover 100% of the cost of works subject to a maximum annual household income threshold of €30,000.

The housing aid for older people scheme provides grants of up to €10,500 to assist older people living in poor housing conditions to have necessary repairs or improvements carried out. Grant eligible works include structural repairs or improvements, re-wiring, repairs to or replacement of windows and doors, provision of water supply and sanitary facilities, provision of heating, cleaning, painting etc. Maximum grant available is €10,500 which may cover up to 100% of the costs of works for applicants with gross annual household incomes of less than €30,000, tapering to 30% for those with incomes of €54,001 to €65,000.

Matters such as the assessment and approval of individual applications, decisions on the eligibility of particular works, fixtures or fittings for grant assistance, and the payment of grants to householders, are the responsibility of the relevant local authority.

Water Services

240. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of water services capital contracts in existence in 1997; and the number of water services capital contracts each year between 1997 and 2011. [10297/11]

241. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of water services capital projects completed in 1997; and the number of water service's capital projects completed each year between 1997 and 2010. [10298/11]

242. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will detail the funding provided for water conservation projects in 1997; and the funding provided for such projects each year between 1997 and 2011. [10299/11]

268. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the funding provided for water services infrastructure in 1997 and the funding provided each year between 1997 and 2011. [10296/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Question Nos. 240 to 242, inclusive, and 268 together.

Almost €6 billion in Exchequer funding has been invested in water services infrastructure between 1997 and 2010. The expenditure is administered through the Water Services Investment Programme and the Rural Water Programme. The Water Services Investment Programme is a multi-annual investment plan for the provision of major water and sewerage schemes. The first rolling 3-year Water Services Investment Programme was launched in July 2000 to meet identified water services needs. The water services investment programme 2010-2012 is the current such plan, and is available in the Oireachtas library along with previous plans.

Responsibility for the administration of the Rural Water Programme, which includes group water schemes and small public water and sewerage schemes, has been devolved to local authorities since 1997. The selection and approval of individual schemes for advancement and funding under the programme, within the overall priorities set by my Department and subject to the block grant allocation provided, is therefore a matter for the local authorities.

Total Exchequer expenditure on Water Services capital works in the years 1997 to 2010 is outlined in the following table:

Year	Total Expenditure	Water Services Investment Programme	Rural Water Programme
	€m	€m	€m
1997	206.6	181.0	25.6
1998	235.0	205.7	29.3
1999	360.0	317.0	43.0
2000	425.3	380.3	45.0
2001	506.6	453.1	53.5
2002	492.5	435.3	57.2
2003	449.6	374.8	74.8
2004	400.0	314.1	85.9
2005	417.9	298.9	119.0
2006	465.0	335.0	130.0
2007	496.7	366.7	130.0
2008	496.4	391.4	105.0
2009	512.0	412.0	100.0
2010	495.0	407.0	88.0
Total 1997-2010	5,958.6	4,872.4	1,086.3

Expenditure under the Water Services Investment Programme includes spending on water conservation. Following the launch of the national water conservation programme in 2002,

some €168m was spent between 2003 and 2010 on water conservation and annual spending on this measure in these years is outlined in the table.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
€m	11.3	11.8	11.8	16.8	20.8	30.7	27.2	37.7	168.1

As the rural water programme is devolved to local authorities, information on the activity in terms of contracts underway or projects completed in any year is available from the individual local authorities. The water services investment programme 2010-2012 outlines the number of major contracts which it is anticipated will commence in the period together with details of schemes in planning. Schemes can comprise a series of contracts, for example for treatment plants and networks. Statistics on activity under the Water Services Investment Programme from 1997 to 2009 generally relate to schemes, while data set out in the table in relation to the number of projects completed in 2010 relates to contracts.

Completion Year	Wastewater	Water Supply	Total
1997	13	11	24
1998	22	16	38
1999	13	18	31
2000	62	40	102
2001	39	41	80
2002	30	19	49
2003	27	22	49
2004	13	12	25
2005	15	10	25
2006	11	10	21
2007	21	23	44
2008	23	18	41
2009	28	14	42
2010 (contracts)	39	33	72
Total 1997-2010	356	287	643

Community Development

243. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has received correspondence recently from the south west inner city RAPID area implementation team; if he has replied to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10359/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Responsibility for this area transferred to my Department on 1 May 2011. I have not received any recent correspondence from the South West Inner City RAPID Area Implementation Team.

Water Services

244. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding an application (details supplied) for funding under the service land initiative programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10418/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Ballymore Eustace Wastewater Treatment Plant was approved for funding under the Serviced Land Initiative of my Department's Water Services Investment Programme. Work on schemes under this Initiative must be completed, and funding drawdown applications received, by the end of 2012.

The first annual review of the main Water Services Investment Programme is currently underway. Kildare County Council has submitted an application to my Department to have the Ballymore Eustace scheme transferred to the Programme under the review mechanism, which is being carried out using strictly defined criteria. The council's application is under examination, together with review applications from all water services authorities, and a decision will be made in the near future.

Community Development

245. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will transfer responsibility for local development companies-partnerships to the city-county development boards which also have a social inclusion aspect to them. [10430/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Community related functions of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs transferred to my Department on 1 May 2011. The former Department had, over the past number of years, pursued a process of cohesion of local delivery structures in order to simplify and enhance the effectiveness of the delivery of a range of local development programmes.

This process has resulted in the realignment of local delivery structures and has reduced the overall number of local development bodies from 94 to 52. These comprise 15 Local Development Companies (LDCs) in urban areas and 37 in rural areas.

The current phase of this work, which is well advanced, is focused on integrating some 160 Community Development Projects across the country with the 52 LDCs. This process has been the subject of extensive engagement with the various stakeholders and is due to be completed in the coming months.

While I have no immediate plans to transfer responsibility for the Local Development Companies to the City/County Development Boards, my Department will continue to work towards identifying further efficiencies to bring about more effective delivery of services and supports for citizens at a local level. This will include the consideration of options for the greater alignment of local development arrangements and Local Government in accordance with the Programme for Government.

The City/County Development Boards (CDBs) already play a key role in endorsing the strategic plans of the Local Development Companies operating within their areas. This process facilitates and promotes a co-ordinated delivery of the services provided by the LDCs at local level, by ensuring complementarity between their individual plans and the CDB Strategy for the relevant county/city. It aims to avoid duplication of work by the local bodies concerned and allow CDBs to identify gaps in the work being carried out by the various local bodies, thereby helping to maximise the impact of programmes for local communities.

Private Rented Accommodation

246. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason a ruling by the Private Residential Tenancies Board (details supplied)

regarding a determination order has recommended Circuit Court proceedings when the PRTB states that its very formation was to replace the use of courts for such disputes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10509/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): I have no function in the operational matters of the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB), an independent statutory body established under the Residential Tenancies Act, 2004, and cannot therefore comment on the specifics of any individual case.

However, the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 makes provision for enforcement by the Courts of Determination Orders made by the PRTB. If the Board or a party mentioned in a Determination Order is satisfied that another party has failed to comply with one or more terms of that order the Board or the first mentioned party may make an application to the Circuit Court in accordance with section 124 of the Act.

Foreshore Licences

247. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 211 of 19 April 2011, when he expects a decision to be issued to the applicant of a foreshore licence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10511/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): As indicated in the reply to Question No. 211 of 19 April 2011, this application was referred to the Chief State Solicitor's Office for legal advice in February 2011 following a challenge to the State's ownership of the foreshore concerned; the applicant was advised of this referral at the time. The position is unchanged

Local Authority Funding

248. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to a letter of 8 March 2011 in which the former Minister of State with responsibility for housing and local services approved funding of €500,000 towards the enhancement of O'Connell Street, Sligo; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that the total estimated cost of the enhancement of O'Connell Street is €5,016,466, and when the balance of €3,216,822 which was sought by Sligo Borough Council for the enhancement of the street will be provided; the conditions, if any, the former Minister of State attached to the allocation of the €500,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10532/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): My Department is providing a capital allocation of €2 million to Sligo Borough Council in 2011 in respect of proposals for the regeneration of the Eastern Quadrant of Sligo. This includes a provision of €500,000 in respect of improvement works to facilitate the pedestrianisation of O'Connell Street.

My Department understands the Borough Council is at present preparing a programme of works in this regard, details of which will be submitted for consideration and approval. Any conditions attaching to the recoupment of the capital funding will be set out in the formal response to this submission.

Sligo Borough Council submitted a number of proposals under the Gateway Innovation Fund (GIF) in 2007, including a proposal for the enhancement of O'Connell Street. Funding decisions under the GIF were deferred in 2008 due to the prevailing budgetary conditions and no budgetary provision was made in respect of the GIF for 2011.

Departmental Funding

249. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the funding application status for Mullingar RAPID; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10551/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): In relation to the proposal to allocate funding for the Mullingar RAPID area, projects have been assessed and prioritised by Pobal, and these are currently being considered by my Department in the context of the reduced level of funding available in the current year, and also in the context of the review of expenditure that is being undertaken. Any decisions arising will be notified to all applicants as soon as possible.

250. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the funding application for a RAPID group (details supplied) in County Westmeath for the purpose of regeneration and closed circuit television; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10554/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Responsibility for this area transferred to my Department on 1 May 2011. I have not received an application from the RAPID group referred to in the Question under the Community CCTV Scheme.

Unfinished Housing Developments

251. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide this Deputy with a copy of the interim report on the advisory group on unfinished housing developments that was completed last February; if he will provide a copy of the submission received from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10557/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): The Unfinished Housing Developments Interim Report, published on 17 February 2011, is available to download from my Department's website at www.environ.ie. I received the final Report of the Advisory Group on Unfinished Housing Developments on 6 May 2011; I will consider its findings and recommendations as a matter of urgency and will bring proposed actions and recommendations to Government for approval.

I am not aware of the submission referred to in the Question.

Local Authority Housing

252. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the level of funding allocation for the regeneration project at Sligo Borough Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10566/11]

253. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the allocation of funding for the provision of local authority housing for Sligo County Council in 2011 and 2012. [10567/11]

254. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the allocation of funding for the provision of local authority housing for Sligo Borough Council in 2011 and 2012. [10568/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 to 254, inclusive, together.

The allocations notified to Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council under the various measures contained in my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme (SHIP) for 2011 are set out in the table. The allocations for next year will be determined in the light of the budgetary provision for the SHIP in 2012.

Measure	Sligo County Council	Sligo Borough Council
	€	€
Social Housing Supply	900,000	850,000
Capital Assistance Scheme	1,800,000	5,700,000
Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme	5,490,140	0
Improvement Works Programme	225,000	2,350,437*
Traveller Accommodation	500,000	
Rental Accommodation Scheme	1,726,249	

*includes €2,000,000 for the Regeneration Project.

Questions Nos. 255 and 256 answered with Question No. 236.

Dormant Accounts Fund

257. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will review an application in respect of a club (details supplied) in County Limerick for funding under the Dormant Accounts Fund; and the details of when this matter will be assessed. [10576/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Under the programme in question, I understand that an Area Implementation Team (AIT), which draws up a plan based on the particular needs of the area so that available funding can be targeted where it will do the most good in the community, has been established for the area in question. The inaugural meeting of the AIT took place on 15 April 2010.

The AIT includes representatives of the Department of Social Protection, the relevant local authority, An Garda Síochána, Youth Services, HSE, VEC and others. I understand that the community forum structure has been agreed, task groups have been formed and there is agreement on the role of agencies and on chairing of task groups. A Co-ordinator for the area is in place since January 2010, funded by the local authority.

As regards the proposal to allocate additional funding for the area in question from the Dormant Accounts Fund, I can confirm that eight projects have been prioritised by Pobal. These are currently being considered by my Department in the context of the reduced level of funding available to the Department in the current year, and also in the context of the review of expenditure that is being undertaken. Any decisions arising will be notified to all applicants as soon as possible.

Unfinished Housing Developments

258. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will ensure that all valuable finished and partially finished properties in so called ghost estates are adequately insured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10586/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): It is a matter for owners of unfinished housing developments to ensure that such properties in their possession within these developments are adequately insured. I have no role in the matter.

Dormant Accounts Fund

259. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm the costs borne specifically by the Exchequer, and not by the fund itself arising from the operation of the Dormant Accounts Fund since it inception; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10597/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): 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 February 2011, the transfers to the DAF have totalled some €589m, which includes interest earned of some €35m. Funds reclaimed in that period by account holders amounted to approximately €208m. On 1 May 2011, the functions relating to Dormant Accounts, previously administered by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, transferred to my Department.

A summary of the current status of the DAF is available on the website *www.pobail.ie* and I am arranging for a copy to be sent to the Deputy in the coming days. This provides a profile of the Fund showing yearly inflows, reclaims, disbursements, etc, from 2003 to the end of February 2011. Disbursements from the DA Fund are paid from the Votes of the relevant Departments which, in turn, are reimbursed from the Fund. Expenditure under the Fund is spread across some 10 Departments and Agencies.

Under the Government Accounting procedures, disbursements on dormant accounts measures are paid in the first instance "up front" from a Department's Vote in the same way as with any other spending programme. Therefore, Government Departments have to source funding for dormant accounts programmes from their Exchequer allocations. However, once expenditure takes place, either on administration of the measure, or by the project itself, it is reimbursed to the Exchequer from the Dormant Accounts Fund in accordance with the Dormant Accounts Acts, in the form of Appropriations-in-Aid payable through the relevant Department's Vote. In this way, the costs associated with dormant accounts measures are Exchequer neutral, though it should be noted that Government Departments cannot spend Appropriations-in-Aid directly themselves once they are reimbursed from the Fund. They are instead refunded to the central Exchequer.

Monies disbursed from the Fund increase Government debt levels as the money belongs to the account holder, who can reclaim it at any time, and not to the State. Consequently, every euro spent from the Fund is regarded in accounting terms as a potential Government liability.

260. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will report on the projected savings to the Exchequer in the event of the Dormant Accounts Board being abolished, as recommended in the report of the special group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10598/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (The McCarthy Report) recommended the discontinuation of Dormant Accounts Board (the

DAB), which has statutory functions relating to disbursements from the Dormant Accounts Fund. The Report stated that this would result in an annual saving to the Exchequer of €1.7m. It should be noted, however, that the majority of the administrative budget for DA is paid to Pobal, who administer my Department's and certain other Departments' DA Measures. The DAB receives only a small proportion of the overall administrative budget.

The annual expenses of the DAB for the year 2010 were €0.12m approximately. The 2010 figure compares with a corresponding figure of €0.21m for 2009 and €0.2m for 2008. Legislation is currently in preparation to dissolve the Dormant Accounts Board and introduce a revised disbursement process for Dormant Accounts Funding. The Bill is scheduled for publication in the current Dáil session.

261. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that the accounting procedures applicable to the Dormant Accounts Fund within both his own Department and within the Department of Finance are fully consistent with Part 6, section 41(*a*) of the Dormant Accounts Act 2001:

> 41.—(1) The moneys in the investment and disbursement account shall be applied by the Agency, on the direction of the Board, for the following purposes:
>
> (*a*) programmes or projects that are designed to assist the personal, educational and social development of persons who are economically, educationally or socially disadvantaged or persons with a disability (within the meaning of the Equal Status Act, 2000) and, in particular, programmes or projects that are designed to assist primary school students with learning difficulties;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10599/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): As regards the purposes for which dormant accounts funding may be spent, any measures approved for funding by the Government from the Dormant Accounts Fund fall under one of the three purposes listed in the Dormant Accounts Act 2001. I should add that expenditure by Departments from the Fund is subject to scrutiny by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the same way as other funding programmes.

262. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that the discretion of the Dormant Accounts Board has been applied consistently to investments and disbursements over the life of the Dormant Accounts Fund; if, over the remaining life of the board, he can confirm that moneys in the investment and disbursements account shall be applied on the direction of the Dormant Accounts Board, for as long as the board continues in existence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10600/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): As regards the discretion of the Dormant Accounts Board, I am satisfied that disbursements approved by the Board have been properly and fairly applied. However, the statutory powers of the Dormant Accounts Board were substantially diminished by the Dormant Accounts Act, 2005, and, as a consequence, since then the Board has not been involved in approving specific dormant accounts disbursements.

Nonetheless, I can assure the Deputy that the Board will continue to be required to comply with its statutory obligations under the Dormant Accounts Acts, and provision is being made

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in the legislation in preparation to ensure that the Board is fully accountable up until its dissolution.

Expenditure Reviews

263. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10657/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The information requested is set out in the following table:

Review	Undertaken by	Expected Completion Date
A review concerning financial reporting by the local government sector.	My Department.	End June 2011.
An economic analysis of the potential impact on competition and consumer prices of eliminating or relaxing the floorspace cap on retail premises.	My Department, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and Forfás.	End September 2011.
An assessment of the transfer of responsibility for water services provision from local authorities to a water utility.	A tender competition to select a consultant is underway.	End December 2011.

Foreshore Licences

264. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to progress the backlog of foreshore applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10688/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): Since the transfer of certain foreshore functions into my Department on 15 January 2010, significant work has been undertaken to improve the throughput of foreshore applications and to modernise the consent process involved. There are now 300 active applications for a lease or licence currently on hand. These applications vary in terms of size of project, level of complexity and state of progression through the foreshore consent process. Since the transfer of functions into my Department, 47 applications have been received, 46 have secured Ministerial approval and 30 leases and licence have been executed.

The short-term administrative and regulatory measures which have been developed to improve the throughput of foreshore applications include:

- Introduction of a pre-application consultation process;
- A scheme of prioritisation for all foreshore applications;
- Development of standard operating procedures;
- Drafting of guidelines for applicants in relation to engineering and habitats issues;
- Draft regulations to put a time limit on consultations with prescribed bodies.

Work on the drafting of a General Scheme of a Bill to further improve the foreshore consent process is also progressing. It is intended that the Bill will, *inter alia,* integrate the foreshore consent process for major infrastructure projects within the strategic consent process operated by An Bord Pleanála, while the foreshore consent process for non-strategic infrastructure projects will be integrated within the wider planning consent process operated by the local authorities.

Local Authority Funding

265. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if approval will issue without further delay for a scheme (details supplied)in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10697/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): A submission requesting funding approval in the amount of €3.512 million in respect of Stage 3 of the Mullaghmatt Remedial Works Scheme was received in my Department from Monaghan Town Council on 14 January, 2011. The cost plan has been examined and the Council has been asked to revise the proposal to facilitate the phased implementation of this scheme. My Department understands the revised plan will be submitted shortly.

Forestry Sector

266. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the issues affecting the forestry sector, specifically inconsistent implementation of the Planning and Development Act regarding road access to forests, which is preventing the thinning and felling of forests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10181/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): Section 4(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 sets out development which is exempted from the requirement to obtain planning permission, including "development consisting of the thinning, felling and replanting of trees, forests and woodlands, the construction, maintenance and improvement of non-public roads serving forests and woodlands and works ancillary to that development, not including the replacement of broadleaf high forest by conifer species".

Article 9 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 provides that development consisting of the formation, laying out or material widening of a means of access to a public road the surfaced carriageway of which exceeds 4 metres in width is not exempted development. However, this did not qualify the exemption in the Act referred to above, which provided a complete exemption for private forest roads including the making of an access onto a public road.

As this resulted in a position where no consent was required to join forest roads to a public road, section 5 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 amends section 4 of the Principal Act to provide that the exemption for forest roads does not extend to the provision of access to a public road. Section 5 of the 2010 Planning Act will be commenced as soon as possible.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

267. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when contracts will be signed and when work will commence on a water treatment plant at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry. [10240/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): 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 Kerry. The Waterville Water and Sewerage Scheme (Design/Build/Operate Contract) is included in the Programme amongst the list of contracts in the county to start in the period 2010-2012. Work on the water distribution and sewer network contract for Waterville is substantially completed. In December 2010 my Department advised Kerry County Council that funding is available to allow it award the contract for the Waterville Water and Wastewater Treatment Plants Design/Build/Operate contract, at a cost of €8.67 million. The contract will be funded on a shared basis between my Department and Kerry County Council. It is now a matter for the Council to progress this contract to construction.

Question No. 268 answered with Question No. 240.

Planning Issues

269. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the matter of farmers' rights of way and the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009, with specific reference to the way farmers will be affected by new legislation requiring registration. [10265/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The position is that Part 8 (Chapter 1) of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 has updated the law in relation to the acquisition of easements and *profits a prendre* in line with recommendations of the Law Reform Commission. Section 35 of the Act, which entered into operation on 1 December 2009, provides that such legal interests in land shall be acquired at law by prescription only on registration of a court order under that section.

Late last year the Law Society made a submission to my Department which contained proposals to amend the 2009 Act with a view to simplifying the procedures for registering easements and *profits a prendre* acquired by prescription. During recent discussions involving my Department, the Law Society and the Property Registration Authority, agreement was reached on the outline of a draft scheme whereby the Authority would be empowered to register such legal rights without a court order under section 35 of the 2009 Act on being satisfied that the claim had been substantiated.

In order to give statutory effect to the proposed scheme, amendments to the Registration of Title Act 1964 and the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 will be required. I intend therefore to include the necessary amendments to both Acts in the forthcoming Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which will be published later this year.

Registration of Title

270. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will establish the ownership of a derelict and abandoned house at a location (details supplied). [10522/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I can inform the Deputy that the Property Registration Authority (PRA), which manages the Land Registry and Registry of Deeds, is the registering body in relation to property in Ireland. A search has been carried out in the Land Registry and it appears that the address in question is an unregistered property.

While it is possible to conduct a search in the Registry of Deeds, Henrietta Street, it is difficult to establish the name of an owner from the records held there. This is because the Registry of Deeds is a register of grantors (i.e. the persons who sold or granted the property

to the current owners), and not a register of owners. In order to carry out a search the customer would therefore need to know the name of the grantor. Other possible sources of relevant information are:

— the Valuation Office

— Thom's Directory (this gives the name of the occupier who may not always be the owner)

The Deputy might also wish to note that if the property appears to be a derelict and abandoned site, this should be brought to the attention of the Derelict Sites Section, Dublin City Council, Development Unit, Block 3, Floor 3, Wood Quay, Dublin 8.

Proposed Legislation

271. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the action he is taking to contribute to the reform of the outdated bankruptcy law here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10540/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question Number 126 of 20 April 2011 which indicated the following:

> The Government commitment under the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland is to publish insolvency reform legislation by Quarter 1 of 2012. The legislative programme for my Department includes a Personal Insolvency Bill that will provide for a new framework for settlement and enforcement of debt and for personal insolvency. The Bill, proposals in respect of which are being developed in my Department, will take into account the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission in its Report on *Personal Debt Management and Debt Enforcement* of December 2010.
>
> The Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, that is in the course of being drafted with a view to publication as soon as possible this year, will contain some interim measures in relation to reform of the law on bankruptcy.

I have nothing further to add to that reply.

Liquor Licensing Laws

272. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on proposals by an association (details supplied) to introduce a nightclub permit or allow for the payment of special exemption orders by direct debit in order to clear up paper trails and ease court time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10197/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am aware that proposals have been made by industry representatives for the introduction of a nightclub permit. However, I am not aware of any proposals to provide for the payment of special exemption order fees by direct debit. I assure the Deputy that the Courts Service will consider any proposal which would provide an opportunity to improve efficiency.

Asylum Applications

273. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application for asylum here in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [10272/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned applied for asylum on 20 May, 2010. His asylum application was considered by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, both of whom concluded that the person concerned did not meet the criteria for recognition as a refugee. Arising from the refusal of his asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 3 February 2011, 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.

The person concerned submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome. In the event that the application for Subsidiary Protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before the file is passed to me for decision. Once a decision has been made, this decision and the consequences of the decision will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by 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.

Ministerial Meetings

274. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will meet with a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10313/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): If the Deputy communicates privately with me regarding the subject matter of the meeting, I will respond to him expeditiously.

Payment of Fines

275. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his proposals, if any, to accept payment of fines handed down by the courts in instalments or by means of some other easy-payment system to be applied to those who have no means and simply cannot pay in full in the form of a single payment; the value of the fines outstanding and not paid to the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10340/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Section 14 of the Fines Act 2010, which was commenced from 1 January last, places an obligation on the court to take account of the defendant's financial circumstances before a fine is imposed. Section 15 of the Act, when commenced, will allow a person on whom a fine has been imposed to apply to the court to pay the fine by instalments. If the court is satisfied that to pay in full by the due date for payment would cause undue hardship, it can direct that payment be made by instalments over a period of one year and, in exceptional circumstances, over a two year period. This provision will apply to fines over €100. The Act is being commenced on a phased basis. It is intended to commence

section 15 as soon as the necessary arrangements have been put in place by the Courts Service to facilitate its operation.

The Deputy will appreciate that the length of time an offender has to pay a fine can vary considerably and is determined amongst other things by the discretion of the judge and value of the fine. I am however informed that the Courts Service has made significant improvements to the fines collection process for court imposed fines. This includes timely and frequent issue of reminders, together with the provision of a convenient on-line payment facility.

The value of fines outstanding is assessed on a rolling 12 month period. For the 12 months to the end of December 2010, the total value of fines imposed was €43m (120,000 fines). The total value of fines collectable after adjusting for appeals or cancellations was €29m (92,000) of which €21m (68,000) were paid giving a collection rate of 71% based on value and 73% based on volume. This leaves approximately €8m (24,000) fines outstanding in the year ending 31 December 2010. This represents a significant improvement over an estimated collection rate of 50% in 2007 and in 2010 resulted in an estimated additional €8.0m in fines collected. Finally, the Programme for Government 2011 to 2016 contains a commitment to provide for attachment of earnings in relation to fines and I am developing proposals in this regard at present.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

276. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a Garda vetting application will be processed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10369/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) has no application for vetting on hand in respect of the person to whom the Deputy refers. In the circumstances I can only suggest that the person contacts the registered organisation involved. A previous vetting application in respect of the person to whom the Deputy refers was processed by the GCVU and a response was returned to the registered organisation involved in September 2009.

Departmental Records

277. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has records of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8 who has been resident here for more than 20 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10372/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that records exist in my Department regarding the person referred to in the Deputy's question, and that they have contacted him regarding renewing his immigration status.

Garda Status

278. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to award members of the Garda Síochána special status and protection while on duty in view of the fact that they have no standing under current legislation as had been highlighted by the case of the late Garda Robbie McCallion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10460/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I believe it is right that the law recognises the gravity of any attack on a member of An Garda Síochána or the emergency services who are carrying out their duty, serving and protecting the public. The Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994, as amended by the Criminal Justice Act of 2006, specifically provides

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that any person who assaults or threatens to assault a peace officer (including members of An Garda Síochána) acting in the execution of his or her duty, knowing that he or she is, or being reckless as to whether he or she is, a peace officer so acting, shall be guilty of an offence. The 2006 Act also increased the maximum penalty to 7 years imprisonment and an unlimited fine. Any person who resists or wilfully obstructs a peace officer in the execution of his or her duty is also guilty of an offence. I have no proposals at present for further legislation in relation to this matter but the situation will be kept under review.

Proposed Legislation

279. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce legislation to criminalise the purchase of sexual acts; his further plans to criminalise the acts of pimping, procuring and trafficking of persons for sexual exploitation; the stage of advancement of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10492/11]

289. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce legislation criminalising the purchase of sexual acts, thus making it illegal to buy sex, and decriminalise those persons who are prostituted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10582/11]

290. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he will release the report he has received from the Attorney General on the visit by an Irish delegation to Sweden in September 2010 in respect of the sex industry. [10591/11]

291. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce legislation and criminalise the action of buying sex. [10592/11]

293. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he intends to publish a Bill regarding sex trafficking and the penalisation of the purchase of sex; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10604/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Question Nos. 279, 289 to 291, inclusive, and 293 together.

It should be noted that under the criminal law as it stands at present, it is not an offence, in itself, to sell sex. In general, it is not an offence to purchase sex either. Consequently, neither party to the transaction is currently criminalised. Any proposal to amend the law in terms of criminalising the purchase of sex would require very careful examination. In this jurisdiction, the criminal law governing prostitution is aimed at protecting society from the more intrusive aspects of such activity from a public order perspective, while also seeking to protect prostitutes from exploitation.

Under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993, it is an offence to solicit in a street or public place for the purpose of prostitution. The offence can be committed by the prostitute, the client or a third party — a pimp, for example. The Act also provides for offences such as organising prostitution, coercing or compelling a person to be a prostitute, knowingly living on the earnings of a prostitute, or keeping or managing a brothel. In addition, the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008, which criminalises the trafficking of persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation, makes it an offence to knowingly solicit or importune a trafficked person, in any place, for the purpose of prostitution.

In 2010, the Swedish Government completed an evaluation of its 1999 legislation criminalising the purchase of sex. The Dignity Project arranged a visit to Sweden in September last

year to learn more about the evaluation and the delegation included representation from my Department. The Dignity Project was a research project funded by the EU. An inter-agency and inter-jurisdictional initiative led by the Dublin Employment Pact and the Immigrant Council of Ireland, it examined services provided to victims of human trafficking with a view to replicating best practice models in partner countries. My Department's Anti-Human Trafficking Unit and the Garda National Immigration Bureau were partners with observer status.

I will be examining a report prepared by my Department following the visit to Stockholm and which was submitted to the Attorney General's Office. I will also be examining the Attorney's recent advices concerning the legal and constitutional implications of introducing a ban on the purchase of sex. It will be appreciated that I have not yet had the opportunity to consider the report, including the question of its publication, and the advices received.

Road Traffic Accidents

280. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and forensic collision investigators qualified to read tachographs and to present the evidence obtained from such charts in court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10500/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The information sought by the Deputy is currently being collated by the Garda authorities and I will write to the Deputy directly when this information is to hand.

281. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a garda, a forensic collision investigator or a public service vehicle inspector is responsible for gathering and analysing the tachograph evidence at the scene of fatal collision; if such a person is qualified in each Garda division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10501/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The information sought by the Deputy is currently being collated by the Garda authorities and I will write to the Deputy directly when this information is to hand.

Garda Training

282. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí who have been trained in the enforcement of the European working time directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10502/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have requested this information from the Commissioner and I will revert to the Deputy immediately upon its receipt.

Road Traffic Offences

283. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prosecutions for dangerous driving that have been taken against commercial drivers involved in fatal collisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10503/11]

284. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prosecutions for dangerous driving taken against commercial drivers involved in fatal collisions that were related to tachograph offences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10504/11]

285. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prosecutions for dangerous driving taken against commercial drivers involved in fatal collisions were related to breaches of the European working time directive for driving hours, rest periods and rest days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10505/11]

286. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prosecutions for dangerous driving taken against commercial drivers involved in fatal collisions were related to breaches of the speed limit for commercial vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10506/11]

287. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prosecutions for dangerous driving taken against commercial drivers involved in fatal collisions were related to the use of a mobile phone when texting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10507/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 to 287, inclusive, together.

Following the submission in 2004 of a report and recommendations by an expert group on crime statistics, it was decided that the compilation and publication of crime statistics should be taken over by the Central Statistics Office, as the national statistical agency, from An Garda Síochána. The Garda Síochána Act 2005 consequently makes provision for this and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. Following the setting up of the necessary technical systems and auditing of the data from which the statistics are compiled, the CSO is now compiling, publishing and responding to queries regarding recorded crime statistics. I have requested the CSO to provide statistics directly to the Deputy.

Garda Deployment

288. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will increase the policing resources for an area (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10580/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Responsibility for the allocation of resources, including personnel, within the Force rests with the Garda Commissioner in consultation with his senior management team. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the area referred to by the Deputy is covered by Clontarf Garda Station. The personnel strength of Clontarf Garda Station, on the latest date for which figures are readily available (31 March 2011), was 79, and of these 7 are assigned as Community Gardaí.

Questions Nos. 289 to 291, inclusive, answered with Question No. 279.

Courts Service

292. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his view of recent decisions by the High Court in the case of persons (details supplied) both deaf who wished to serve on juries when summoned to do so; and his plans to end the discrimination against deaf persons willing to do jury service. [10596/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Section 64 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 introduced an amendment to the First Schedule of the Juries Act 1976 which places the emphasis on a person's capacity to perform the duties of jury service and does not automatically exclude any person because of an infirmity. My Department

is considering, in consultation with the Attorney General, the High Court judgment in the *Clarke* case.

In addition, as the Deputy may be aware, the Law Reform Commission is considering Jury Service as part of its *Third Programme of Law Reform 2008 — 2014* . The Commission engaged in a public consultation last year and I look forward to the publication of their final report and recommendations which I understand is likely to be completed in the latter half of this year.

Question No. 293 answered with Question No. 279.

Legislative Programme

294. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his view on the Spent Convictions Bill 2007; if he will introduce such legislation during this term; if there is any mechanism available now to have an old or dated conviction removed from the record and if so, if there are categories of offences excluded from such consideration. [10629/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am pleased to be able to tell the Deputy that the Government's legislative programme for the current term provides for the publication of a new Spent Convictions Bill. The new Bill will build on the recommendations contained in the Report prepared by the Law Reform Commission. Unlike the 2007 Bill mentioned by the Deputy, it will elaborate the arrangements in a very comprehensive way, leaving no doubt about the conditions to be met before a conviction can be regarded as spent.

It is important to understand that neither the 2007 Bill nor the one I will bring forward provide for the removal of a conviction from the criminal record. Instead, the legislation will provide that in certain circumstances, the details need not be disclosed.

Currently, the only mechanism available for the non-disclosure of previous convictions is that provided in Section 258 of the Children Act 2001. That section provides for non-disclosure after a period of 3 years has elapsed in the case of certain convictions for offences committed before turning 18. Offences triable by the Central Criminal Court are excluded. In addition, the section can be availed of only if the person has not been dealt with for an offence in the previous three years.

No similar legislation exists at present in respect convictions acquired by adults. The proposals that I will be bringing forward will provide for the non-disclosure of past convictions of adults for certain offences where the sentence is within specified limits and after a qualifying conviction free period has elapsed. However, the Bill will provide for exceptions, such as job applications for certain sensitive employment posts. It is intended that the provisions will have full retrospective and prospective effect, in other words, it will apply to qualifying convictions acquired before the commencement of the legislation as well as those acquired following commencement.

Court Judgments

295. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the action he will take to ensure that judgments in the Commercial Court ordering debts to be paid by persons or companies are enforced, particularly when the party owing the money remains in business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10630/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have no function as Minister in the enforcement of court judgments. Enforcement of the judgments which are in question is the responsibility of the relevant County or City Sheriff who on receipt of an order of the court may seek to enforce it by way of the seizure of funds or assets of the debtor.

Garda Investigations

296. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the outcome of an internal investigation into the alleged non-execution of a bench warrant or community order issued at Castlebar District Court, County Mayo, in respect of a person (details supplied). [10635/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the investigation referred to by the Deputy is on-going.

Expenditure Reviews

297. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10661/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The commitments under the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland, in so far as they relate to my Department, are:

- to introduce legislative changes to remove restrictions to trade and competition in the legal profession, establishing an independent regulator and implementing the recommendations of the Legal Costs Working Group and outstanding Competition Authority recommendations to reduce legal costs — the time-line for these actions is the end of quarter three, 2011;
- to legislate for reform of the bankruptcy regime that will balance the interests of both creditors and debtors — the time-line for this action is the end of quarter one, 2012.

As indicated in the Legislation Programme announced by the Government on 5 April 2011, a Legal Services Bill to provide for regulation of the legal professions and legal costs and a Personal Insolvency Bill to provide a new framework for the settlement and enforcement of debt and for personal insolvency are in the course of being developed in my Department to meet the EU/IMF requirements.

Prisoner Releases

298. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if it is a requirement when a person is released from prison that they receive a final certificate of release from the prison service. [10693/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that there is no formal certificate of imprisonment and consequently no requirement to issue such a document. However, a Prison Governor can provide a prisoner with a written record of his or her imprisonment if requested.

Human Trafficking

299. **Deputy Ann Phelan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the report Globalisation, Sex Trafficking and Prostitution: The Experience of Migrant Women in Ireland (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10734/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Deputy's question confuses two reports. The report "Globalisation, Sex Trafficking and Prostitution — The Experiences of Migrant Women in Ireland" commissioned by the Immigrant Council of Ireland is separate from the report referred to by the Deputy as having been produced by the voluntary and NGO Group 'Turn off the Red Light' lodged with the Attorney General's Office.

The Anti-Human Trafficking Unit in my Department were asked by the previous Minister to examine the report "Globalisation, Sex Trafficking and Prostitution — The Experiences of Migrant Women in Ireland". The Report is wide ranging and its recommendations required extensive consultation. The examination which was conducted in conjunction with a number of other Government Departments and Agencies is at an advanced stage. Many of the Report's recommendations insofar as they relate to the trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation have been addressed in the National Action Plan To Prevent and Combat Trafficking of Human Beings in Ireland 2009-2012 published in June 2009 and through the consultative structures such as the Round-table Forum and five interdisciplinary Working Groups described in the National Action Plan. I expect to receive a report in the coming months and I will consider what further actions, if any, are necessary.

The report lodged with the Attorney General's Office was a report prepared by officials of my Department following a visit to Sweden in September 2010 by them and members of the Dignity Project to examine Swedish legislative provisions in relation to prostitution, the so-called 'Swedish model'. The Dignity Project was a two year, EU funded, research project into international best practice for services to victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking which concluded on 7 February 2011. In relation to this other report, I would refer the Deputy to my comprehensive reply of today to Questions Nos. 279, 289, 290, 291, and 293.

Asylum Applications

300. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will clarify the residency status of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10739/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my reply below to Parliamentary Question No. 212 of Tuesday, 22 March, 2011. The position is unchanged since then.

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 13 January 2006, 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. He was subsequently notified of his entitlement to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

The person concerned submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome.

In the event that the application for Subsidiary Protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before the

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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.

Deportation Orders

301. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will clarify the residency status of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10740/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my reply below to Parliamentary Question No. 164 of 14 October 2008, Parliamentary Question No. 264 on Tuesday 3 February 2009, Parliamentary Question No. 197 on Wednesday 1 July 2009, Parliamentary Question No. 277 on Tuesday 8 December 2009 and Parliamentary Question No. 134 on Thursday 25 November 2010. The status of the person concerned remains largely unchanged since then.

The person concerned applied for asylum on 9th January, 2002. His asylum application was considered by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, both of whom concluded that the person concerned did not meet the criteria for recognition as a refugee.

Arising from the refusal of his asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 10th June, 2003, 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 behalf of the person concerned at that time.

Following the consideration of his case, in accordance with 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, the then Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform made a Deportation Order in respect of the person concerned on 8th August, 2004.

This Order was served by registered post dated 12th January, 2005 which placed a legal obligation on the person concerned to 'present' at the Offices of the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 in order to make travel arrangements for his removal from the State. The person concerned 'presented' as required.

On 28th February, 2005, judicial review proceedings were lodged in the High Court on behalf of the person concerned, challenging the decision of the then Minister to make a Deportation Order in respect of him. The Judicial Review Leave application was refused on 29th November, 2006. The person concerned was advised by registered letter dated 9th January, 2007 that as the judicial review proceedings had been determined, it was intended to proceed with his removal from the State. He was required to 'present' at the Offices of the GNIB on Monday 15th January, 2007 in order to make arrangements for his removal from the State. He 'presented' as required and was given further presentation dates.

An application for Subsidiary Protection was made on behalf of the person concerned, by his legal representative, under cover of a letter dated 23rd March, 2009. While it appeared at that time, based on an earlier High Court Judgment, that a person subject to a Deportation Order could seek the exercise of Ministerial discretion, pursuant to Regulation 4 (2) of the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006, to having a Subsidiary Protection application examined, in circumstances where new facts or circumstances had been advanced which demonstrated a change from the position which obtained at the time the Deportation Order was made, this position was overturned by a Supreme Court decision dated 9th July, 2010 which ruled that Minister did not have such a discretion. As a result, it is not open to the Minister to consider an application for Subsidiary Protection from a person who was the subject of a Deportation Order on the date the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006 came into force on 10th October, 2006. Accordingly, the Subsidiary Protection application submitted by the person concerned cannot be considered.

The person concerned, through his legal representative, has submitted further representations which are being treated as an application for the revocation of the existing Deportation Order, as provided for under Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This application is under consideration at present. When a decision has been made on that application, the decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

In the mean-time, the person concerned remains the subject of a Deportation Order and, as such, he is legally obliged to comply with any reporting requirements placed on him by the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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 Correspondence

302. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence his views on correspondence regarding the Irish Red Cross (details supplied). [10536/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have examined the correspondence in question and the previous correspondence that it also refers to. My position in relation to the issues raised in the parliamentary questions that are mentioned in the correspondence is as set out in my responses to each such question.

Defence Forces Reserve

303. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Defence the number of members per unit of the Reserve Defence Forces paid a gratuity in 2010; the number of training field days held for the RDF in 2009 and 2010 and the number of RDF members who attended each field day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10205/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): A breakdown of the above information is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Fire Services

304. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Defence in view of ongoing forest and gorse

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fires at various locations throughout the country, if he will consider providing fire fighting services from Defence Forces helicopters; if he will consider the comparative effectiveness and efficiency of aerial fire fighting as distinct from ground fire fighting, with specific reference to the usage of helicopter buckets and bambi buckets, which have the capacity to deliver 2,600 gallons of water; if he will examine the possibility of establishing a national aerial fire fighting service with three or four of these helicopter buckets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10303/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The provision of fire fighting services is primarily a matter for the local authorities. Fire service provision, including the assessment of fire cover needs and the making of such other provisions as it considers necessary or desirable, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under Section 10 of the Fire Services Act 1981. The White Paper on Defence (2000) does however provide for the Air Corps to assist and support the civil authorities. In that regard, the Air Corps responded to a request from the local authorities on Sunday 1st May last to deploy Air Corps assets to assist fire-fighting efforts in Counties Donegal and Mayo. Helicopters fitted with specialist under slung bambi buckets were deployed continually up until Wednesday 4th May last to release water on fires in Co. Donegal.

In addition to their military roles, Air Corps helicopters carry out a variety of taskings including air ambulance, inland Search and Rescue and support to An Garda Síochána. It is therefore not possible to dedicate these assets exclusively to a fire fighting role. I understand from my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Mr. Phil Hogan, T.D., that he has no plans to establish a national aerial fire fighting service.

Defence Forces Recruitment

305. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Defence when he proposes to arrange further recruitment to the Defence Forces. [10388/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Recruitment to the Permanent Defence Force was suspended in late 2008 pending a review of the best means by which to achieve the reduction of 3% in payroll costs that had been applied, in common with other areas of the public service, to the Defence Forces. The present position is that, within the context of consolidating the public finances, the Government is focused firmly on maintaining the operational efficiency of the Defence Forces. To this end, targeted recruitment was carried out in 2010 and is continuing in 2011. To date the following General Service induction has taken place in 2011:

	Army	Naval Service	Air Corps	Total
2011	202	0	40	242

In addition there will be an intake of 42 recruits into the Naval Service in the near future and an intake of 30 cadets from the Cadetship Competition in 2011. A number of technical appointments will also be filled.

With the support of the Chief of Staff, and within the available resources, I intend to retain the capacity of the Defence organisation to operate effectively across all roles, while contributing to the necessary public service economies. I am advised that at this time the Defence Forces retain the capacity to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.

Defence Forces Personnel

306. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Defence if spectacles will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny and if he will expedite the matter. [10626/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Military Authorities that the person in question has an appointment today to see the Defence Forces Optician. The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be prudent for me to prejudge the outcome of this appointment.

Question No. 307 withdrawn.

Control of Horses

308. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of abandoned horses that have been impounded in each county for each of the years 2008, 2009 and 2010; the estimated cost of collecting, housing and disposing of abandoned horses for these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10484/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the Control of Horses Act, 1996, Local Authorities have the primary role for dealing with wandering or straying horses. The Act includes provisions for seizure and detention of stray horses and disposal of horses seized. I am empowered by the Act to make grants available to each Local Authority towards expenses they incur in its implementation. In this regard, my Department provided funding of €1.988m in 2008, €2.156m in 2009 and €2.466m in 2010 to Local Authorities to assist in their work in implementing the Control of Horses Act.

Statistics on the number of horses impounded by Local Authorities under the Control of Horses Act 1996 in each county for the years 2008, 2009 and 2010 are set out below.

County Council	Number of Horses Seized 2008	Number of Horses Seized 2009	Number of horses Seized 2010
Carlow	0	0	0
Cavan	0	0	0
Clare	28	22	24
Cork City	20	53	101
Cork County	47	63	134
Donegal	0	0	0
Dublin City	251	349	446
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	16	14	20
Fingal	109	175	341
Galway City	0	0	0
Galway County	0	0	0
Kerry	27	41	20
Kildare	58	57	66
Kilkenny	41	20	92
Laois	49	71	61
Leitrim	0	0	26
Limerick City	38	103	179
Limerick County	27	133	118
Longford	2	8	4
Louth	1	23	16

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County Council	Number of Horses Seized 2008	Number of Horses Seized 2009	Number of horses Seized 2010
Mayo	15	9	20
Meath	1	3	0
Monaghan	5	11	11
Offaly	0	0	0
Roscommon	3	3	9
Sligo	0	2	22
South Dublin	127	142	133
Tipperary North	16	22	99
Tipperary South	23	37	45
Waterford City	3	18	0
Waterford County	4	1	4
Westmeath	20	46	124
Wexford	0	0	22
Wicklow	0	0	112
Total	931	1,426	2,249

Forestry Sector

309. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Irish sawmills are importing timber from Latvia, Scotland and elsewhere due to an overly bureaucratic system of permissions for forest roads and access, which means Irish forest owners cannot access and sell their timber; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10182/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am fully aware of the need to support the construction of forest roads in order to facilitate the extraction and supply of timber to the processing sector. In 2010 my Department paid out grants totalling €3.8 million towards the construction of 100 kilometres of forest roads. To date in 2011 grants totalling €3million have been approved for forest roads construction.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in operating the forest road approval system my Department must ensure compliance with all relevant national and EU legislation. The system in operation is required to ensure that forest road construction projects will not have a negative environmental impact, especially to designated nature conservation areas and watercourses such as rivers and lakes.

Early Retirement Scheme

310. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding an application under the early retirement scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10232/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Early Retirement Scheme was received from the person named on 24 September 2009. My Department was not in a position to approve the application from the person named under the Early Retirement Scheme as the scheme conditions were not met. In order to qualify as a 'category A' applicant under the scheme, the proposed transferee of the applicant's land must be approved for payment under the Young Farmers' Installation Scheme. As this requirement

was not met the person named did not qualify for a pension under the ERS. The Young Farmer's Installation Scheme is now closed to new applicants.

My Department wrote to the person named on 8 February 2010, offering the option of resubmitting the application as a 'category B' application under the scheme which entails the proposed transferee securing a minimum of 5 hectares of enlargement land. Such an application was received in my Department on 6 April 2010. A number of problems were identified when this application was assessed. Officials from my Department have requested clarification of these issues from the person named on three occasions. The latest request was made on 27 April 2011.

Processing of the application cannot be finalized until these queries have been responded to satisfactorily.

Farm Apprenticeship Scheme

311. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider the possibility of initiating a farm apprenticeship scheme. [10271/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the Agriculture, (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988, Teagasc has statutory responsibility for the provision of education and training services to the agriculture sector. The delivery of these services is an operational matter for Teagasc and its Board to prioritise. Ministerial responsibility is confined to matters of policy in accordance with the Act and the Minister does not interfere in the day-to-day operations of Teagasc.

In the past, the Farm Apprentice Board had responsibility for farm apprenticeship training programmes. The functions and staff of the Board transferred to Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority, in 2002. Teagasc continued to offer this programme and graduates received an Advanced Certificate in Farm Management. In line with general trends in agricultural education in the period 2000 to 2006, demand for this course declined, and student intake dropped sharply with the result that the course ended in 2006.

The demand for agricultural education has accelerated greatly in recent years. To cater for future 'professional farmers' Teagasc now offers specialised two year Advanced Certificate Programmes in Dairy Herd Management, Drystock Management and Crops and Mechanisation at various Agricultural Colleges. These specialised Programmes are very well regarded by students and are viewed by Teagasc as the essential building block for professional farmer training in the future. The Advanced Dairy Programme, for example, currently produces approximately 60 dairy graduates per year.

Teagasc is currently assessing future training needs of professional dairy farmers in light of the recent Report from the Dairy Expansion Activation Group, which recommended the current 2-year Dairy Diploma course be extended to a four-year Dairy Herd Management qualification. I understand Teagasc intend to explore possibilities in regard to a 'dairy internship' type programme with other stakeholders.

Forestry Sector

312. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his views on the implications any sale of Coillte's assets, specifically timber from forestry, will have for businesses operating in the forestry private sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10306/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Coillte was one of 28 commercial state bodies reviewed by the Review Group on State Assets and Liabilities, chaired by Colm McCarthy, which reported recently. The Government is now considering the findings of the Report and its recommendations in detail. However, no decision has yet been taken by the Government about the future of Coillte.

313. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will recognise the important role the forestry sector plays in the economy here and the need to support this sector as much as possible in order to ensure all of the 16,000 persons working in forestry remain in employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10307/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I fully recognise the important role the forestry sector plays in Ireland's economy and I am committed to the continued expansion and development of the sector. The sector is a major employer and makes a significant contribution to Ireland's export markets.

This year, my Department will be supporting the development of the forestry sector through the provision of a series of schemes. Funding of €114 million will be provided which will support the establishment of approximately 7,500 hectares of new forests in 2011, and will allow for the construction of forest roads to facilitate the harvesting and transport of timber to market. In addition, there are also a number of other support schemes aimed at encouraging the ongoing management of the forest estate and the overall development of the sector.

Grant Payments

314. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork has not yet received payment in respect of their sheep grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10315/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): As processing of the application under the Grassland Sheep Scheme received from the person named on the 14 April 2010, has now been finalised, the payment due will issue shortly.

315. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to Parliamentary Question No. 88 of 14 April 2011, the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo has not received their payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10322/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in January 2010. Following an on farm inspection he has been requested to submit a revised agri-environmental plan. When this has been received by my Department, and all the associated checks have been completed, his year 1 payment will be processed for payment.

Animal Welfare

316. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his plans to protect the health and safety of Irish greyhounds once they reach China; the reasons for choosing China as a target market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10332/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): There have not been any exports of greyhounds from Ireland to China in recent years. Any proposal to export greyhounds from Ireland to China would require the establishment and agreement of export

health certification protocols in advance with the Chinese authorities, and appropriate transport arrangements would have to be put in place to ensure the welfare of the animals in transit.

In response to an approach from promoters in China, Bord na gCon has been exploring the possibility of developing greyhound racing in China and recently submitted a proposal to my Department. My colleague Minister of State Shane McEntee, TD, met with the Chairman and Chief Executive of Bord na gCon on 3 May 2011 to discuss the matter. It was agreed at this meeting that Bord na gCon would modify its proposal to exclude the export of greyhounds from Ireland but would continue to explore possibilities of developing the proposal to assist in the management of greyhound racing in China. Minister McEntee informed the Dáil of these developments on May 3 2011.

Further consideration will be given to the matter on receipt of a revised proposal from Bord na gCon.

317. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his view and policy on the export of greyhounds to China; if he has responded to the campaign against this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10342/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): There have not been any exports of greyhounds from Ireland to China in recent years. Any proposal to export greyhounds from Ireland to China would require the establishment and agreement of export health certification protocols in advance with the Chinese authorities, and appropriate transport arrangements would have to be put in place to ensure the welfare of the animals in transit.

In response to an approach from promoters in China, Bord na gCon has been exploring the possibility of developing greyhound racing in China and recently submitted a proposal to my Department. My colleague Minister of State Shane McEntee, TD, met with the Chairman and Chief Executive of Bord na gCon on 3 May 2011 to discuss the matter. It was agreed at this meeting that Bord na gCon would modify its proposal to exclude the export of greyhounds from Ireland but would continue to explore possibilities of developing the proposal to assist in the management of greyhound racing in China. Minister McEntee informed the Dáil of these developments on May 3 2011.

Further consideration will be given to the matter on receipt of a revised proposal from Bord na gCon.

318. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his views on reports that the Irish Greyhound Board, a semi-State body, plans to export Irish dogs to China, a country which has a very poor animal welfare record; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10400/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): There have not been any exports of greyhounds from Ireland to China in recent years. Any proposal to export greyhounds from Ireland to China would require the establishment and agreement of export health certification protocols in advance with the Chinese authorities, and appropriate transport arrangements would have to be put in place to ensure the welfare of the animals in transit.

In response to an approach from promoters in China, Bord na gCon has been exploring the possibility of developing greyhound racing in China and recently submitted a proposal to my Department. My colleague Minister of State Shane McEntee, TD, met with the Chairman and Chief Executive of Bord na gCon on 3 May 2011 to discuss the matter. It was agreed at this meeting that Bord na gCon would modify its proposal to exclude the export of greyhounds from Ireland but would continue to explore possibilities of developing the proposal to assist in

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the management of greyhound racing in China. Minister McEntee informed the Dáil of these developments on May 3 2011.

Further consideration will be given to the matter on receipt of a revised proposal from Bord na gCon.

319. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the measures he has taken to ensure that all exporters comply with Council Regulation (EC) No. 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations. [10401/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Council Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations came into effect in January 2007. It lays down the requirements and conditions for the transport of live vertebrate animals, including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, poultry and horses, undertaken in connection with an economic activity, and the related operations of handling, loading and unloading. The main measures taken by my Department to ensure compliance with Regulation are set down below.

Transporters are authorised in accordance with and made aware of the requirements set down in Regulation 1/2005.

Trucks are approved in accordance with the requirements set down in Regulation 1/2005.

Drivers involved in the transport of live animals have a certificate of competence and have undergone a training course carried out to standards set by my Department.

Journey Logs in respect of cattle must be submitted for approval to an Official Veterinarian by the organiser of the transport in advance of any proposed long journey.

My Department deploys a considerable amount of resources to the process of certifying animals for export.

320. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give a commitment to provide time for a Dáil Éireann discussion on any proposal by Bord na gCon to export greyhounds to China prior to the agreement of export health certification protocols with the Chinese authorities. [10402/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): There have not been any exports of greyhounds from Ireland to China in recent years. Any proposal to export greyhounds from Ireland to China would require the establishment and agreement of export health certification protocols in advance with the Chinese authorities, and appropriate transport arrangements would have to be put in place to ensure the welfare of the animals in transit.

The commitment of this Government to animal welfare in general is beyond doubt and is reflected among the priorities in the Programme for Government.

My colleague Minister of State Shane McEntee, TD, met with the Chairman and Chief Executive of Bord na gCon on 3rd May 2011 to discuss the Board's proposal to explore business opportunities in China. It was agreed at this meeting that Bord na gCon would modify its proposal to exclude the export of greyhounds from Ireland but would continue to explore possibilities of developing the proposal to assist in the management of greyhound racing in China. Minister McEntee informed the Dáil of these developments on May 3rd 2011. Further consideration will be given to the matter on receipt of a revised proposal taking account of additional points raised by my Department.

321. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in view of his confirmation to Dáil Éireann on 19 April 2011 that Bord na gCon is exploring possible business opportunities in China and has recently made a submission to him, when he will complete his consideration of the Bord na gCon proposal; and if his views on this proposal will be made public. [10403/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): My colleague Minister of State Shane McEntee, TD, met with the Chairman and Chief Executive of Bord na gCon on 3rd May 2011 to discuss the Board's proposal to explore business opportunities in China. It was agreed at this meeting that Bord na gCon would modify its proposal to exclude the export of greyhounds from Ireland but would continue to explore possibilities of developing the proposal to assist in the management of greyhound racing in China. Minister McEntee informed the Dáil of these developments on 3 May 2011. Further consideration will be given to the matter on receipt of a revised proposal taking account of additional points raised by my Department.

Fishing Vessel Licences

322. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the entitlements of a trawler owner (details supplied); the dates and details of applications and appeals submitted to him since 2006; the reasons for the decision in each of these applications and appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10412/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Fisheries (Amendment) Act of 2003 transferred the functions of sea fishing-boat licensing from the Minister to the Licensing Authority for Sea-Fishing Boats, which operates on an independent basis subject to criteria set out in that Act and Ministerial Policy Directives. All applications for sea-fishing boat licenses are considered by the Licensing Authority. Under the legislation, the Minister is precluded from exercising any power of control in relation to any particular case or group of cases with which the Licensing Authority is or may be concerned.

I have, however, made inquiries with the Registrar General and he informs me that Mr. John Leonard applied to licence and register a fishing vessel in his name. Mr. Leonard did not complete the licensing process and the capacity owned by Mr. Leonard (8.37 GTs and 89.53kWs) expired on 6 September 2009 under the 2-year rule as set out in Ministerial Policy Directive 2/2003.

The Fisheries (Amendment) Act of 2003 also provided for an independent appeals process in respect of decisions of the Licensing Authority. Mr. Leonard appealed the expiration of his capacity (8.37 GTs and 89.53kWs) to the independent Appeals Officer and requested an oral hearing.

Following an oral hearing on 3 February 2011, which was attended by Mr. Leonard and the Licensing Authority, the Appeals Officer upheld the decision that the capacity had expired and refused the appeal.

It is open to Mr. Leonard to re-apply for a sea fishing boat licence at any time. He will however be required to provide the necessary replacement capacity before the licensing process can be completed.

Harbours and Piers

323. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the total moneys allocated for capital spending on harbours and piers in 2011; the details of

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the projects on which any money has been or will be spent and his plans to fund the completion of the Greencastle breakwater project in County Donegal. [10423/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The total budget allocation for the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme for 2011 is €10.177 million.

This Programme is currently under consideration by my Department and is expected to be finalised in the near future.

Greencastle harbour is owned by Donegal County Council and responsibility for the maintenance and development of the harbour rests with that local authority in the first instance. My Department has however, in recent years, project managed works on phase one of the Greencastle Harbour development project on behalf of Donegal County Council as well as providing funding.

Donegal County Council and my own Department are continuing to explore various mechanisms by which the Greencastle project might be advanced.

National Reserve Applications

324. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason for the delay in payment of a national reserve application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10458/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is no record in my Department of a National Reserve application having been received from the person named. Representations were made on behalf of the person named in July 2010 alleging that an application under the 2008 National Reserve had been submitted. The closing date for receipt of applications under the 2008 National Reserve was 15 May 2008 — over two years earlier. Following further correspondence on behalf of the person named, my Department had responded that it is not satisfied that an application under the 2008 National Reserve had been made prior to 15 May 2008. If the person named is not satisfied with this decision he has the right to appeal the decision to the Independent Agriculture Appeals Office.

Animal Welfare

325. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of inspections of dog transporters in each of the years 2007 to 2010; the estimated annual cost of inspecting dog transporters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10483/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of spot checks carried out on authorised dog transporters was 88 in 2007, 79 in 2008, 27 in 2009 and 36 in 2010. The information on the estimated annual cost of inspecting dog transporters is not readily available and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Grant Payments

326. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding an application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10488/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named registered 43 beef breed calves under the 2010 Suckler Welfare Scheme. To date, payment has issued in respect of 19 registered animals. My Department established that 4 animals were sold with no Scheme event dates having been received and a letter issued on 23 December 2010 advising the person named of the situation in respect of these animals. Dates were provided for a further 20 animals, which indicated that the animals were weaned within eight weeks of birth. As this action breached the Terms and Conditions of the Suckler Welfare Scheme the person named has not received payment on these animals. The applicant submitted an appeal and the case is currently under review by my Department. A decision will be conveyed to the applicant shortly.

Departmental Expenditure

327. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the budget for coastal protection, foreshore development and coastal zone management for each of the years 2008, 2009 and 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10495/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Responsibility for the Coastal Protection Programme transferred to the Office of Public Works (OPW) on 1st January 2009 and, as such, queries in relation to the Programme from that date onwards should be directed to the OPW. The budget allocation for the Coastal Protection Programme for 2008 was €3.037 million.

The budget allocations for Foreshore Development for 2008, 2009 and 2010 were €1.3 million, €1.292 million and €0.038 million, respectively. Responsibility for most Foreshore functions transferred to Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) with effect from 15th of January, 2010.

The figures for foreshore development for 2008 and 2009 include refundable deposits for windfarm licences.

Coastal Zone Management was the name of a Division in my Department prior to the transfer of functions to DEHLG on January 15th, 2010. However, excepting the administration costs for the Division, who work on other aspects of my Department's work also, the only budget assigned was that for Foreshore Development as set out above.

Allowance Payments

328. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a definitive conclusion is expected to be reached in relation to a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10510/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I understand the claim for payment of allowances is currently being reviewed and a decision will issue shortly. The person concerned will be informed by his employer, Teagasc, when a decision has been made.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

329. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding changes in respect of acceptable proof of postage of the 2011 single farm payment scheme application forms in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10524/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The submission of annual Single Payment applications, amendments forms and applications relating to the transfer of entitlements or the National Reserve are subject to strict closing dates set down in EU Regulations. The submission by 16 May 2011 of the Single Payment Scheme application form and associated documentation is an essential requirement for all farmers in order to benefit from their entitlements under the various Direct Payment Schemes, which are valued at some €1.8 billion per annum. As a service to my Department's clients a Swift Post receipt is attached to each return envelope sent to farmers with the pre-printed Single Payment application form.

Arising from certain difficulties encountered relating to the late receipt of various applications and other documentation, my Department, acting in conformity with good administrative practice, has taken a decision that a certificate of posting will no longer be accepted as proof that an application was actually posted in time to reach my Department by the closing date.

Proof of postage must now be either a Swift Post receipt or a Registered Post receipt. In addition, many thousands of farmers are submitting using my Department's online facility and receive an immediate confirmation of receipt when the application is filed. It is also open to farmers to hand in their application forms at any of the Department's public offices where they will be issued with a written acknowledgement, if they so request.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

330. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture; Fisheries and Food if he has or intends to contribute to the EU Commission consultations on land use, land use change and forestry in the context of the EU greenhouse gas emissions debate, on behalf of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10533/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has contributed to the EU Commission consultations on land use, land use change and forestry in the context of the EU greenhouse gas emissions debate through the submission in December 2010 of Ireland's response to the EU Commission's public consultation on the role of EU agriculture and forestry in achieving the EU's climate change commitments. At Ireland's request, a bi-lateral meeting was subsequently held at senior official level with the EU Commission on this issue and further bi-lateral engagement is intended. My Department is also fully engaged with the EU Commission at technical expert level on the issue of land use, land use change and forestry on an on-going basis.

Expenditure Reviews

331. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Agriculture; Fisheries and Food if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10651/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no specific assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by my Department under the terms of the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support.

My Department, in common with all other Government Departments, is required to make periodic financial and staff returns to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform as part of the on-going monitoring and management of public expenditure process.

In order to provide the Government with a comprehensive set of decision options to meet the funding constraints in the National Recovery Plan, 2012-2014, my Department is currently in the process of carrying out a comprehensive review of public expenditure, which will be sent to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform over the coming months. I have invited the consultancy companies Accenture and KPMG to advise me on carrying out the review on a pro bono basis.

Headage Payments

332. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture; Fisheries and Food the reason the 1985 application for cattle headage in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal was refused and subsequent applications for sheep headage were reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10692/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Due to the inordinately long time-lapse involved it is not possible, in the time available, to provide a comprehensive reply to the Deputy. Enquiries are being made in the matter and my Department will be in further direct contact with the Deputy in due course.

Expenditure Reviews

333. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Community; Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by her under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by her or independently; when she expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10653/11]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, on foot of the restructuring of Government Departments announced by the Taoiseach in March 2011, the functions of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs have recently transferred to 6 reconfigured Government Departments.

I can confirm to the Deputy that there are no reviews arising under the EU/IMF Programme relation to the Family Policy function remaining in my Department, which is shortly to be renamed the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. With regard to the functions of my Department that have been transferred to other Departments, the Deputy will appreciate that the question of identifying any such reviews or reports in that regard would be a matter for the receiving Departments to consider.

Leithdháiltí Caiteachais

334. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta cén t-eolas airgeadais a cuireadh ar fáil di don tréimhse 1/1/2011 go 31/3/2011; cén chaoi a bhfuil an caiteachas go dáta i gcomparáid leis na meastacháin a foilsíodh ag tús na bliana agus leis na próifílí caiteachais a réitíodh don bhliain; an gcuirfidh sí cóip den eolas a tugadh di ar fáil dom; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [10742/11]

Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Mar is eol don Teachta, d'fhoilsigh an Rialtas roimhe seo na leithdháiltí caiteachais agus na próifílí caiteachais don bhliain 2011 i mí Feabhra agus tá siad ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne Airgeadais.

Nuair a ghlac mé leis an bpost mar Aire a bhfuil freagracht uirthi as an Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta an 10 Márta 2011, chuir oifigigh mo Roinne ar an eolas

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mé faoi staid an chaiteachais ag an tráth sin i gcomparáid leis na próifílí foilsithe agus leis an leithdháileadh iomlán don bhliain araon. Comeádadh mé suas chun dáta go tráthrialta ar na cúrsaí sin.

Mar eolas don Teachta, b'fhiú €68.47 milliún ollchaiteachas na Roinne an 31 Márta 2011. Ba ionann sin isteach agus amach le 90% den phróifíl foilsithe agus 19% den leithdháileadh sna Meastacháin Athbhreithnithe, ar fiú €352.388 milliún é.

Tá leithdháiltí na Roinne ar fáil ag an nasc thíos chun gur féidir tagairt a dhéanamh dóibh go héasca: *http://www.finance.gov.ie/documents/public%20expenditure/2011/rev2011.pdf*.

Is féidir amharc ar chaiteachas maidir le próifílí foilsithe ag an nasc seo a leanas:

www.finance.gov.ie/documents/public%20expenditure/2011/Expendprofile.pdf.

Ambulance Service

335. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the financial assistance available for persons wishing to be trained (details supplied); the certification and standards authority that govern the delivery and quality of this course here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10246/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): The Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) sets educational qualifications and lays down standards for provision of ambulance services in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors.

Since its establishment in 2000, the Council has worked in particular to ensure that pre-hospital personnel in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors are appropriately trained for the roles which they carry out. It awards qualifications at three levels under the National Qualifications for Emergency Medical Technicians scheme. These levels are emergency medical technician (the minimum qualification), paramedic and advanced paramedic.

PHECC also registers all qualified pre-hospital practitioners, including those in private and voluntary services, and has implemented practice standards for practitioners, through clinical practice guidelines, and for emergency ambulances.

The National Ambulance Service College (NASC), in affiliation with University College Dublin (UCD), meets the training needs of the Health Service Executive and its National Ambulance Service. The NASC/UCD does not have a remit or resources to provide training or education for external individuals.

The Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB) paramedic training is provided by its Training Institute in affiliation with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. As the DFB does not fall under the remit of my Department, I am not in a position to advise on its admission criteria.

An alternative pathway would be to seek a place on a student paramedic programme run by the two institutes recognised by PHECC. The HSE advertises such vacancies on *www.publicjobs.ie*.

National Drugs Strategy

336. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans to restructure the local drugs task force to make them more answerable to her and the communities they serve; the steps she has taken to ensure that the drugs task force operate in an open and transparent manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10356/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): Action 62 of the National Drugs Strategy (interim) 2009-2016 provides for a review of Drugs Task Forces, including inter alia, a review of their boundaries. The objective of the review is to ensure that maximum benefit is achieved from the activities of Drugs Task Forces, that best value is achieved from the financial and staff resources available, and that effort is targeted to maintain progress made and address new and emerging issues.

The National Drugs Strategy also provides for measures to strengthen the governance and accountability of Drugs Task Forces. In line with the Strategy, Drugs Task Forces are required to report on their activities, including their broader strategic and co-ordination work, during 2010 and their action plans for 2011. The reports will also provide a profile of Drugs Task Force projects, including an assessment of the projects as a group, in addressing the local drugs problem. In this context, the reporting process will feed into the Article 62 review, which I referred to above. The reports from the Drugs Task Forces, together with the annual report from the Oversight Forum on Drugs, which monitors progress at national level, will form the basis for a national review of outputs and outcomes under the Strategy.

337. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health and Children the resources that have been provided to the south west inner city local drugs task force for 2011; the projects that will be promoted with the money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10360/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): Each Local Drugs Task Force has an annual funding allocation from my Department for community-based drugs initiatives. From that allocation, each Task Force has the discretion to allocate funding to projects and initiatives based on the priorities it has identified for its respective area. Funding for these projects is channelled through a designated Department or State Agency.

With regard to South Inner City Local Drugs Task Force, €2,215,434 has been allocated in 2011 to support 38 projects, as listed as follows.

		€
SIC-1	Coolmine House — Career Guidance	17,464
SIC-5	Westland Row CBS — funding for after school activities	9,728
SIC-7a	Grants to Residents Associations — Marrowbone Lane Residents	5,610
SIC-7b	Grants to Residents Associations — School St and Thomas Court Bawn	13,598
SIC-7d	Grants to Residents Associations — Michael Mallin	5,610
SIC-7e	Grants to Residents Associations — Marrowbone Lane Tenants	5,610
SIC-18	Donore Community Drug Team Project Worker	53,078
SIC-20	Casadh Rehabilitation Project	175,960
SIC-22	Coolmine-Ashleigh House Project	248,226
SIC2-1	Mercy Family Centre: Family Support worker	24,000
SIC2-2	Whitefriar St. Community Centre Family Support worker	37,575
SIC2-3	CAP Project: Family Support Worker	52,000
SIC2-6	Rinn Development Activity Program and Poolbeg Training	132,336
SIC2-8	Ruhama	50,636
SIC2-9	Ringsend Community Services Forum	55,028
SIC2-10	Fountain Resource Group — funding for family support services	67,720
SIC2-12	Whitefriar Aikido Club	3,240
SIC2-13	Task Force Targeted Outreach Programmes	59,595
SIC2-14	Exchange House — funding for travellers support programme	46,018

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		€
SIC2-15	Community Response — family support worker	24,000
SIC2-16	Donore Community Drugs Team	160,714
SIC2-17	Teen Challenge residential treatment centre	140,058
SIC2-18	SWICN drug education worker	64,154
SIC2-19	St. Andrew's Resource Centre — awareness and prevention programmes	52,706
SIC2-21	Task Force Project Development Programme	52,000
SIC2B-1	Coolmine Ltd — Ashleigh House	130,922
SIC2B-2	Casadh Rehab Project family support worker	24,000
SIC2B-3	RUHAMA — 2nd outreach worker	51,724
SIC2B-4	RADE — outreach worker	52,588
SIC2B-5	Exchange House Female Traveller Education/Outreach Worker	46,018
SIC2B-7	Merchants Quay South Inner City Outreach Team	58,718
SIC2B-8	Community Awareness of Drugs (CAD): Parental Progs	44,000
SIC2B-9	Fountain Resource Centre: Positive Parenting	8,850
SIC2B-10	Teen Challenge project worker	47,786
SIC2B-11	Ringsend and District Response to Drugs project worker	48,980
SIC2B-12	School Street Project: project worker	50,134
SIC2-22 C/I	Coolmine Therapeutic Community counsellor and part-time workers	65,642
SIC2-23 R/I	RADE part time counselling service	29,408
	Total	2,215,434

Health Service Staff

338. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will consider extending the contracts of employment for those temporary community welfare officers, currently employed until 30 June 2011 who facilitated the transfer of community welfare services from the Health Service Executive to the Department of Social Protection, in view of the very significant work of these employees in dealing with those looking for help. [10603/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): The transfer of the Community Welfare Service from the Health Service Executive (HSE) is due to be completed by 1st October 2011. As and from 1st January 2011, all staff of this Service were seconded to the Department of Social Protection, but continue to be employees of the HSE, up to 30 September 2011. I have been advised that the staff in question were employed in a temporary capacity by the HSE in 2010 for a period of six months. These contracts were subsequently extended on the basis of being terminated on a phased basis from end-June to end-September 2011. The HSE has appointed Transition Managers from within the Community Welfare Service, to work with the Department of Social Protection to oversee the transfer of the service to that Department and assist with practical issues that arise in this regard.

Pension Provisions

339. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Health and Children the total amount of pension payments made to retired nurses in 2009. [10736/11]

340. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of superannuation contributions, pensions levy, PRSI contributions paid by serving nurses of all disciplines in 2009. [10737/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 339 and 340 together.

As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Community Development

341. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will consider providing assistance to a community development group (details supplied) in County Kildare to develop a day care centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10184/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Service Reports

342. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health and Children if his attention has been drawn to the 27 recommendations made by a report into the circumstances pertaining to the death of a person (details supplied) and if he will account for all progress made into the implementation of each of these 27 recommendations. [10190/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE established a Women's Health Task Force to oversee the implementation of the recommendations from the report referred to by the Deputy. Of the twenty seven recommendations, twenty five have been implemented in full in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda. The remaining two are partially complete and will be implemented as soon as possible.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

343. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 334 of 19 April 2011, if he will provide the actual number of persons who received State therapy services while under the fair deal scheme during each of the years 2009, 2010 and the first three months of 2011. [10212/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As previously advised, there were approximately 1,600 people receiving financial support under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme at the end of 2009. During 2010, over 11,700 people qualified for financial support under the scheme. At end-March 2011, there were approximately 12,380 people in receipt of financial support.

The Nursing Homes Support Scheme does not cover therapies because a person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the Medical Card Scheme or the Drugs Payment Scheme, is unaffected by the Scheme. In other words, a person can continue to receive goods and services in accordance with the terms of these other schemes regardless of whether they are in a private nursing home or elsewhere.

In determining the services covered by the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, it was considered very important that the care recipient and the taxpayer would be protected and would not end up paying for the same services twice. For this reason, medications and aids that are already prescribed for individuals under an existing scheme are not included in the services

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covered by the new Nursing Homes Support Scheme (i.e. as this would involve effectively paying twice for the same items or service).

Individuals who receive State therapy services are not identified separately as individuals receiving financial support under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. Therefore, the information requested by the Deputy is not available.

Medical Cards

344. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10225/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

National Substance Misuse Strategy

345. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will provide a complete list of names of the persons on the steering group working on the national substance misuse strategy. [10236/11]

346. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the national substance misuse strategy will be published; and the cause of the delay in its publication. [10237/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 345 and 346 together.

The National Substance Misuse Steering Group is examining a wide range of issues in relation to alcohol policy such as pricing, supply and availability, treatment, prevention, marketing and sponsorship. The Steering Group has not yet completed its work. I expect to receive the report before the end of the year. The members of the National Substance Misuse Strategy Steering Group are as follows:

National Substance Misuse Strategy

Steering Group Membership as at 31/12/10

Name	Organisation
Dr Tony Holohan (Joint Chair)	Dept of Health and Children
John Collins (Joint Chair)	Dept of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs
Dr John Devlin	Dept of Health and Children
Robbie Breen	Dept of Health and Children
Michael Conroy	Dept of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs
Eddie Arthurs	Dept of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs
Eddie Matthews	Health Service Executive
Prof. Joe Barry	Health Service Executive
Deirdre Mongan	Health Research Board
Dr Eamon Keenan	The College of Psychiatry of Ireland
Fiona Ryan	Alcohol Action Ireland

Name	Organisation
Det Supt Michael O'Sullivan or Eva Micheau	An Garda Síochána
Michelle O'Mahony	Dept of Arts, Sport and Tourism
Fergus McCabe	Community Sector
James Doorley	National Youth Council of Ireland
Dr Jean Long	Health Research Board
Rolande Anderson	Irish College of General Practitioners
Rosemary Garth	Alcohol Beverage Federation (IBEC)
Sadie Grace	Family Support Network
Theresa Donohue	Dept Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Dr William Flannery	The College of Psychiatry of Ireland
Albert O'Donoghue	Office of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Denis Bradley	National Advisory Committee on Drugs
Kathleen Connolly	Dept of Justice and Law Reform
John Moloney	Department of Education and Science
Tony Geoghegan	Voluntary Sector
Willie Collins	Voluntary Sector
Dr Declan Bedford	Faculty of Public Health Medicine, Royal College of Physicians
Noel Brett	Road Safety Authority
Kieran Sludds	Health and Safety Authority
Fionnuala Sheehan	MEAS Ltd
Linda O'Rourke	Dept of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs
Clare O'Reilly	Dept of Health and Children

Health Services

347. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a hospital (details supplied) has outsourced the sending of letters to patients to the Philippines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10238/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

348. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of public health care institutions here in which there is a practice of outsourcing of administrative tasks to other countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10239/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospitals Building Programme

349. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health and Children when work will commence on the proposed new community hospital for Kenmare, County Kerry. [10241/11]

374. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health and Children when will the contract for the construction of the new community hospital for Kenmare, County Kerry be signed off. [10344/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 349 and 374 together.

As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Aids and Appliances

350. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will introduce a scheme whereby grants can be made available to communities throughout the country to allow for the purchase of defibrillators, equipment and so on and also allow communities to train volunteers in CPR, heart saver AED and cardiac first response courses. [10243/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): My Department does not propose to introduce a scheme for grants to be made available for the purchase of defibrillators or other such equipment. The Health Service Executive (HSE) were tasked with the responsibility for the implementation of the Task Force Report on Sudden Cardiac Death and provided guidance and advice on the development of cardiac first responder programmes. They instigated resuscitation training through a number of programmes along with partner organisations to ensure that a range of different sectors throughout the population were adequately trained in both CPR and AED usage.

General Practitioner Services

351. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health and Children his views on general practitioners attending patients at their home (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10248/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): Under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme contract, general practitioners (GPs) are obliged to provide services in their practice premises or by way of domiciliary visits, as appropriate, for their medical card and GP visit card patients, for 40 hours each week. They must also make arrangements to enable contact to be made with them, or a locum/deputy, for emergencies outside of these hours.

GP out-of-hours co-operatives are now in place in all HSE areas, providing coverage in all or in part of all counties. The total annual cost of funding GP out-of-hours services is some €110 million. In 2010 the HSE provided over €8 million in funding to SouthDoc to provide GP out of hours services in Counties Cork and Kerry.

Persons who contact GP out-of-hours co-operatives are prioritised as either emergency, urgent or routine. In emergency cases a triage nurse will generally arrange for the dispatch of an ambulance and/or duty doctor. For non-emergency calls a triage nurse carries out a structured assessment by telephone of the patient's symptoms. The nurse may provide advice over the phone, make an appointment for the patient to be seen by the duty doctor at a treatment centre or, if necessary, a home visit may be arranged.

The total payments to GPs under the GMS Scheme in 2009 was over €472 million. The decision to remove the "distance from the GP's surgery" as a payment criterion for the GMS GP Contract was taken in 2010 under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2009. This decision has to be seen in the light of the country's current financial circumstances and the fact that salaried health staff have all had pay cuts in recent years.

Health Service Staff

352. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding maternity cover for a speech therapist working in a health centre (details supplied) in County Wicklow. [10250/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services

353. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the steps he will take in securing additional services from the Health Service Executive in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [10253/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Medical Cards

354. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [10268/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

355. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [10270/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

356. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding future proposals for a hospital (details supplied) in County Limerick. [10277/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter the question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Staff

357. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children the process being engaged to recruit and appoint a new chief executive officer at the Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin, incorporating the National Children's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10278/11]

358. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a director of operations has been appointed at the Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, to take the load of the day-to-day running of the hospital as

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recommended in the Tallaght hospital review in the absence of such appointment already having been made; if the hospital will make this appointment as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10279/11]

359. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children the progress that has been made since September 2010 on reducing the board of the Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, from 23 members to ten; the progress being made on the introduction of non-executive directors at board level and the appointment of a representative of local general practitioners on the board and of a representative person to act as a link to the local population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10280/11]

360. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the two additional consultant radiologists recommended for the Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, have been appointed and taken up their duties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10281/11]

361. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a review of the performance of the radiology IT systems in place at the Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, has been undertaken since September 2010, taking account of the recommendations of the Tallaght hospital review; if the results of such have been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10282/11]

362. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the process of appointing consultants, both new and replacement, at the Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, has been modified to ensure a transparent streamlined process, which addresses departmental deficiencies in a timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10283/11]

363. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the 2011 service level agreement between the Health Service Executive and the Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, insists on the implementation of all recommendations of the Tallaght hospital review as recommended by the review body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10284/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 357 to 363, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services

364. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children his plans to establish universal-access multi-disciplinary developmental clinics at specific stages for infants and children. [10287/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): Screening and surveillance checks are provided for all children at regular intervals by Public Health Nurses, Area Medical Officers and GPs with referral onto specialist services if problems are identified. This involves a wide range of professionals from general practice and speech and language therapy to psychology, crossing over to more specialised services for children with very pronounced needs.

Alcohol-Related Conditions

365. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason that foetal alcohol syndrome, partial foetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol related neurodevelopmental disorder and alcohol related birth defects are still not notifiable conditions here. [10288/11]

366. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of newborns, older infants, toddlers, children and adolescents diagnosed as having foetal alcohol syndrome each year in the last decade; the number diagnosed as having partial foetal alcohol syndrome; the number diagnosed as having alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder and the number diagnosed as having alcohol-related birth defects. [10289/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 365 and 366 together.

The 1981 Infectious Diseases Regulations have been revised on a number of occasions between 1985 and 2007 and only infectious diseases are notifiable under this legislation. Therefore Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) does not fall within the scope of this legislation.

Although FAS is a specific diagnosis, there are many features that need to be present, as well as a history of pre-natal alcohol intake.For these reasons the diagnosis of FAS is difficult and is frequently either misdiagnosed or unconfirmed.

There is no National Register for Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Therefore, the numbers of cases of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND) in Ireland are unknown. This reflects the situation in many countries in Europe.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) provides information for the EUROCAT Congenital Anomaly Register. In the Eastern Region the HSE has reported that only one or two cases are identified per year.This is believed to under report the number of actual cases.

A study partly funded by the Health Service Executive, has commenced in the Coombe Women's hospital in Dublin, aimed initially at screening women for alcohol intake in pregnancy with a view to counselling them accordingly. In the next number of years, an extension of the study is planned to estimate the number of FAS cases diagnosed over a specific time period.

Health Services

367. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the steps he will take to enable a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 with a personal assistant funded by the Health Service Executive via a service provider, to switch to a direct payment from the HSE in order that they may become the direct employer of their personal assistant or failing that to at least allow them switch service provider. [10291/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

Departmental Expenditure

368. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of State funding provided in 2010 to registered charities associated with the Health Service Execu-

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tive; the charities that received such funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10308/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): The Health Service Executive funds a significant number of voluntary organisations to provide health and personal social services on its behalf, the vast majority of which have charitable status. These voluntary organisations are funded from a discrete subhead within the HSE Vote, and the 2010 outturn for this subhead amounted to €2.385 billion, as set out in the Revised Estimates Volume for 2011. In addition, a further €7.5 million was provided through the HSE's National Lottery scheme.

Details in relation to grants to voluntary organisations are set out in the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the HSE. Information in relation to 2009 can be accessed at www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/corporate/AnnualReport2009.html. The Annual Report for 2010 is due to be submitted to me by 21st May, after which it will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas , and subsequently published on the HSE's website.

Telecommunications Services

369. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the 116000 phone number will be implemented to protect our children from predators. [10318/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): The purpose of the 116000 phone number is to provide a contact number to families if children go missing. It does not form a part of child protection structures. While the Office of the Minister for Children was involved in ongoing discussions with other Government Departments and NGO's in relation to the development of a hotline for missing children, the establishment of the hotline for missing children is a matter for the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

Medical Cards

370. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an appeal to refuse a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10319/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

371. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for renewal of a doctor's visit card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [10324/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

372. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Health and Children if St. Luke's Hospital outreach oncology clinic will remain at Mullingar regional hospital, County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10326/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As the Deputy's question relates to the delivery of services, I have asked the HSE to reply to her directly.

Parliamentary Questions

373. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 329 of 12 January 2011, when a response will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10327/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): I understand from the HSE that a reply issued to the Deputy on the 24th January 2011. I have asked the HSE to re-issue a copy of this letter to the Deputy.

Question No. 374 answered with Question No. 349.

Hospital Accommodation

375. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the construction of the new 120 bed facility for cystic fibrosis patients at St. Vincent's Hospital Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10368/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): I have been informed by the HSE that the project is proceeding according to plan, within budget and no reports of delays have been received. Completion for service delivery is expected in early 2012.

Health Services

376. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for a transfer for specialist treatment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10375/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Cards

377. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10383/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services

378. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will reconsider a request for assistance made by a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; the number of patients nationally that avail of outpatient intravenous infusion services; and of this number the number that have to travel more than 50 miles for treatment. [10385/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As the individual case raised by the Deputy is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

My Department has been informed by the HSE that outpatient intravenous infusion services are used for a very wide range of conditions and treatments and the Executive does not rou-

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tinely collect the data referred to by the Deputy. The HSE is not therefore in a position to provide the statistical information requested by the Deputy.

Medical Cards

379. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10389/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

380. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will ensure that an urgent surgical procedure will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10407/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Departmental Bodies

381. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will review and reform the health promotion unit in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10415/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): Health promotion is a key element of any modern health system. This Government will place a heavy emphasis on prevention. Historically, while we have been happy to spend many millions on cutting edge technology to deal with the end result of poor lifestyle choices, we have been slow to spend sufficient funds on preventing those behaviours in the first place. By focusing on prevention we will not only save the taxpayer considerable money by avoiding expensive treatments but also, and even more importantly, we will provide our citizens with a much better quality of life. The Health Promotion Unit in my Department will play a vital role in advancing policy in this area.

Health Services

382. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health and Children in view of the five years on a waiting list, if he will advise when the orthodontic intervention by the Health Service Executive West will take place in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway. [10419/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medical Cards

383. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a medical card appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [10422/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Accommodation

384. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the outcome of his recent visit to Clonakilty Community Hospital, County Cork; and the direction he gave to Health Service Executive officials in terms of finding alternative considerations to the planned closure of beds at this hospital. [10486/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): During a recent visit to the region my colleague, Minister Reilly, took the opportunity to visit Clonakilty Community Hospital, to inform himself on the range of services provided at the hospital, the rationale for the reduction in long stay beds at the hospital and the potential impact of this decision. During the visit the Minister was informed of the developments which have taken place in Clonakilty Community Hospital in recent years. These include: the development of a Dementia Unit; the refurbishment of inpatient accommodation to provide an improved living environment; and designation of beds to provide respite, palliative care and community support. During the visit the background to the decision to reduce the number of residential beds at the hospital was outlined in detail. This included: nationally agreed model of care for provision of health services to older people, with emphasis on supporting older people to live at home; national and local analysis of requirements for residential care for older people; the requirements to meet HIQA standards including those relating to the environment; the impact of the Public Sector Recruitment Moratorium and the need to ensure that the remaining staffing resources are targeted to meet prioritised needs; and the impact of the Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal) on the demand for places in public units.

The HSE set out the reasoning behind the approach taken along with the need to address the issue of ward accommodation at the hospital where there are a number of wards with a large number of beds. The Minister asked that the HSE examine the potential to rearrange beds and services at the hospital in order to determine whether it would be possible to retain some of the 16 beds earmarked for closure for a period of time.

The Department is currently considering the future of HSE Provision of Residential Care for Older People. This review will consider the position of all HSE residential facilities for Older People in terms of meeting the National Standards and Regulations. It will also consider local demographic pressures and the extent of existing public and private provision, with a view to developing an overall strategy on how the Executive should continue to provide this service in view of current budgetary and other pressures. Any plans that the Executive may have to close or withdraw residential care beds is suspended until the Minister has had an opportunity to consider the findings of the review.

I should make it clear, however, that, providing quality and safe care for our long stay residents will have to remain at the heart of these considerations.

Health Services

385. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health and Children his views on the Health Service Executive's decision to put home-help services out to tender, the way he will ensure that the quality of care for patients and working conditions for home help providers is not reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10487/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Government policy is to enable older people to remain at home and in their communities, which is where they want to be. This is underpinned by significant investment to support older people to live at home for as long as possible through a range of community services, including home help. In some cases, where the service is approved and funded by the HSE, this may be undertaken through partnership arrangements with non-statutory providers to maximise service delivery.

The Department of Health and Children accepts the need for a more standardised approach to the delivery of home care overall, whether by statutory or non-statutory providers. During 2010, the HSE and the Department progressed various improvements to home care provision, particularly relating to the standardisation and governance of services. The on-going procurement initiative for HSE home care recipients is fundamental to effecting improvement overall. This process does not reflect a policy of privatisation but, rather, a more standardised approach to the procurement of services nationally. It is designed, primarily, to enhance client safety and quality, and compliment the long standing partnership model of the HSE. It should be noted that approximately 75% of all home help services are provided directly by HSE staff, and these services will not be affected by the current procurement process.

The process has been carried out in accordance with relevant EU Guidelines. All tenderers must comply with quality standards set by the Executive. Successful tenderers will be monitored by the HSE to ensure services supplied are in line with the contract and quality measures set, including Garda Vetting, qualifications or other requirements pertaining to those caring for vulnerable older people on behalf of the Executive. The Department of Health and Children will continue to liaise closely with the HSE in relation to the issues raised by the Deputy, while progressing all other initiatives relevant to developing community based services for older people.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

386. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on payment of the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10513/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Mental Health Services

387. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will use the review of the Mental Health Act 2001 as an opportunity to explore using new legislation to address the obligations of health services to provide access to comprehensive community based mental health services and if he will ensure that the terms of reference of the review incorporates this accordingly. [10541/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Government is committed to reviewing the Mental Health Act 2001, implementing A Vision for Change and reforming our model of healthcare delivery. The evidence is overwhelming that a modern mental health service is best delivered in the community. In these circumstances the Government is committed to developing community-based services and in that context will ringfence €35m annually from within the health budget to develop community mental health teams and services to ensure early access to more appropriate and better quality care. If legis-

lation is required in respect of any of these measures I will ensure that appropriate proposals are considered in that regard.

Hospital Services

388. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a surgical procedure will be expedited by the Health Service Executive; or, if, in view of this person's medical history and waiting time, they will be referred for attention to the National Treatment Purchase Fund as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10560/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Cards

389. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a medical card application has been received in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [10577/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Action Plan

390. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he intends to implement the action plan for neurological care as drawn up by the Neurological Alliance of Ireland an umbrella group of more than 30 NGOs and charities providing support to some of the 700,000 persons living with a neurological condition. [10594/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): Following discussions in 2010 between the Director of the Office of Clinical Strategy and Programmes in the HSE and the Irish Consultant Neurologists' Association (Neurology Faculty) it was agreed to appoint a number of Neurologists to lead three key national programmes. The setting up of these programmes shows the importance that the HSE gives to neurological care and its commitment to improving access to neurological services.

In this regard, I welcome the action plan for neurological care by the Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI), to which the Deputy refers. This plan emphasises the importance of neurological care and raises many issues that these neurology programmes will address.

The first of these programmes deals with neurology out patient departments and aims to provide standardised care for neurology patients and to increase access so that patients will not wait more than thirty days for an appointment. The programme is due to establish referral guidelines and encourage the increased use of neurolink. The second programme deals with epilepsy services and aims to introduce rapid access clinics and introduce twenty four hour, seven day a week telephone access to expert opinion for all healthcare professionals. It is intended that this programme will assist with admission avoidance and reduce the number of attendances to emergency departments. The third programme deals with stroke services and aims to establish robust clinical governance systems for stroke care, including local stroke teams and regional stroke networks. This programme is due to include access to safe and effective stroke thrombolysis in all hospitals admitting acute stroke on a twenty four hour, seven day a week basis.

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The HSE has emphasised to my Department that all national programmes, including those concentrating on neurology, will have a focus on patient advocacy. These inter-related programmes aim to improve service quality, effectiveness and patient access and to ensure that patient care is provided in the service setting most appropriate to individuals' needs.

The NAI action plan includes reference to access to neurological rehabilitation services. My Department is in the process of finalising a National Policy and Strategy for the delivery of Neuro-Rehabilitation Services in Ireland 2011 — 2015. The Health Service Executive's National Service Plan for 2011 includes a commitment to target people waiting for a neurology out-patient appointment, appoint a national clinical lead for neuro-rehabilitation and establish an implementation structure and develop an implementation plan for neuro-rehabilitation.

Medicinal Products

391. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the changes, if any, that have taken place with respect to herbal remedy products, and alternative medicines from 30 April 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10609/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): The Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive (2004/24/EC) of 2004 was transposed into Irish Law through the Medicinal Products (Control of Placing on the Market) Regulations 2007 (S.I. 540 of 2007).

These Regulations put in place a Traditional Herbal Medicines Registration Scheme to ensure the safety and efficacy of these products to consumers. This simplified registration scheme ensures that these products must be able to show proven standards of quality and evidence of efficacy and safety, and also must be supplied with detailed directions as to their safe use by consumers. An exceptionally long transition period of 7 years allowing for the registration of traditional herbal medicines already on the market ended on 30/04/2011. The Irish Medicines Board (IMB) is the Competent Authority for the registration process.

Medical Aids and Appliances

392. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if all the supports and equipment required by a person (details supplied) will be provided as a matter of urgency by the Health Service Executive and if he will expedite a response. [10627/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Cards

393. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a full medical card will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if he will expedite a response. [10631/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Expenditure Reviews

394. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF

programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10660/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): The information requested by the Deputy is being collated by my Department and will be forwarded to him as soon as it is available.

Hospitals Waiting Lists

395. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health and Children if he will expedite the appointment time of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 16; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10668/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Cards

396. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application for a general medical services card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon. [10671/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

397. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount paid to pharmacists under the high tech prescription claim system for drugs that were not prescribed but held in stock; his views on whether this represents value for money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10680/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): Regulations are being drafted to give effect to these reductions. The HSE is also taking measures to achieve significant savings in expenditure under the scheme.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

398. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health and Children his plans to amend the fair deal plan to end the anomaly where farms are fully assessed for the levy on the residence of nursing home residents to pay for their care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10691/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, individuals contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 5% of the value of any assets per annum towards their cost of care. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets, or €72,000 in the case of a couple, is not counted at all in the financial assessment. The scheme includes a safeguard that nobody will pay more than the actual cost of care.

An individual's principal residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the 15% or 'three year' cap. It means that individuals pay a 5% contribution based on their principal residence for a maximum of three

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years regardless of the time they spend in nursing home care. After 3 years, even if an individual is still in long-term nursing home care, they will not pay any further contribution based on the principal residence. This 'three year' cap applies regardless of whether an individual chooses to opt for the loan or not. The intention of this three year cap is to protect the family home.

The 'three year' cap also extends to farms and businesses in circumstances where:

i. the person has suffered a sudden illness or disability which causes them to need long-term nursing home care, and

ii. the person or their partner was actively engaged in the daily management of the farm or business up until the time of the sudden illness or disability,

and

iii. a family successor certifies that he or she will continue the management of the farm or business.

In the case of couples, the measure applies where the applicant suffered a sudden and unforeseen illness and either or both members of the couple have been engaged in the running of the family farm or business. This stipulation is in keeping with the key principle of joint assessment of couples.

The 'three year cap' was extended to farms and businesses at Report Stage in the Dáil because a number of Deputies and farming interest groups, expressed concern, at both Second and Committee Stages, about the treatment of farms under the legislation. In particular, there was concern about the potential impact of the 5% annual contribution on the sustainability of family farms and businesses, specifically, in situations where care is required from an early age and for a prolonged period.

This measure is intended to ensure the financial sustainability of farms and businesses in cases where a person suffered a sudden illness and did not have an opportunity to put appropriate succession arrangements in place. It affords additional protection because it ensures that a person's maximum contribution is fully quantifiable.

If a farm or business has been transferred more than five years prior to an individual's application for the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, the asset will not be taken into account at all in the course of the financial assessment.

The Minister for Health does not propose to amend the legislation underpinning the scheme to make the treatment of farms and businesses any more beneficial than at present. Individuals in possession of such assets may already avail of the three year cap. In contrast, the 5% contribution based on assets other than the principal residence or farms and businesses that meet the criteria outlined above is ongoing for the duration of the individual's time in long-term nursing home care.

Proposed Legislation

399. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children his views on the proposal in the revised EU-IMF programme of financial support for Ireland regarding the elimination of restrictions on the number of general practitioners qualifying; and when he will bring forward legislation on this matter. [10695/11]

400. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health and Children his views of the proposal in the revised EU-IMF programme of financial support for Ireland regarding the

removal of restrictions on general practitioners wishing to treat public patients as well as restrictions on advertising; and when he will bring forward legislation on this matter. [10696/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): I propose to take Questions Nos. 399 and 400 together.

The EU/IMF programme provides for the introduction of legislative changes to remove restrictions to trade and competition in sheltered sectors by the end of the third quarter in 2011, including eliminating restrictions on the number of GPs qualifying and removing restrictions on GPs wishing to treat public patients as well as restrictions on advertising.

The Medical Council's current Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners, published in 2009, removed restrictions on advertising by medical practitioners. Accordingly, GPs are now free to advertise their services and their prices. No further action is required on this matter.

With effect from 1 July 2010, the number of GP training places increased from 120 to 157 per annum. The GP training programme is of four years duration — two years spent in hospital posts and two years in an approved general practice.

The HSE is working with the Irish College of General Practitioners on a process to fast track GP training for doctors who already have trained in a hospital prior to undertaking the four year GP training cycle.

In relation to removing restrictions on GPs wishing to treat public patients, my officials, in consultation with the HSE, are finalising proposals for the implementation of this commitment within the specified time frame.

Health Services

401. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children, further to Parliamentary Question No. 121 of 30 March 2011, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [10725/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): My Department has been advised by the Health Service Executive (HSE) that a reply on this matter issued to the Deputy on 6 May 2011.

402. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children, further to Parliamentary Question No. 368 of 5 April 2011, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [10726/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): I understand that the matter is being investigated and that a reply will issue to the Deputy shortly.

403. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children, further to Parliamentary Question No. 394 of 5 April 2011, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive. [10727/11]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy James Reilly): My Department has asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy in this matter as soon as possible.

Medical Cards

404. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding

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the renewal of a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [10729/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

405. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health and Children his plans to address the situation whereby general practitioners are charging patients with medical cards for blood tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10730/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Róisín Shortall): Under the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, a general practitioner (GP) is expected to provide his/her patients who hold medical cards or GP visit cards with all proper and necessary treatment of a kind generally undertaken by a GP. Where blood tests form part of the investigation and necessary treatment of patients' symptoms or conditions, these should be provided free of charge to medical card and GP visit card holders. The HSE also points out that, in many GP surgeries, it is the practice nurse who takes blood samples. The HSE significantly subsidises the cost of employing practice nurses.

If the HSE is made aware of specific cases where GMS patients are being charged by GP contractors, it will arrange to have such cases investigated as appropriate. A report has been requested from the Primary Care Unit Managers in the HSE on the extent of complaints received and the status of same.

Computerisation Programme

406. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered extending the facility to tax motor vehicles online to commercial vehicles; if not, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10302/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The national vehicle fleet comprises over 2.4 million vehicles and the online motor tax service can currently be availed of by a very significant 85% of owners. Arrangements being made by my Department, which are now at an advanced stage, will enable commercial vehicles (some 327,000 units) to avail of the online motor tax service in instances where they are covered by a current roadworthiness certificate. This new service will be introduced in the coming weeks.

The Road Safety Authority is currently engaged in the implementation of a wide-ranging commercial vehicle roadworthiness reform programme. As part of this, it is envisaged that new arrangements which will involve electronic data transfer as well as more streamlined administrative arrangements will also encourage a greater volume of commercial vehicle owners to tax online.

Training Programmes

407. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons on waiting lists for Fáilte Ireland skills programme; and the way he will accommodate these persons. [10436/11]

410. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons currently on a waiting list for skills courses with Fáilte Ireland; the number

of persons on a waiting list in each Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford training centres; and the average waiting time in each centre. [10209/11]

422. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the Fáilte Ireland training centre at a location (details supplied) closed last month; the action he will take to provide for the 250 bar, restaurant and culinary training places lost following the closure of the training centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10553/11]

434. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Fáilte Ireland has indefinitely suspended its series of skills courses in its four training centres; the reasons behind the move; if he foresees the reinstatement of the courses in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10735/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 407, 410, 422 and 434 together.

The matters raised are operational matters for Fáilte Ireland. I have referred the Deputies' Questions to the agency for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply to your question within ten working days.

Road Safety

408. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if it is against the law to send texts and e-mail and drive while using a hands free device; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10508/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Section 3(1) of the Road Traffic Act 2006 and Statutory Instruments 443 and 444 of 2006 provide for the offence of driving a mechanically propelled vehicle in a public place while holding a mobile phone. Offences relating to using a mobile phone for texting or emailing while driving can also be dealt with under Section 52 of the Road Traffic Act 1961 (as substituted by Section 50 of the Road Traffic Act 1968).

Swimming Pool Projects

409. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a swimming pool (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10689/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, which is administered by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport grant aid to a maximum of €3.8 million is provided to Local Authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools , subject in both cases to the total grant not exceeding 80% of the eligible cost of the project or, in the case of projects located in disadvantaged areas, 90% of the eligible cost. Proposals must comply with the standards set out in the Department's "Procedures for the Planning, Approval and Financing of Swimming Pools and Technical Guidelines."

Under the Guidelines there are four principal stages in a swimming pool project following the submission of a feasibility study. These, in order of progress, are: Preliminary Report; Contract Documents; Tender and Construction. The Department and its technical advisors, the Office of Public Works, evaluate each stage and Local Authorities cannot proceed to the next

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stage of a project unless prior approval issues from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Contract Documents were approved for a new swimming pool in Ballybofey/ Stranorlar in January 2009, leaving Donegal County Council to proceed to the next stage, which is the preparation of the Tender Report. I understand the Tender Report should be forwarded by Donegal County Council to the Department for approval by the end of this month.

Question No. 410 answered with Question No. 407.

Cycle Facilities

411. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the storage of bicycles (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10247/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised is an operational matter for Bus Éireann. I have referred the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Network

412. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are any requirements for road works affecting cycle lanes to be finished to a higher standard than would otherwise be the case, in view of the fact that cycle lanes are paid for out of the public purse, but can be left impassible after work carried out by private companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10249/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities own resources and are supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Local authorities have been provided with a number of best practice documents and are required to apply these guidelines when carrying out works on regional and local roads.

Private companies require the prior written consent of the relevant road authority to carry out road works. It is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that all works carried out by private companies are of a satisfactory standard.

413. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied). [10269/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads is a matter for the National Roads Authority under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting this, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply in relation to his concerns. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

414. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his policy in regard to the introduction of further road tolling; if it is intended to toll the Jack Lynch Tunnel and or the Mallow Road, Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10286/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. In addition, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors in respect of national roads is vested in the NRA under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007). The "National Roads Traffic Management Study" published recently together with other work being undertaken by the NRA will help inform consideration of future traffic management measures, including tolling. The issues involved will need to be considered carefully before decisions are made on future tolling strategy.

Swimming Pool Projects

415. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10304/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, which is administered by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport grant aid to a maximum of €3.8 million is provided to Local Authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools, subject in both cases to the total grant not exceeding 80% of the eligible cost of the project or, in the case of projects located in disadvantaged areas, 90% of the eligible cost. Proposals must comply with the standards set out in the Department's "Procedures for the Planning, Approval and Financing of Swimming Pools and Technical Guidelines."

Under the Guidelines there are four principal stages in a swimming pool project following the submission of a feasibility study. These, in order of progress, are: Preliminary Report; Contract Documents; Tender and Construction. The Department and its technical advisors, the Office of Public Works, evaluate each stage and Local Authorities cannot proceed to the next stage of a project unless prior approval issues from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

A Preliminary Report was approved for the refurbishment of Buncrana swimming pool in April 2005, leaving Donegal County Council to proceed to the next stage, which is the preparation of Contract Documents. I understand Contract Documents should be ready for approval in February 2012.

Departmental Bodies

416. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a detailed breakdown of projected savings from the merging of the National Road Authority and Rail Procurement Agency; and the additional costs foreseen in the setting up of said merged body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10328/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Report of the Steering Group on the Merger of the National Roads Authority and the Railway Procurement

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Agency, which is available on my Department's website, examines costs and savings in Chapter 11. The Steering Group considered that a saving of €3 to €4 million could be achieved in the medium term.

Public Transport

417. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown of spending to date on a project (details supplied); and the proportion these figures represent of the overall projected spend on each. [10330/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) on December 2009, the implementation and development of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), such as Metro North, DART Underground and Luas line BXD come under the remit of the NTA.

The legislative basis for this is Section 11(1)(e) of the DTA Act 2008 "Principal Functions of Authority — The principal functions of the Authority are to secure the- provision of public transport infrastructure". Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Traffic Accidents

418. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the percentage of road accident fatalities in the most recent years for which figures are available involving vehicles of ten years old or older; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10370/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The subject matter of this particular question i.e. statistics on road accident fatalities, is the responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have referred the question to them for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten days.

National Car Test

419. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of private motor vehicles over ten years old that fail the national car test; the percentage of failures in this category concerned with issues of safety; if he will provide details as to the number of private vehicles that fail the NCT on safety grounds on presentation of the vehicle for its first NCT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10371/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority has responsibility for the delivery of the National Car Test.

I have referred the Deputy's question to the Road Safety Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Tourism Promotion

420. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the State-funded tourism projects that are currently under way in the West Cork area; the amount of funding that has been ring-fenced to promote tourism in the area in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10485/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The matter raised is an operational one for Fáilte Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's Question to the agency for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

National Car Test

421. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale used by him and the national car test in determining that cars of more than ten years require testing every 12 months from June 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10517/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has responsibility for the delivery of the National Car Test. In accordance with EU Directive 96/96/EU, all Member States are required to have arrangements in place for the compulsory periodic roadworthiness testing of motor vehicles and trailers registered by them. Implementation of a system of roadworthiness testing of passenger cars in Ireland commenced in January 2000 through the National Car Testing Service (NCTS).

In 2008, the RSA reviewed the car testing specification and, following this review, proposed that a number of new test items be introduced to the National Car Test (NCT). A public consultation process was conducted by the RSA on the proposals in 2009 and, having considered the views received, the RSA recommended that the proposals, including annual testing of cars over ten years old, be introduced to the NCT. The recommendations were accepted and approved by my predecessor.

The NCT is a preventative road safety measure that ensures vehicles, particularly older vehicles, using our roads are in sound working order. In the course of its review, the RSA found that almost half (47%) of collisions that occurred in 2007 involved vehicles that were nine years old or more. In addition, 45% of serious injuries from collisions in 2007 involved vehicles that were nine years old or more. There is a need to ensure that older vehicles are frequently maintained and that dangerous or defective vehicles are not on our roads.

I intend to monitor the introduction of this new regime and in conjunction with the NRA review its effectiveness as appropriate.

Question No. 422 answered with Question No. 407.

Driving Tests

423. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a driving test in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3. [10578/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The subject matter of this particular question, i.e. driver testing, is the responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have referred the question to them for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten days.

Departmental Bodies

424. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the staffing levels in the National Roads Authority in each of the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and to date in 2011; if NRA staff are being let go; and, if so, the number of same and from which Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10583/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The staffing levels for the National Roads Authority (NRA) for each of the years requested by the Deputy are as follows:

2011 to date — 132 or 130 WTE

*WTE refers to staff members work patterns

As a non-commercial semi-state body the NRA is subject to staff reduction targets under the Employment Control Framework (ECF). In achieving its targets under the ECF to date there have been no compulsory redundancies in the NRA.

Road Network

425. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to expand the network of service areas on the motorway network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10584/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads (including the provision of service areas) are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

426. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has reviewed the operation of all toll charges across the national road network in view of the recent legal disputes that have arisen regarding overcharging; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10585/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with local authorities concerned.

In particular, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors in respect of national roads is vested in the NRA under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007).

Toll rates for 2011 for a number of toll schemes have been the subject of a dispute between the NRA and the relevant PPP operators concerned. Where necessary, the NRA has sought clarification through the Courts system.

427. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when construction contracts will be awarded to begin works on the N3 Belturbet bypass; the N4 downs grade separation; the N3 Longford bypass; the N7 Newlands Cross-N11 Arklow to Rathnew PPP and Gorey service area; the M17-18 Gort to Tuam road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10587/11]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local

authorities concerned. Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

428. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the National Roads Authority's pilot programme of improvements on sections of national secondary low-volume routes; when this pilot programme will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10588/11]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads (both primary and secondary) are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

429. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the following road schemes will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála for approval: N14-N15 link to Strabane; N56 Dungloe to Glenties; N59 Westport to Mulranny; N59 Oughterard to Clifden; N59 Moycullen bypass; N86 Tralee to Dingle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10589/11]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rural Transport Services

430. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the charge applied to disabled persons in County Donegal for travel to their training day or day centres under the rural transport initiative and his plans to either remove or advise removal of this additional financial burden on them following repeated budget cuts to their income. [10607/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I understand that the transport services in question are not provided under my Department's Rural Transport Programme but are operated under contract with the Health Services Executive (HSE), to whom the question of charges for those services should be addressed. The Free Travel Scheme of the Department of Social Protection applies to all services operated under the Rural Transport Programme.

Partnership Agreements

431. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress being made on the implementation of the Croke Park agreement; if he will meet all targets within the time frame required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10650/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Progress in relation to the implementation of the Croke Park Agreement Action Plans in my Department and its non-

[Deputy Leo Varadkar.]

commercial semi-state agencies has been reported up to end-Quarter 1 2011 showing good progress and savings being made.

While the most substantial savings have been achieved through the reduction in the pay bill associated with reductions in numbers (with estimated savings of approximately €2 million), a number of non-pay savings have also been identified. These relate mainly to efficiencies through Information Communications Technology improvements which amount to approximately €350,000.

My Department has indicated to the Implementation Body that a small number of actions are behind schedule. In each instance work is continuing to progress these actions notwithstanding the delay in meeting the original targets.

Expenditure Reviews

432. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will identify all assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by him under the terms of the EU-IMF programme of financial support; if these assessments, reviews or reports are being carried out internally by him or independently; when he expects each assessment, review and report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10665/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are no specific assessments, reviews or reports being carried out by my Department under the terms of the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support. My Department is currently engaging in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2011 being led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the outcome of which will be known later this year.

Road Network

433. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position on the Ballybofey Stranorlar by-pass on the N15, County Donegal. [10690/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Question No. 434 answered with Question No. 407