

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 6 Iúil 2011.
Wednesday, 6 July 2011.

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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: Last night the deputy leader of Fine Gael talked at length about his reasons for pushing ahead with the removal of services from Roscommon hospital, and signalled that this will continue with other hospitals. He said he was startled by the quality of treatment at the hospital, although to be startled is an odd reaction given the fact every single one of the issues he mentioned was fully known to him last February.

Fine Gael repeatedly told the people of Roscommon that it had the solution, for example, to the NCHD issue. The only things that have actually changed since then are that the Minister, Deputy Reilly, has taken personal responsibility for the HSE and the Department has under-spent its budget by about €40 million. Yesterday we had the remarkable spectacle of the Taoiseach going as far as to deny having made any commitments to smaller hospitals. His problem, of course, is that it only takes about five minutes research to show that making promises to hospitals was a core campaign tactic of Fine Gael in Roscommon and throughout the country during the election, and in the past few years.

For example, the Taoiseach personally gave assurances relating to services in Ennis on 7 February, he gave assurances on services in Nenagh on 4 February, and in Cork on 18 February he said he had a list of hospitals whose services Fine Gael would protect. With regard to Sligo, which we discussed yesterday, he should look at the record of this House, where his name is signed under a motion demanding that services there be protected and retained. As Deputy Feighan said at the launch of Fine Gael's Roscommon campaign: "With us, James Reilly and Enda Kenny, the future of Roscommon hospital will be secure because we are telling the truth".

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: It is safe.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Instead of the moral outrage——

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have a question? You are nearly running out of time. You have ten seconds.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It is good stuff, a Cheann Comhairle. It is worth repeating.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Who created the problem in the first place?

A Deputy: Look at what happened in the past two or three years.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Martin has ten seconds.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Instead of the moral outrage, when the Taoiseach is asked questions——

Deputy Paudie Coffey: What about the promises made in 2007? Promises were made left, right and centre in Waterford. We had them in writing.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Two wrongs do not make a right.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will Deputy Martin please ask the question?

Deputy Alan Shatter: One would think they were never in charge of the health service.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the usual suspects please remain silent?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I never said a word.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Instead of the moral outrage, Taoiseach——

An Ceann Comhairle: Will you please ask the question? Your time is up.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am asking the question but I am being heckled repeatedly from the other side.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Ask him about Punch and Judy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: As the leader of the main Opposition party, I am entitled to ask a question and you must allow that to proceed.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, and you have two minutes to do it. You spent the first minute and 50 seconds making a statement.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am entitled to do so.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, but ask the question.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Hold on a second. Under standing orders I am entitled to ask a question on a matter raised.

An Ceann Comhairle: It says Leaders' Questions here.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Do you want to read out the standing order?

An Ceann Comhairle: Please, go ahead.

Deputy Micheál Martin: No, it is very important that——

Deputy James Reilly: Finish the sermon and get on with the question.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is very important that we understand the standing order.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is also very important that you understand who is in the Chair.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am being heckled repeatedly and I need to be protected as well.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is very important that you understand who is in the Chair.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I understand who is in the Chair but I also understand the standing order on Leaders' Questions. It allows me to ask a question on a matter raised.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please ask it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am trying to ask it but I am being repeatedly interrupted by all sides. I am simply saying to the Taoiseach that instead of the moral outrage when he is asked questions about his commitments, can he explain exactly why his straightforward promise to the people of Roscommon has been abandoned?

The Taoiseach: I find the Deputy's intervention in this pathetic. For somebody who commissioned over 130 reports and acted on none of them, and who came into this House and denied all responsibility for reading his brief about a charge that cost almost €1 billion in respect of taking money back off geriatric patients in long-stay care, his record in this regard is not one to follow.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Come on. Answer the question.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The Taoiseach is ducking the question.

The Taoiseach: I make no apology for attempting to bring about a situation where patient safety is seen and demonstrated to be of critical and fundamental importance to the Government. I am on record on many radio stations throughout the country as saying the Fine Gael Party, as an Opposition party attempting to get into government, was not going to go down the route of endless promises of restoring places that have been closed down.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: There must have been no hospitals at all.

Deputy Tom Hayes: That is our party — Fine Gael.

The Taoiseach: If the Deputy cares to do some more research, he will find it on record after record in regard to many local hospitals.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputies give the Taoiseach a chance to reply?

The Taoiseach: Let me say this about Roscommon. I know Roscommon hospital exceptionally well, I have been there on many occasions, I know many of the people who work there and many of the constituents from County Roscommon have come to me and have come to protest outside my office.

Deputy Finian McGrath: They are not happy.

The Taoiseach: I want to make it clear that what is involved here is changing a situation whereby patient safety becomes paramount. The fact is that the Health Information and Quality Authority has expressed serious safety reservations about the situation that exists in a number of small hospitals where there is not the range of medical capacity to deal with all of the situations that arise. That is not the fault of any individual working in the hospital. It is just a fact of life that the situation that exists in a number of small hospitals is not the way we would like it to be. HIQA expressed concern in this regard about a number of hospitals, including Roscommon, and the consultants in the region have also expressed fears in respect of safety.

[The Taoiseach.]

Unlike the thread the Deputy is trying to spin here, there is no intention to close down Roscommon hospital — that is the first point. The second point is that, as has been clarified in the debate here with the Minister for Health, there will be an urgent care centre, run by non-consultant hospital doctors in Roscommon hospital and operating from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It is a band-aid station.

The Taoiseach: The GP service has gathered together to form a co-operative which will provide a call-in centre based in the outpatient department of the hospital and this will operate from 6 p.m. until 9 a.m. The GPs will also provide their own roster for Saturdays and weekends, as heretofore. The vast majority of the treatments that have been provided in Roscommon hospital to good effect over the years will continue.

From a medical safety perspective, the Minister has pointed out that people suffering from deep trauma, heart attack or stroke have a better chance of survival if they are brought to a high volume centre like Galway. He has confirmed that Roscommon will have four ambulances, with two based in Roscommon town and backed up by a rapid response vehicle with a team of trained paramedics and the advantage of a medical assessment unit. This is in the interest of patient safety. I am aware of the concerns, fears and anxieties that people have but I assure the Deputy that what I am describing is going to happen.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I will quote the statement from the Taoiseach's party to the people of Roscommon: "I would like to confirm that Fine Gael undertakes, in accordance with the Fine Gael policy on local hospitals, to retain the emergency, surgical, medical and other health services at Roscommon hospital which are present on the formation of the 31st Dáil". That is what he said a short while ago. He knew everything that he has outlined in the Dáil in terms of patient safety and non-consultant hospital doctors, NCHD. In the debate held last October, Deputy Reilly made it clear he had the solutions to the NCHD issue and that by eliminating waste in the HSE, and so on, he would solve all the problems and resolve the issues in terms of protecting services in local hospitals.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we hear the Deputy's supplementary question?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Punch and Judy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach always lets politics get in the way of facts in terms of the €1 billion reported——

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we have the supplementary question please?

Deputy Micheál Martin: ——but if he took time to read the independent report he would find that what he has asserted is absolute nonsense.

Deputy Ray Butler: Living on a prayer, that is how Fianna Fáil left us.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Substantial investments have been made in Roscommon hospital over the years.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy put his supplementary question?

Deputy Micheál Martin: I will put it now. Yesterday the Taoiseach made an incredible statement to the House when I asked him about keeping report cards on Ministers. He said we should not take his words at face value and it was only a metaphor.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is over time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Can he be straight this morning by telling us whether the country should take the same approach when it thinks back to the long list of specific commitments and promises he and his party made while they sought power? They were only metaphors.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: The damage was already done to the economy.

Deputy James Reilly: Fianna Fáil is a metaphor for disaster.

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

The Taoiseach: That is equally pathetic. What I said on other matters in this House, in respect of which my word can be taken as coming true and through, is that we are going to hold a number of referendums, which Fianna Fáil failed to organise when it was in Government, on accountability and responsibility.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Stick to the question.

The Taoiseach: They are not metaphors; they are facts. We will have one about confidentiality and one about the consequences of Abbeylara. We have made a number of additional decisions which we said we would make.

Deputy Dara Calleary: What are the consequences for Roscommon?

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Government is also getting rid of 20 Deputies.

The Taoiseach: If Deputy Martin wants to go down the road of having report cards, he should stick with that. If that is his limit for the moment, he should stay with it. He is doing well. We have a bigger picture to sort out, namely, the challenge that faces our country.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Taoiseach answer my question?

The Taoiseach: He stated that the Minister, Deputy Reilly, had the answers to the non-consultant hospital doctor problem. This week the Minister made an amendment to the Act to provide a facility for temporary registration in order to allow greater access for non-consultant hospital doctors to work in this country, an issue which Deputy Martin and his Government failed to address for ten years.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The very service the Taoiseach said he would keep is closing.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: Deputy Martin is good at pointing the finger.

The Taoiseach: Year after year, the same problem arose in January and July and he did nothing about it.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: We dealt with them.

Deputy Micheál Martin: They were dealt with.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are over time.

The Taoiseach: The Minister has the Government's authority to deal with the problem in so far as non-consultant hospital doctors are concerned and that situation will improve on the next roster because of the changes he has introduced.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Who is he coddling?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy has not commented, as others have, on the facilities now being introduced in respect of patient safety in Roscommon.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The service is closing.

The Taoiseach: I am sure he will agree that the medical evidence is incontrovertible in so far as mortality rates are concerned.

Deputy Micheál Martin: He knew all about that for the past couple years but it did not stop him putting down motions in this House.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: Fianna Fáil had 14 years.

The Taoiseach: I am sure the Deputy wants every patient to have the best chance of survival, whether from heart attack, stroke or deep trauma.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach made a commitment knowing all that.

The Taoiseach: The facilities being put there are in the interest of patient safety and the vast majority of treatments carried out in Roscommon hospital will continue as heretofore with an enhanced and improved situation.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Knowing all of that, he made the commitment.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Unbelievable.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: What about Fianna Fáil's own promises?

The Taoiseach: There will be additional facilities in terms of the new ambulance crew and the rapid response vehicle backed up by the trained paramedic team. Believe reality.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Deputy Naughten says the promise should not have been made.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Has Deputy Martin inhaled something? I thought the headshops were shut.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are now five minutes over time on this question. I am not going to tolerate this. If I call people to finish, they should finish. We are five minutes over and we are supposed to allow seven minutes for a question. I also ask Deputies to cut out the heckling so we can hear what is being said.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I am sure the people of Roscommon are uplifted and edified by the rí rá taking place in this Chamber over a deadly serious issue. I understand the Taoiseach's frustration at Fianna Fáil, which closed accident and emergency departments in Monaghan, Dundalk, Ennis and Nenagh.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: You guys certainly filled them.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The Taoiseach is doing exactly the same thing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is this Deputy Adams's question? Is he speaking on health?

Deputy Gerry Adams: I do not understand why the Ceann Comhairle interrupted me.

An Ceann Comhairle: I apologise. I thought he was commenting on the previous question.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I am allowed to comment on anything I wish.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Hear, hear.

Deputy Gerry Adams: That is what I was sent here to do.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will do so through the rules of this Chair.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Of course. The Labour Party stated: "The Labour Party is 100 per cent behind Roscommon Hospital".

Deputy Timmy Dooley: With a JCB.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Deputy Dooley was quiet for long enough.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I stood by it.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The statement continues: "the Labour Party under Eamon Gilmore will not tolerate and will reverse any cuts to services if the HSE attempts to implement them between now and the election". The local Fine Gael candidates and Deputies, as well as the present Minister for Health, gave cast iron guarantees. The Taoiseach stated that GPs in the region will provide an out-of-hours service to replace the accident and emergency unit but tá sé ráite ag na dochtúirí seo go gcuirfear saol daoine i mbaol má leanann an Rialtas ar aghaidh leis an dúnadh seo. GPs advise that people's lives will be put at risk if the Government goes ahead with this closure.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: On a point of order——

An Ceann Comhairle: There are no points of order on questions. The Deputy should resume his seat.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I am appealing to Fine Gael and the Labour Party——

Deputy Emmet Stagg: I ask that the script Deputy Adams is using be circulated.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should resume his seat.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I am appealing to Fine Gael and Labour Party Members to support the Private Members' motion proposed by Sinn Féin and make a stand——

An Ceann Comhairle: Please put the question.

Deputy Gerry Adams: ——on behalf of our communities. I urge the Taoiseach to give clear notice that the Government will reverse the decision.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will the Deputy put the question?

Deputy Gerry Adams: I am also appealing to people to join today's protest against this outrageous decision.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: What about all the cuts in the North?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Of all the U-turns the Taoiseach has performed since he came into office, this is the most brazen.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: What about the U-turns Sinn Féin has done in the North?

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: It is a different song now.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Buttimer, every single day I have to address you. Will you please remain silent?

Deputy Tom Hayes: It is impossible for him to do that.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not a joke.

The Taoiseach: A full debate is being held arising from Sinn Féin's motion on small hospitals, including Roscommon. Deputy Adams is aware that Roscommon hospital has had difficulties in respect of recruiting non-consultant hospital doctors and has for quite some time relied heavily on agency staff. The hospital does not have anaesthetic cover on a 24-seven basis and an emergency department consultant is only available on site one day per week. This is not satisfactory and arising from these and other issues the HIQA report expressed serious concerns about the safety of patients. This was not because of the qualities of individual doctors but due to a lack of range of medical personnel. It is for that reason only that these changes are being made; to provide 24 hour cover in respect of the urgent care centre, to provide improved ambulance and transport facilities, backup paramedic personnel, facilities for access to a medical assessment unit, and transfers for patients suffering from heart attacks, deep trauma, stroke and so on. The changes being made are based on a requirement, a necessity and a responsibility to provide the best opportunity for patients in those categories to have the best level of treatment and the best opportunity to survive deep trauma, a heart attack or a stroke.

Deputy Gerry Adams: In Louth and Monaghan, the hospitals are suffering death by a thousand cuts. If services are removed and if the proper appointments are not made at the appropriate times, then a hospital can become unsafe. The responsibility of a government is to make a hospital safe. A mark of any society is that citizens — we are citizens, not subjects — have the right of access to wrap-around health care. The Taoiseach used the phrase “small hospital”. Who defines that term? If a citizen is ill, he or she should have access to first class primary health services. This is a small State. We have half the population of London. The Taoiseach is governing the USA.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can I have your question, please?

Deputy Gerry Adams: Part of the major problem is that money which should be going into these hospitals is going elsewhere. Today, the Government is going to give €10 million to unguaranteed senior bondholders who are not part of the banking guarantee. Why does the Taoiseach not reverse that? He can reverse all his other judgments. Why does he not keep to the promises he made on this issue in the election and put the money into front-line public services as opposed to toxic banks?

The Taoiseach: That is why the changes are being made to improve patient safety. We are a small country and a small State with a population less than half the city of London. Our philosophy is that we should have health services available to people at the lowest unit cost and

as close to them as possible. This means that we cannot have everything at every crossroads. In this case, the changes are being brought about for the people of Roscommon who attend Roscommon hospital. They will still have access to the vast majority of the types of treatment that they have always had, except in the outlined cases where small numbers will have an opportunity for better treatment due to the range of medical personnel in a bigger hospital. It is for that reason that extra transport facilities, extra trained paramedic staff and a rapid response vehicle are being made available. That applies from this weekend.

I understand that GPs have agreed to base their drop-in centre in the outpatient department of Roscommon hospital. That facility will be available to the people as it always was, and the GPs will continue their roster at weekend as they have done heretofore. The service in the urgent care centre in the hospital will be provided by the non-consultant hospital doctors for the people of Roscommon on a daily basis, as they would expect. In the interests of those who suffer from serious attacks, the facility and best opportunity for them will be provided elsewhere.

It is a case of anxiety and concern. I know many of the people involved. It is not an easy situation to say we must change this, but it is in the better interests of the patient and the services being provided. As the Minister for Health proceeds to change the structures, the problems associated with bigger hospitals, including Galway, will also be dealt with. His setting up of the special delivery unit will begin to deal with the backlog of waiting lists, with consequent problems for everyone when there are patients lying on trolleys and so on.

This is not an isolated issue. This is a leviathan structure that did not deliver what it was supposed to deliver and which has to change direction, its structure and the way it does its business. That is not easy task for the Minister, but that is what the Government will do in the interests of patients and the quality of services provided.

Deputy Gerry Adams: How many more accident and emergency departments are being closed down?

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on Deputy Ross.

Deputy Shane Ross: Thank you. A few weeks ago, the Government launched its jobs initiative in a great fanfare of triumph and publicity. A few days ago, the US Chamber of Commerce announced that there were 2,000 jobs vacant in the multinational sector here, especially in the areas of science, mathematics and technology. It seems a strange reflection on Government policy that there are 440,000 unemployed people here crying out for jobs, yet there are 2,000 vacancies which cannot be filled. What are the job creating quangos up to? Why were they not ready for this problem which has now arisen?

In particular, what has happened to FÁS, the €1 billion per annum bloated quango which is supposed to be in charge of training and employment in Ireland? Why is there so little information about FÁS? I made the mistake of looking for the FÁS annual report in the Library last night, but I could only get the annual report for 2009. I made inquiries about this issue this morning. In blatant breach of its statutory requirement, FÁS has not been able to produce its accounts on time by 30 June of this year. This quango has been surrounded by controversy and scandal for a long time. To find that it cannot produce its accounts begs the question as to what is going on in this training agency. Is it still in the same sort of chaos that it was before?

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you Deputy.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am just coming to the question. If this happened in public companies, they would be struck off after four months. Apparently, FÁS can act with impunity. It does not produce its accounts on time and there is no prospect of it doing so.

[Deputy Shane Ross.]

Would the Taoiseach consider calling in the board and the chief executive of the so-called reformed FÁS — it shows no signs of renewal — asking them why they cannot produce and will not produce accounts and annual reports according to their statutory obligations? This produces great unease. Will he ask them what plans they have, as the leading training agency, to fill the identified gap of 2,000 jobs in the multinational sector?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy has raised an issue that pertains to other countries as well as Ireland. There is a shortage of skills in many countries. With things moving so rapidly in the area of the Internet, robotics, nanotechnology, genetics and so on, the next decade will require a new range of skills sets and training for young people.

I met Mr. Schmidt of Google last week when he was here. He pointed out that the company is exceptionally happy with the facilities made available to it, and the opportunity that Ireland has presented for the company to do business. He pointed out the shortage of particular skills. The Minister for Education and Skills was with me when we met Mr. Schmidt. This requires an adjustment in the curriculum dealing with mathematics, engineering, physics and so on.

That is not something which can happen overnight but it is something of which the Minister is fully cognisant.

The question of FÁS will be decided on by Government, if not next week, then the week after. It is being reformed. I take Deputy Ross's point about the opportunity for the chief executive and chief personnel to be called in and I expect they will appear before the appropriate Oireachtas committee, whether education and skills or social protection. Deputies, like Deputy Ross, will have the opportunity to have face-to-face discussions on the projections and proposals on the revamped and reformed structure which was FÁS and on which the Deputy had a particular and direct hit some years ago. Deputy Ross's point is perfectly valid.

From speaking to chief executives and senior officers in companies like Hewlett Packard, Intel, Dell and so on, I know they recognise the scale of evolution and change required in all these sectors. Flexibility in our education system is required to deal with that. The Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Quinn, is very conscious of that. I hope that as a small country we can meet that flexibility and demand.

Looking at what has happened with mathematics over the years, it appears some companies look for some elements from the mathematics curriculum when looking for young people here while others with a different skills set are very happy with what they have got. However, it is an issue which needs to be addressed. I hope that when the new entity is formed, Deputy Ross will have the opportunity to speak directly to the chief executive at the Oireachtas committees.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Taoiseach for his reply. The question really is, why was the need for these particular skills sets not anticipated because we now have a serious situation?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The Deputy should ask the guys in front of him.

Deputy Shane Ross: I would blame those guys too. The Minister should not worry. However, it is a question which only one person can answer. If it wanted to blame those guys, I am sure the Government would not be averse to doing so.

Is there any penalty or stricture or can anything be done when these quangos, these semi-State or State agencies, decide to ride roughshod over these rules and say they will not or cannot produce accounts on time? What can be done to enforce this rule? Often it is honoured more in the breach than in the actuality. FÁS did not produce its accounts until November last

year. Now it does not give a hoot and it is again not producing them. One would have to ask the question whether it is up to its old tricks or whether it is just being negligent.

The Taoiseach: That is a valid question. I will ask the Minister for Education and Skills to provide the answer as to why FÁS has not been in a position to produce its end of year report by June. Deputy Ross is right that it should be in a position to do so. The Minister for Education and Skills will come back with the reasons. The Minister and the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, met the chief executive officer and the board of FÁS on this issue.

Deputy Ross will be aware that 3,000 places in third level have been offered through the Springboard jobs initiative. The jobs initiative will provide 16,000 places for training. The point was made by the chairman of the board dealing with the jobs initiative and the new internship programme that invariably when businesses in these areas take on young qualified people, even on internships, they find that after a six month period, the young person decides to start a business of his or her own or he or she proves so efficient that the firm hires them full time.

As Deputy Ross knows, what is happening in the laboratories and research units throughout the world is, in many cases, bringing to light new innovations which have not or could not have been thought of because perhaps they were discovered by different sorts of research. When given the opportunity to be exposed to that range of challenge, our young people invariably measure up. I saw this recently at the highest level in some of the major software and multinational companies in the country. It is a case of attempting to be on the next wave which will come. It is happening in terms of robotics, nanotechnology, software, genetics and so on where these changes will be made. Deputy Ross's question is perfectly valid. Flexibility and adaptability are required to give our young people the opportunity to measure up to the challenge from wherever it comes.

11 o'clock

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 8, motion re presentation and circulation of Revised Estimates 2011; No. 4, Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2011 — Second Stage (resumed); the Foreshore (Amendment) Bill 2011 [*Seanad*] — Order for Second Stage and Second and Remaining Stages, subject to completion in the Seanad, to be included on a supplementary Order Paper and to be taken at 3.45 p.m.; and No. 14. — Finance (No. 3) Bill 2011, Order for Report, Report and Final Stages.

It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that: (1) the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. and business shall be interrupted not later than 10 p.m.; (2) No. 8 shall be decided without debate and any division demanded thereon shall be taken forthwith; (3) the proceedings in relation to the resumed Second Stage of No. 4. shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 1.30 p.m.; (4) subject to completion in the Seanad, Second and Remaining Stages of the Foreshore (Amendment) Bill 2011 [*Seanad*] shall be taken at 3.45 p.m. and the following arrangements shall apply: (i) the proceedings on the Second Stage shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 5.50 p.m.; the opening speech of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for Fianna Fail, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case, the speech of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case, Members may share time, and a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed five minutes; (ii) the proceedings on the Committee and Remaining Stages shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 7 p.m. by one question which shall be put from the Chair and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; (5) Private Members' business shall be No. 24, motion re hospital services (resumed), shall

[The Taoiseach.]

take place at 7 p.m. or on the conclusion of Second and Remaining Stages of the Foreshore (Amendment) Bill 2011 [*Seanad*], whichever is the later, and shall conclude after 90 minutes; and (6) the Report and Final Stages of No. 14 shall be taken today and the proceedings thereon shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 10 p.m. by one question which shall be put from the Chair and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Finance.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are six proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. agreed to?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I bring to the Ceann Comhairle's attention, because it is very important, the promised publication of the Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2011, all Stages of which are scheduled to be taken tomorrow. It was promised that it would be published and distributed on Monday.

An Ceann Comhairle: We can deal with that on the Order of Business. It is not related to this matter.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is because I am objecting to it. I want to make my point. The Bill was to have been distributed on Monday. Last night I made inquiries of the Minister's office and we were told the Bill would not be available until tomorrow morning, the day all Stages——

An Ceann Comhairle: What does that have to do with the Dáil sitting late?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: As the protector of Members of the House and to allow for the proper scrutiny of all legislation——

An Ceann Comhairle: By all means but can we——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I am making the point that only following intervention have we now received the Bill on the eve of the proposed taking of all Stages of, I acknowledge, required legislation.

An Ceann Comhairle: The proposal I have put is that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: To whom will I put the question?

An Ceann Comhairle: Put it to me but——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I am putting it to the Ceann Comhairle.

An Ceann Comhairle: Put it after this——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: As the protector of Members' interests and to ensure the proper address of all legislation in this House, the Ceann Comhairle should use his good offices to reflect not only to the Minister for Health but to all Departments——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is totally out of order.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——that legislation should be circulated in good time for proper scrutiny and careful evaluation in advance of debate. That is my point.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not understand the Deputy's point at this particular juncture.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: There is no other place for me to hang it. The Ceann Comhairle is a long time in this House and he will understand very well——

An Ceann Comhairle: I understand that when a proposal is has been put——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——that I must avail of the opportunity to make the point. The Minister should understand——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should resume his seat.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——and be sympathetic to the point I am making.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are six proposals to be put to the House. I am putting the first proposal, which is that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. tonight. Is that agreed? Agreed. That is the point I was making.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I hope the Ceann Comhairle understands the point I was making also.

An Ceann Comhairle: The second proposal deals with No. 8, motion re presentation and circulation of Revised Estimates 2011. Is that agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 4, Second Stage of the Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2011, agreed to?

Deputy Joe Higgins: It is not agreed. This is the first of three Bills where a guillotine is proposed today. The Taoiseach is quickly becoming the Madame Defarge of the Thirty-First Dáil. All he is short of is a knitting set.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It is better than being one of the three stooges.

An Ceann Comhairle: We should get on with it.

Deputy James Reilly: Will the Deputy have enough speakers?

Deputy Joe Higgins: I would rather be a stooge than a stool pigeon like the Minister, Deputy Shatter.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The Minister for Star Trek. He should remember the leaflets he sent out.

Deputy Joe Higgins: A Cheann Comhairle——

An Ceann Comhairle: Please allow the Deputy to continue, although he is inviting the interruptions.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Never.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is the young lad beside him.

Deputy Joe Higgins: In fairness, I am trying to be kind to the Government backbenchers.

An Ceann Comhairle: I know all of that. I appreciate the Deputy's generosity but he should get on with it.

Deputy Joe Higgins: It is reported in the press that the backbenchers feel frustrated at not having sufficient time to express themselves in this Dáil.

Deputy Paudie Coffey: We are frustrated listening to you.

Deputy Joe Higgins: There are three guillotines before us and if we allow the practice now, what will happen in the autumn, when far more pressure comes on this Dáil from legislation and other issues? Has the Government Chief Whip ascertained how many speakers are offering on the Electoral (Amendment) Bill, how many have been cut and why the Government proposes three guillotines? It promised, as one of its reforms, that the guillotine would rarely be used.

The Taoiseach: I understand there was a briefing on this on Monday, and this will allow for Committee Stage to be taken appropriately. There will be ample opportunity to make amendments and debate those, as the Deputy always does.

Question, "That the proposal for dealing with Second Stage of the Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2011 be agreed to", put and declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with Second and Subsequent Stages of the Foreshore (Amendment) Bill 2011 agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with Private Members' Business agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 14, Order for Report, Report and Final Stages of the Finance (No. 3) Bill 2011 agreed to? Agreed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister for Health has announced his intention to abolish the Health Service Executive and take direct legal and legislative responsibility for decisions where he currently only has administrative responsibilities. This will include decisions to withdraw services from local hospitals.

Deputy James Reilly: Changes.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Taoiseach indicate when the legislation will be published?

The Taoiseach: The Minister will bring forward proposals later this year to abolish the HSE board by amending the Health Act 2004. It will be necessary in that context to put alternative arrangements in place to ensure appropriate corporate governance of the HSE in the absence of that board.

Deputy Micheál Martin: So it is just the board. It will not be the executive.

The Taoiseach: It will be later this year. The Minister will bring forward proposals to the Government later this year to abolish the HSE board by amending the 2004 Act.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is the board. What about the HSE? That was the promise he made.

The Taoiseach: It is the board.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The promise was to abolish the entire HSE.

The Taoiseach: Sometimes the Deputy jumps to conclusions.

Deputy Micheál Martin: No, I listened very carefully to what the man said.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: That is what the Deputy heard.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We probably took him and the Taoiseach too much at face value. We are genuinely seeking clarity on the issue. Is the legislation to abolish the board or the entire HSE?

The Taoiseach: The Minister will bring forward proposals later this year to abolish the HSE board by amending the Health Act 2004.

Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil: It is just the board.

The Taoiseach: It is the board.

Deputy Barry Cowen: I am bored listening to the Taoiseach.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The programme for Government contains the commitment — or threat — to break up the ESB by stripping it of its transmission assets. The Government has in its possession the Cahill report, which clearly sets out the lunacy of that approach. Nevertheless, I see the legislative programme envisages an electricity transmission assets Bill. When is it proposed to publish the Cahill report and what will be the timetable of the Bill? The uncertainty hanging over this large State utility is causing great difficulties for business and investment planning, and it also has industrial relations implications. The Cahill report should be published so we can have the debate and keep the ESB strong and intact.

The Taoiseach: The Cahill report has not yet come to the Government and the Minister will bring forward a memo in due course. The report will be published and the Deputy will be well informed on the matter.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Minister has the report. I have had correspondence with him and he is deliberately failing to publish a report paid for by taxpayers——

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: ——as the report shows the flaw in Government policy.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The report must be published——

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy hear me?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: ——as a matter of urgency.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are discussing promised legislation.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I have a question for the Taoiseach under Standing Order 36. It appears the posse of men who rode into town last November posing as good samaritans are ripping off blind the Irish people. With only two weeks before the Dáil breaks, will the Taoiseach arrange for a comprehensive report and debate on the real implications of the memorandum of agreement between the IMF-EU and the Government with regard to the incredible €9 billion rip-off?

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy——

Deputy Joe Higgins: What other secrets are contained in the execution of that memorandum in the alleged name of solidarity?

An Ceann Comhairle: Perhaps the Deputy could get in touch with his Whip in seeking a debate on the issue.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is entitled to ask for a debate on an issue at the Whips' meeting. All of the detail of the headline spoken of by the Deputy was raised and dealt with at Question Time with the Minister for Finance yesterday. As the Deputy is aware, this Government took over when certain obligations were signed by the previous Administration, and those figures are not new. If the Deputy wishes to have a debate about any issue, he should feel free to raise it at the Whips' meeting, the appropriate forum to do so.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I seek leave to move a motion of censure against the Minister for Justice and Equality relating to his withholding of information from the House with regard to the Smithwick tribunal. I seek Government time to have this debated as soon as possible.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Government offering time for the motion?

The Taoiseach: There is a motion of censure down against the Minister for Justice and Equality and it is a matter for the party opposite. If it wishes to move it in private Members' time the party is free to do so. It is a bogus motion as all the issues have been dealt with by the Minister, Deputy Shatter, and the correspondence referred to has been laid before the Oireachtas Library. As I stated yesterday, it is only right and proper that when this House establishes tribunals of inquiry to consider any matter, the taxpayer funds those tribunals. In this case the motion establishing the Smithwick tribunal required that within ten days of public hearings, an interim report would be produced. The Minister for Justice and Equality is quite right in having the public given up to date reports on the progress of the tribunal.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach is avoiding the issue.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Yes, the Minister withheld information.

The Taoiseach: All the correspondence is available and if the party wishes to pursue the motion of censure, it should do so in private Members' time.

Deputy Dara Calleary: On a point of order, the Minister came into the debate on 1 June in possession of information which was directly relevant to the debate. He deliberately withheld it.

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

Deputy Dara Calleary: One would assume that a motion of censure against a Minister would be taken by the Government as a matter of priority.

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

Deputy Dara Calleary: The only bogus thing about this is the withholding of information.

An Ceann Comhairle: You will have to move it in Private Members' time.

Deputy Micheál Martin: A Cheann Comhairle——

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry, we are not having a debate on this.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Your role as Cheann Comhairle is to protect the rights of the Members of the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: Absolutely. I will do that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This is a very serious issue. We asked the Taoiseach a question when we allowed this debate to take place. We put it to him clearly that more time should be allowed and that all documentation should be provided to Members before the motion amending the terms of reference came before the House. No such documentation was provided. The Government pressed ahead and guillotined the debate. Members were denied access to crucial correspondence between the Minister and the judge of a tribunal that was established by the Oireachtas. The tribunal was established by the Oireachtas — it is not just a matter for the Government and the Opposition.

An Ceann Comhairle: I understand.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This inquiry was established by the collective membership of this House. Serious documentation was withheld from the Members. Some attempt should be made to——

An Ceann Comhairle: You are making a very serious charge here.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It is a serious charge.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is factual. It happened.

An Ceann Comhairle: You are making a serious charge.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The issue eventually came out through freedom of information.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The judge——

An Ceann Comhairle: We are dealing with a request for a motion to be taken. The Deputy asked whether the motion can be taken in Government time. The Taoiseach has indicated that it cannot.

Deputy Dara Calleary: A Cheann Comhairle, you said it is serious.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy's party wishes to use its Private Members' time to debate the issue, it can do so. I cannot do anything to force the Government to allow time for a motion to be considered. In effect, it is now a Private Members' motion.

Deputy Dara Calleary: You said it is serious.

An Ceann Comhairle: Of course it is a serious matter.

Deputy Dara Calleary: It is certainly not bogus.

An Ceann Comhairle: I regard a motion against any Minister as a serious matter.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It is entirely bogus and Deputy Calleary knows it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is not.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for the Deputies who tabled it.

Deputy Dara Calleary: It is not.

Deputy Alan Shatter: You are a disgrace to make that allegation.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Aithníonn ciaróg ciaróg eile.

Deputy Alan Shatter: It is entirely bogus.

Deputy Micheál Martin: You withheld the documentation.

Deputy Alan Shatter: This is political play-acting.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: We have the Punch and Judy show again.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not need the usual assistance from up there.

Deputy Dara Calleary: You withheld it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: If any other Government behaved like that——

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: What happened to the promise to end the Punch and Judy show?

Deputy Micheál Martin: ——there would be blue murder and you know it.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I note that the Revised Estimates for 2011 are on this morning's clár. In light of the serious developments we are seeing in certain areas, will it be possible for the Dáil to examine the first Estimates for 2012 in the next few weeks, or even on our resumption? For example, this morning——

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot debate that now.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: ——I received a petition from approximately 1,000 parents.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is totally out of order.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I want to tell the Taoiseach about the petition I received——

An Ceann Comhairle: Maybe you can write to him and tell him.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: ——from approximately 1,000 parents in Darndale-Belcamp parish.

An Ceann Comhairle: I have to ask you to resume your seat.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: It seems that a class for children with moderate learning disabilities may be closed in September, unfortunately.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will you please resume your seat?

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I would like the Minister for Education and Skills to look at that situation.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will you resume your seat now?

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: He knows the parish well.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Man overboard.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: It is one of the areas of Ireland with the lowest take-up of third level education.

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

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: The Taoiseach represents the area with the highest take-up of third level education.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I think the Government has a man overboard.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I am asking the Taoiseach whether we will see the Estimates for 2012——

An Ceann Comhairle: No, no. Will you please resume your seat, Deputy?

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: ——on the floor of the Dáil in the next few months.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Boyd Barrett on the Order of Business.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: I would like the Taoiseach to answer the question I asked about the timing of Dáil business.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy will have an opportunity to debate all the Estimates at the various committees in due course. It will take place in a much more transparent and accountable form than previously.

Deputy Micheál Martin: You must be joking.

The Taoiseach: We had a situation where 15 minutes applied for all——

Deputy Micheál Martin: You must be joking.

The Taoiseach: I am not joking, actually.

Deputy Micheál Martin: You are joking.

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy.

The Taoiseach: What you did when you had the authority was a disgrace.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We have not had a committee meeting yet.

The Taoiseach: We are going to change all of that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: You will change nothing.

The Taoiseach: The Estimates have not been published yet. When they are, they will be brought before the committees.

Deputy Micheál Martin: You need not think you are coddling anybody.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: We do not need to go back over that.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We have heard all about the comprehensive spending review.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: According to Standing Order 26(2)(a), the Taoiseach orders the business of the Dáil on the Order of Business and arranges the sittings. In that context, I want to ask the Taoiseach if the Dáil will have a chance to discuss the cannibal logic that the IMF-EU delegation, which is coming here in the next two weeks, is applying to our economy.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should resume his seat. He is totally out of order.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: That logic involves destroying our economy and our services, supposedly in order to save them.

An Ceann Comhairle: He should ask his Whip to raise the matter.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is sucking us dry to the tune of €9 billion.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please resume your seat. You are out of order.

Deputy Joe Higgins: On a point of order, Deputy Boyd Barrett is absolutely correct.

An Ceann Comhairle: When did Deputy Higgins take over the job of Chair? He should also resume his seat.

Deputy Barry Cowen: Hard luck, Joe.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Boyd Barrett is not a member of Deputy Higgins's party, by the way.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I want to make a point of order, which is my entitlement.

An Ceann Comhairle: No.

Deputy Joe Higgins: I am sure you will protect my right to do so.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will protect your right, but you are totally out of order. You cannot be questioning——

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We are looking for clarification.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no point in quoting Standing Order 26(2), which relates to the ordering of business. That is not the point here. This is the Order of Business.

Deputy Joe Higgins: The Taoiseach frequently answers our queries with regard to the ordering of business by referring to the Whips.

An Ceann Comhairle: Correct.

Deputy Joe Higgins: It is the business of the Taoiseach, fundamentally, to order the arrangements for sittings——

An Ceann Comhairle: That is Government business.

Deputy Joe Higgins: ——and the business taken in the Dáil.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, that is Government business.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Deputies should ensure it is raised this evening.

Deputy Joe Higgins: He should answer.

An Ceann Comhairle: No, he should not. He is out of order if he does. Will you resume your seat?

Deputy Joe Higgins: He should respond to what has been requested by us, rather than fobbing it off to the Whips.

An Ceann Comhairle: Will you please contact your Whip and ask her to arrange a debate on the issue?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Get your Whip to raise it this evening.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Every time we ask, the Government Whip says “No”.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: It was never asked.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We asked about the McCarthy report.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have some order please? I call Deputy Donohoe.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: The supply of alcohol to minors continues to be a very big problem for gardaí and communities. As the summer approaches, the potential for this problem to flare up again is great. The Government has given a commitment to introduce a sale of alcohol Bill, which will give the Garda and other agencies even greater power to tackle these issues, including the growing problem of the supply of alcohol from private premises. Can the Taoiseach tell the House whether this Bill will be ordered before the summer or later this year?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy has raised an important point. This Bill will be ordered later this year.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: When the Minister for Education and Skills was standing in for the Taoiseach on Leaders’ Questions approximately three weeks ago, I asked about the proposals in the programme for Government to assist people who have difficulty paying their mortgages. The Minister, Deputy Quinn, undertook to get back to me within a week. That promise seems to have had the same status as Deputy Reilly’s election promises, unfortunately. Will the Taoiseach get back to me on this matter as quickly as possible? Many people are very worried about it. A substantial section of the programme for Government deals with it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Deputy asking about a promised debate or about a report?

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I am asking about a list of promises to assist people who have difficulty paying their mortgages. This long list of legislative and administrative proposals takes up half a page of the programme for Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is legislation promised?

Deputy Willie O’Dea: The Government seems to have forgotten about it already. It is in the programme for Government.

The Taoiseach: The Minister for Finance will report progress on this issue directly to the Deputy.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I hope he will be much quicker in getting back to me than the Minister for Education and Skills was.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I will send some material to the Deputy.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I appreciate that.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: The Deputy looked well on “Tonight with Vincent Browne”. I enjoyed the programme.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The matter I would like to raise is relevant to the Taoiseach and the Minister for Education and Skills. Apparently, the Office of the Attorney General has advised the Government, or its predecessor, that it is legally acceptable to end the closed school rule, which is an historical commitment that was made to certain rural communities. Will the Government publish this advice and explain the rationale that makes the Government think it is acceptable to bring the rule to an end?

An Ceann Comhairle: That is not promised legislation.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: It should be.

An Ceann Comhairle: Maybe it should, but that is none of my concern.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Can I explain my point?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should table a question.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I am raising this matter because a growing number of communities are questioning the legal rationale for this change. They believe legislation should have been introduced to give effect to it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can I help the Deputy? There are two ways of raising this matter. He can table a parliamentary question or use his party’s private Members’ time.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I have done so.

An Ceann Comhairle: What about using private Members’ time?

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I think the Taoiseach could respond to what I have said. Will he publish the Attorney General’s advice? It is a simple question.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is out of order.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The Taoiseach will not publish the advice. What does the Government do with the advice it receives from the Attorney General?

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for the Government.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Does it accept it and say it is fine? One needs to have hundreds of thousands of euro if one wants to go through the High Court or the Supreme Court to get that information.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Niall Collins.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: It is not right.

Deputy Niall Collins: At a committee meeting yesterday, the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, informed us that Dundalk Port Company has failed to meet its obligations to maintain its pension fund properly and to register with the Pensions Board and has reneged on a number of other responsibilities. He said he sought to refer the matter to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement but he received legal advice from the Attorney General to the effect that he could not do so because company law does not provide for it. Does the Government

have any plans to amend the Companies Acts to allow action to be taken in the event of corporate governance failures by companies like Dundalk Port Company?

An Ceann Comhairle: Is there promised legislation in this area?

The Taoiseach: There is no promised legislation.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: There is.

Deputy Micheál Martin: A companies Bill is on the agenda.

The Taoiseach: I am sure the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, will consider the consequences of what he told the committee yesterday.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I will not bother informing them.

Estimates for Public Services 2011: Message from Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Select Sub-committee on Education and Skills has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimate for public services for the service of the year ending on 31 December 2011: Vote 26.

Business of Dáil

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): On a point of information, I understand there is a motion of referral of the Estimates to select committees which I have been requested to move. Are there other committees which have yet to deal with Estimates and does a formal motion need to be moved?

An Ceann Comhairle: That will be done after Question Time. However, if the Minister wishes to move the motion now, I will oblige him.

Presentation of Estimates: Motion

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I move:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 159(1) or (2) of the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann relative to Public Business, Revised Estimates for the Public Services for the year ending 31st December, 2011, be presented to the Dáil and circulated to members on 6th July, 2011, being a date later than that prescribed for the presentation of Estimates and that the Revised Estimates be referred to Select Committees or sub-Committees, as appropriate, pursuant to Standing Orders 82A(3)(c) and (6)(a) and 159(3) and paragraph (8) of the Orders of Reference of Select Committees.

Question put and agreed to.

Ceisteanna — Questions

Official Engagements

1. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on discussions at the British Irish Council. [17281/11]

2. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will give details of the issues raised during his bilateral talks with British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg at the recent meeting of the British Irish Council [17282/11]

3. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the recent meeting of the British Irish Council and any bilateral talks he held at the meeting. [18452/11]

4. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his involvement in and assessment of the British Irish Council meeting recently. [18578/11]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 4, inclusive, together.

I attended the 16th summit of the British-Irish Council in London on 20 June. It was my first attendance at a British-Irish Council summit since becoming Taoiseach. The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Nick Clegg; the Scottish Government delegation was led by First Minister, Mr. Alex Salmond; the Welsh Government delegation was led by the First Minister, Mr. Carwyn Jones; while the First Minister, Mr. Peter Robinson, and the Deputy First Minister, Mr. Martin McGuinness, led the delegation from Northern Ireland. Delegations from the other member administrations of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man were also in attendance.

The British Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron, greeted the delegations ahead of the summit. In his welcoming remarks he underscored the importance of the British-Irish Council and the intrinsic value of all of the Good Friday institutions. He also commented on the strength of relations between the eight BIC administrations and characterised relations between Britain and Ireland as being at “an all time high” in the aftermath of Queen Elizabeth II’s visit to Ireland.

The summit provided an opportunity to give an update on each administration’s economic position and have a substantive discussion of the common objectives of promoting economic growth and related challenges and opportunities. The Council discussed how to achieve strong, sustainable and balanced growth that was more evenly shared across the member administrations. It considered measures to promote economic growth, including incentives for businesses to start, finance and grow a business; encouraging investment and exports as a route to a more balanced economy; and creating a more educated and flexible workforce. The Council acknowledged that member administrations should continue to learn from each other’s successes and identify synergies across administrations.

The Council welcomed the discussion paper on an all-islands approach, AIA, to energy resources. It agreed the AIA vision of an approach to energy resources across the British islands and Ireland which would enable opportunities for commercial generation and transmission, facilitating the cost-effective exploitation of the renewable energy resources available, increasing integration of their markets and improving security of supply.

The Council discussed progress on the work to establish the BIC standing secretariat. It will receive a further progress report at the next summit in Dublin. A target start date of 1 January 2012 was agreed, subject to final details and related issues being agreed.

The Council noted the progress of each of the 11 sectoral groups of the Council which cover collaborative spatial planning, demography, digital inclusion, early years policy, energy, electricity grid infrastructure, marine renewables, environment, housing, indigenous, minority and lesser used languages, misuse of drugs, social inclusion and transport.

The Council agreed that the autumn British-Irish Council summit in 2011 will be hosted by Ireland.

While attending the summit, I took the opportunity to have bilateral meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Nick Clegg; the First Minister, Mr. Alex Salmond, and the First Minister, Mr. Carwyn Jones. During my bilateral meeting with Mr. Clegg I outlined my belief that the British-Irish Council provided a useful forum for the eight member administrations to find opportunities for practical and mutually beneficial co-operation. I emphasised that we needed to look closely at the areas of work being addressed by the Council to ensure our focus was strategic and producing tangible results. We reflected on the recent successful visit to Ireland of Queen Elizabeth II and commented that it clearly underscored the close and highly developed relationship between Britain and Ireland. We also discussed economic matters and developments at EU level in advance of the European Council meeting which took place later that week. We referred to the interest rate reduction being pursued at EU level and the bilateral loan from Britain. We also discussed Irish emigrant issues, including the Hammersmith centre, Irish construction workers at the Olympic village site and tourism potential from Britain.

When I met with the Scottish First Minister, Mr. Salmond, I congratulated him on his recent electoral success. I stated the Government was fully supportive of the establishment of the BIC standing secretariat in Edinburgh and suggested we propose 1 January 2012 as an opening date. We discussed economic developments in Scotland, including renewable energy projects and the development expertise centres such as Aberdeen. This agreement was made in the context of the commitment by both Governments to the full implementation of the Good Friday and St. Andrews Agreements. I also noted that sectarian issues had, regrettably, come to the forefront in Scotland in the last few months and welcomed the Scottish Government's concerted efforts to deal with these difficulties.

During my meeting with Mr. Jones I congratulated him on his electoral success and we had a brief discussion on the close relationship between our two countries. I looked forward to welcoming him to Dublin for the next British-Irish Council summit which will take place in November.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I thank the Taoiseach for his comprehensive reply. I welcome the constructive nature of the meeting of the British-Irish Council. It reflects the ongoing progress in the sets of relationships between all participants.

Did the Taoiseach take the opportunity in his bilateral meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Clegg, to discuss Ireland's European Union negotiations, particularly our desire to have the terms of the financial assistance programme improved in terms of a reduction in the interest rate? Given that we are also seeking a reduction in the interest rate charged on the British loan, did he raise this matter with Mr. Clegg?

The Taoiseach: As I stated, I did so on both occasions. I indicated to Mr. Clegg that the decision had been taken by the Heads of Government in Brussels, in respect of an interest rate reduction being agreed in principle, that the Minister for Finance and officials from Ireland should make contact with their colleagues. I also referred to the British loan. I thanked the Deputy Prime Minister, as I did the Prime Minister previously, and indicated the nature of the discussions we were having with our colleagues abroad on an interest rate reduction.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Did the Taoiseach ask for a reduction in the interest rate on the bilateral loan?

The Taoiseach: I indicated to the Deputy Prime Minister that, obviously, an interest rate reduction was desirable but that our focus was on following through immediately on the decision of the European Council at which leaders agreed in principle that a reduction should

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apply and that countries the subject of an EFSF bailout should have it applied to them. I indicated to him that Ireland was measuring up on all the conditions set. I also pointed to the nature of our difficulty in seeking the agreement of everybody on an interest rate reduction.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I have two brief questions.

An Ceann Comhairle: I will come back to the Deputy.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Ar ardaigh an Taoiseach an cheist maidir le Sellafield ag an cruinniú den Chomhairle Sasanach-Éireannach nó ag an cruinniú leis an Leas-Phríomh Aire, Mr. Nick Clegg? The Taoiseach may recall that on 15 March he agreed to raise Irish concerns about the Sellafield plant with the British authorities. I wonder whether he took the opportunity to do so at either of the two meetings mentioned.

The Taoiseach: Níor ardaigh mé cúrsaí Sellafield leis an Leas-Phríomh Aire ach nuair a bheidh an céad seans eile agam bualadh leis an Phríomh Aire, ardóidh mé arís í ag an bpointe sin. Séard a bhí i gceist ar chlár an chruinnithe — an céad cruinniú ar a d'fhreastal mé mar Taoiseach den Chomhairle ar fad — ná, mar a dúirt mé leis an Teachta Ó Máirtín, díospóireacht faoi chúrsaí a bheadh oiriúnach a bheith ardaithe leis an Leas-Phríomh Aire.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Caithfidh mé a rá nach bhfuil sin go maith ar chor ar bith. It is not good enough. There are deep concerns here. The Taoiseach is aware that the British are prepared or have announced that they will bring in privately built nuclear plant to be constructed in England and Wales, including at the existing installations at Sellafield and in Wales. Also, we must establish whether these nuclear facilities will be scrutinised subject to EU-wide stress tests or whether the British will bring in their own test. It is regrettable that the Taoiseach did not take the opportunity to raise the issue with him.

The Taoiseach: For the information of the Deputy, I did raise this matter at the European Council meeting in respect of the stress tests being carried out on nuclear and reprocessing plant such as at Sellafield. I am pleased to report that it is included as part of the stress tests. I expect the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources will be in direct contact with his counterpart in Britain about proposals for other nuclear stations with particular reference to those on the west coast of England.

Deputy Gerry Adams: This was first raised on 15 March. It is now July.

The Taoiseach: Gabh mo leithscéal.

Deputy Gerry Adams: This issue was first raised by me here after the earthquake in Japan. The Taoiseach will recall that there have been small earthquakes in Cumbria as well. It was during the early days of this Dáil. The fact that it has not been raised directly by the Taoiseach with the British authorities is disappointing.

The Taoiseach: I have no wish to take credit from Deputy Adams in any shape or form for raising such issues of importance.

Deputy Gerry Adams: I am not looking for credit; I am looking for a resolution.

The Taoiseach: The Sellafield reprocessing plant has been the subject of discussions, questions, priority questions and Private Members' time during the past 30 years. Having visited the place myself on several occasions I am well aware, as is Deputy Adams, that some serious

issues arose from leaks from Sellafield into the Irish Sea over a period of years. We are pleased to note that with all the connections, pressure and so on, this matter improved greatly. Sellafield is included. It is part of the analysis of the stress tests on nuclear and reprocessing plant in Europe, such as Sellafield.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Like the Taoiseach's Government, the British Government is imposing a savage programme of cuts on public spending. Did the Taoiseach get an opportunity to question the Deputy Prime Minister with regard to the effect of £4 billion or £5 billion of cuts in Northern Ireland and the effects these will have on hard-pressed communities and working class people, many on the margins, for whom public services are critical? Did the Taoiseach have an opportunity to raise this matter? Why is the Government, including the Taoiseach, terrified to ask the leaders of other EU states to honour the solidarity, which they maintain is a core value in the European Union, by cutting the interest rate they are charging on loans to this country? Incredibly, the Minister for Finance informed me yesterday that he did not ask the US Treasury Secretary, Mr. Geithner, about the €20 billion hit he insisted the Irish people take by making us pay the obligations of the gambling bondholders. Does the Taoiseach not accept that ordinary people in this country — taxpayers — will find it incredible that the Taoiseach has high level access to these leaders, yet he refuses to ask them to apply a humane interest rate rather than this incredible profiteering on the misery of the Irish people to the tune of €9 billion — we learned the figure yesterday — through interest rates that are considerably over the odds?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Higgins has raised two matters. The first is valid. I raised the issue of vulnerable communities in Northern Ireland with the Deputy Prime Minister. I made him aware that in so far as the Government is concerned, we seek to work with the British Government and members of the elected Assembly and Executive in Northern Ireland with particular reference to the vulnerability of communities, especially where there are continued efforts to thwart the peace process. I note the comments of many public representatives from all shades of public opinion for restraint and calm. I pointed this out to the Deputy Prime Minister and I pointed out to him our interest in keeping the connection with the United States alive in so far as assistance under that fund is concerned. This is not only a demonstration of continued interest but also a matter of leverage for further EU funding. I made it known to the Deputy Prime Minister that it is important in the interests of Britain to continue to have facilities and support made available for communities in Northern Ireland. We discussed the question of a reduction in the corporation tax rate in Northern Ireland. This is a matter for the Assembly and the Government and the Exchequer in Britain to make decisions on. That may come about in an all-island sense.

The second point was typical of Deputy Higgins. Let me assure him that no one in the Government is terrified of asking any leader direct questions. I have contact with them when appropriate at Council meetings. It was a part of the process, whereby the leaders agreed that a reduction in the rate should be applied in principle, that there were discussions with all of them at some stage. As the Deputy is aware, it requires agreement from the lending countries. One of these countries has still not given agreement in respect of a reduction in the rate for Ireland. This is where the discussions continue and I hope the matter can be brought to a conclusion. The Deputy is aware, as I have stated repeatedly, that the responsibility for concluding that debate was transferred to the Ministers for Finance because the stress tests on the Irish banks had not been completed when the leaders of Governments were to deliberate on the matter in Brussels. It is a case of making the leaders directly aware that Ireland is measuring up and that we have met the conditions of the bailout scheme, and making them aware of the developments in our economy, with particular reference to the balance of trade surplus, the

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growth in exports, the flexibility of our workforce and the stimulus provided for the indigenous economy to grow. These are all reasons people should continue to have confidence in the country. We will continue the discussions with particular reference to France in respect of the reduction of the interest rate.

Deputy Joe Higgins: The British loans are completely separate from the other EU loans. Even if the Taoiseach used the excuse that some EU countries are tagging together and he requires everyone's agreement, the Taoiseach does not need it with regard to the loans provided by Britain. I remind the Taoiseach that when the loans were offered, the British Government made it clear that they were doing so to protect their economic interests in regard to the trade between Ireland and Britain and the profits accruing to British companies. The excuse does not stand up. Why did the Taoiseach not ask the British Government to reduce the interest rate, bearing in mind the crushing burden that is on our people to meet the gambling debts of European bankers?

The Taoiseach: These things are all interlinked. At issue is the potential to have a reduction in the interest rate across all the loans.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I asked the first two questions on this issue. Specifically, I asked whether the Taoiseach asked the Deputy Prime Minister for a reduction in the interest rate on the bilateral loan. The Taoiseach's response initially was that he referred to the issue. Then he stated that he indicated to him our desire for the reduction. With the greatest of respect, that is verbiage. On decoding, it suggests an absence of this issue at centre stage in the bilateral discussions with Mr. Clegg. The same situation applies with Prime Minister Cameron. The issue was not raised in the context of a submission to the British Government to the effect that we seek the terms and conditions applying to the bilateral loan reduced in accordance with the decision of the EU Heads of State on 11 March. The point is that were the terms of the bilateral loan changed or improved, it would have a powerful impact on the rest of the debate across Europe and would be a useful and powerful signal. I note the apparent absence of either a capacity or desire to raise the hard questions with people. I already raised in this Chamber the absolute refusal of a number of Ministers, including the Taoiseach——

An Ceann Comhairle: A question, please.

Deputy Micheál Martin: —— to raise the Geithner question. This issue simply is not raised when Government members meet people. To date, no direct submission has been made to the British leaders seeking a reduction in the interest rate on the bilateral loan, which would have an important impact on the wider issue.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is under a serious delusion if he thinks the hard questions will not be or are not being asked. As the Deputy is aware, the European Union portion of the EU-IMF programme funding for Ireland is made up of the European financial stabilisation mechanism, EFSM, the European financial stability facility, EFSF, and the bilateral loans from the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark. Moreover, as the Deputy also is aware, of these three only the EFSM relates directly to the European Union. Based on the full drawdown of the €22.5 billion from the EFSM, the current margin of 2.925% and an average maturity of 7.5 years, the gross margin will be approximately €4.9 billion, out of which it will be necessary to deduct costs. The Deputy is aware of these figures as he was a member of the Government that signed up for the programme. In contrast, the margin on borrowing from the EFSF accrues to the EFSF in the first instance. Based on the current margin of 2.47%, full drawdown of the €17.7 billion available and an average maturity of 7.5 years, the gross margin will be approxi-

mately €3.3 billion. The margin from the bilateral loans accrues to the relevant country and thus far, only the United Kingdom facility has been agreed. It provides for a margin of 2.29% , which is approximately €650 million. These figures are not new but are well known. The agreements and therefore the margins for Denmark and Sweden have yet to be finalised and signed off. These matters are linked and the Government will continue to pursue the question of agreement on the overall interest rate and will continue to ask the hard questions.

Official Engagements

5. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will publish details of the proposed text on the interest rate paid for by Ireland circulated by President Van Rumpoy at the summit meeting of 11 March 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18231/11]

6. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach his further plans for substantive bilateral meetings with other heads of Government which he has for the remainder of 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18388/11]

7. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the manner in which he approached discussions regarding the European Central Bank at the recent European Council meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18394/11]

8. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide a detailed report on the discussions he was involved in at the recent European Council meeting in relation to the Gaza flotilla; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18613/11]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 5 to 8, inclusive, together.

I reported to the House on 22 March on the meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the euro area that took place in Brussels on 11 March. That meeting agreed that pricing of the European financial stability facility, EFSF, should be lowered to better take into account debt sustainability, while remaining above funding costs with an adequate mark-up for risk and in line with IMF pricing principles. It was agreed to reduce by 1% the interest rate applying to loans to Greece, which did not take place under the EFSF.

As I have previously told the House, it was not possible to secure a reduction in the rates applying to loans to Ireland at that time. Some partners sought a commitment from Ireland on corporation tax to which I was not prepared to accede. There were difficult exchanges and discussions. Partners made various suggestions, none of which were acceptable to Ireland. No text was formally tabled at the meeting by President Van Rompuy or anyone else.

The Government will continue to press strongly for an interest rate reduction but on a basis consistent with improving the prospects of successful implementation of the EU-IMF programme. As the Members are aware, resolution of this issue is being taken forward by finance ministers. The Government remains fully engaged in an ongoing, constructive dialogue with our European partners in both capitals and institutions and I remain hopeful of a positive outcome. There is now a greater understanding of the Irish position on corporation tax and its significance to our economic recovery than was the case last March.

My programme of bilateral meetings during the second half of the year will continue to be guided by ongoing assessment of strategic priorities. It will include a meeting in Dublin with the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Buzek, on 12 July; and most likely with Prime Minister Mr. Donald Tusk of Poland in September in the context of the Polish EU Presidency. It remains my intention to be in a position to travel to China later this year, subject to final agreement with the Chinese authorities.

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The most recent meeting of the European Council confirmed the appointment of Mr. Mario Draghi as President of the European Central Bank with effect from 1 November 2011. This was on foot of a recommendation by ECOFIN, the Council of finance ministers, and following consultation with the European Parliament and the ECB. There was no substantive discussion of the matter at the meeting.

The European Council noted that the situation in Gaza remains of concern. Colleagues agreed that humanitarian assistance delivered to the population in Gaza should be in accordance with the relevant framework and decisions of the UN and should take care not to endanger human lives.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The three questions I tabled in this group refer to three completely different issues. Grouping them in this fashion leaving marginal time for questions only serves again to allow the Taoiseach to avoid answering specifically the questions that have been raised. I seek specific answers to the specific questions I am about to ask. First and specifically, the Taoiseach confirmed only last week in the House that on 11 March, President Van Rompuy tabled a text concerning Ireland's interest rate. Last week, I asked the Taoiseach whether he would publish the text and he replied he would not. In this reply, in something of a play on words, the Taoiseach indicated that no text was formally put forward. He confirmed the existence of the text in the House last week and I now ask him to publish that text. In a press conference that evening, President Van Rompuy stated that Ireland was not asked to surrender its corporation tax rate or to sign on for the common consolidated corporate tax base, CCCTB. There is a view abroad that a compromise text was put to the Taoiseach that would have effected the interest rate reduction. Members can only make a judgment in this regard if the aforementioned text is published.

The Taoiseach promised transparency and openness in Government and this is a fundamental issue. All the Heads of Government had agreed on 11 March that there should be a reduction in the interest rate and I note that much work had been done in advance. President Van Rompuy produced a text to try to break the deadlock and I ask for it to be made available to Members to allow them to make a proper assessment of how the negotiations were conducted on 11 March. I note that when Fianna Fáil tabled a motion on corporation tax in this House, the Government amendment referred to remaining highly sceptical of many aspects of the common consolidated corporation tax base proposal "but that the Government believes that a constructive and forthright engagement with all of our European partners on this issue will result in the best outcome for Ireland and for the European Union as a whole". May I take it that the Van Rompuy text and the wording in the Government amendment to the that motion on corporation tax are very similar?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Martin tabled three questions in this group. The first pertains to details of the proposed text on the interest rate for Ireland circulated by President Van Rompuy. The second relates to bilateral meetings and the third concerns the European Central Bank. I have dealt with each of those three questions in my reply. The Deputy is aware of what happens at such meetings, at which a variety of wordings may be presented to individual leaders, depending on the issue. However, this range of wordings may not have been circulated to, or approved or agreed by, others. The position is that no formal text purporting to be the proposition being put to Ireland was circulated to everyone. Ireland was asked to increase its corporation tax rate. This condition was being requested if Ireland was to be granted a reduction in the interest rate that had been agreed by the leaders. I refused to do that and made that clear. Because I took that stand in respect of our country, which is supported by the Deputy, agreement was not forthcoming on the interest rate reduction. As a consequence, the

matter is still being discussed and I hope it can be brought to a conclusion. It is not a case of an agenda containing a formal text to be debated in respect of Ireland. As the Deputy is aware, such items could comprise a variety of options being presented that were not presented to the body as a whole or agreed by individual leaders. I hope this response deals with that matter for the Deputy. I have referred to the bilateral meetings with other Heads of Government and as I stated, the ECOFIN Ministers have recommended that Mr. Draghi should take up office in the European Central Bank in November 2011.

Deputy Micheál Martin: On the specific issue, I know well what goes on.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is Question Time and I ask the Deputy to ask questions.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am trying to ask the Taoiseach questions to get to the bottom of this issue. European Council President Van Rompuy brokers solutions to any difficulties arising. I ask the Taoiseach to say whether at the meeting President Van Rompuy provided him with a compromise text as a possible solution to the problem?

The Taoiseach: The answer is yes. It was presented, but it was not acceptable to me.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Will the Taoiseach publish the text?

The Taoiseach: No, because it is not one that was presented formally to everybody else.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That does not matter.

The Taoiseach: It was an attempt by the President to bring forward a text which he thought might be acceptable, but I rejected it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is very important in the context of this key debate on debt sustainability. The Taoiseach has confirmed that a text was presented to him by President Van Rompuy. A lot of money has been at stake in the past three or four months and I would like to know whether the text is similar to the amendment tabled by the Taoiseach during the debate on corporation tax. People are talking all the time about a formula of words; even at the last ECOFIN meeting the Minister was talking about a formula of words. Therefore, we need to know what this is all about. We know the issue of the corporation tax rate is not up for grabs and that this has always been the stated position of Governments. I am focusing on the formula of words President Van Rompuy presented to the Taoiseach. I think the Taoiseach owes it to the House, given the enormity of the debate, to tell us what it was. This is a key issue and the Taoiseach's priority. He owes it to the House and the public to publish the text of the compromise presented in order that people will be able to make an independent, objective assessment of the issues between EU member states and the eurozone countries and Ireland.

The Taoiseach: President Van Rompuy made an effort to arrive at a compromise, but I was not prepared to accept it on the basis of our view of a CCCTB, common consolidated corporate tax base. As for the Deputy suggesting various texts be published, I had to make a judgment in that regard as the Head of Government at a leaders' meeting and I did so. It is not a case of publishing ten drafts of a text that might be acceptable——

Deputy Micheál Martin: President Van Rompuy's text.

The Taoiseach: President Van Rompuy was the person who was attempting to arrive at a compromise and as leader of the Government, I had to make a decision in Ireland's interests. While the leaders agreed in principle on a reduction of 1% for those in the EFSF, the text

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given to me was unacceptable. We have moved on from there and I hope we can come to a conclusion on an agreement before too long.

In respect of papers being tabled by the European Commission, I have no problem in participating in discussions, but I am entitled to have a view for or against these proposals. I have indicated a healthy scepticism about the common consolidated corporate tax base.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The conflict in the Middle East was discussed at the summit, as were concerns about the flotilla sailing to Gaza, which concerns were expressed in this House. The Taoiseach will know that the crew of *MV Saoirse* have since expressed their belief their ship was sabotaged — I have seen some photographs — and that Irish citizens were put at risk. Have Government representatives spoken to any of the people on *MV Saoirse* or the Israeli or Turkish authorities about this matter? If not, has the Government any plans to do so?

The Taoiseach: It was discussed at the meeting and concern was expressed that the blockade arranged by the Israeli Government was still in situ for ships leaving ports for Gaza. There was also concern that nothing should happen as happened on the previous occasion when lives were lost. I note the Greek Government has indicated that, in the case of ships wishing to travel to Gaza, it is prepared to have humanitarian aid delivered through Israel or Egypt. I have not had contact with anybody on board *MV Saoirse* and cannot confirm whether the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade has been in touch with any member of the crew. I will inform the Deputy when I have contacted the Minister.

Deputy Gerry Adams: It was act of piracy by the Israeli authorities. The blockade of Gaza is completely illegal, as it is in breach of international law. It is a very serious matter. Thankfully, no one was hurt or killed owing to the diligence of the crew and the captain, a Waterford man, who examined the ship. I ask the Taoiseach to pursue the matter both in the interests of peace in the Middle East and also of those very courageous activists and ordinary citizens who have gone to make a stand in pursuing their cause.

The Taoiseach: I know many hold strong views and I have been contacted about the matter by many. The political establishment must make every effort to ensure peace talks recommence between Prime Minister Netanyahu and everyone else involved. In that regard, an agreed starting point for talks would be helpful. As I said to the Deputy on a previous occasion, I recall vividly my own visit to Gaza. I had discussions with Mr. John Ging who was in charge of the provision of humanitarian aid in Gaza at the time. The Deputy will know that the problem is complex and very serious. I note Prime Minister Papandreou's offer to have any humanitarian aid on ships leaving Greek ports to be delivered by the Greek authorities through Israel or Egypt. I hope nothing like what happened on the previous occasion will happen again.

Deputy Joe Higgins: A large majority of the people have great sympathy for and are in solidarity with the suffering people of Gaza who are suffering mass unemployment, the malnourishment of children and extreme penury as a result of the blockade by the Israel. If the Taoiseach knows this and says he knows what the situation is in Gaza as a result of his visit, why did he agree to such a gutless communiqué from the EU leaders' summit meeting on the flotilla to Gaza? Why did he agree to the inclusion of a mealy-mouthed sentence that put the onus on those trying to deliver aid to the people of Gaza by calling on them to desist as they would endanger lives? Who endangered lives? Who carried out a massacre the last time people tried to deliver aid to Gaza? Can the Taoiseach understand why Israel is encouraged in its imprisonment of the people of Gaza by this mealy-mouthed sentence from the EU leadership?

An Ceann Comhairle: A question, please, Deputy.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Why did the Taoiseach not call, in particular, for the Irish ship, delivering aid to the tune of more than €100,000 collected from a great number of Irish people, to be given the right to deliver aid to Gaza? How would he like it if people bringing goods to this country were forced by another power to deliver them through England, for example, which is what he is suggesting with regard to the proposal to deliver aid through Egypt? Why does the Taoiseach not shout from the rooftops that this is an illegal and immoral siege of the people of Gaza and should be ended forthwith?

The Taoiseach: It is a matter of politics. Last week the Deputy's word was "spineless". This week it is "gutless". He will have another adjective next week. I do not want to see any lives lost as a result of somebody with good intent attempting to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza and finding a blockade. I hope what happened the last time will not happen again.

The Greek Government has made an offer, whereby any persons wishing to send humanitarian aid into Gaza can have it delivered by it through Israel or Egypt. If the intent is to provide humanitarian aid for the besieged and beleaguered people of Gaza, it is a perfectly legitimate and guaranteed way of seeing that it gets through in order for it to be effective for people who are in need of it. I spoke to the father of the caretaker of the American international school who was blown up when it was bombed. I met many of the people who are in desperate family situations. They need help.

On the political front, I hope these discussions can start again. In respect of humanitarian aid, there is a far better method of getting it through to people by accepting the offer of the Greek Government to have it delivered through Israel or Egypt with immediate beneficial effect for people, rather than persons with good intentions running a blockade where they will be turned back.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I tabled three separate questions and timing has become an issue. I asked the Taoiseach his plans for substantial bilateral meetings. Given the debt issue and the priority given to it by the Taoiseach, it is extraordinary and incredible that he has yet to have a substantial bilateral meeting with a eurozone leader. The programme he outlined in his reply is scant in terms of any substantive bilateral meetings with eurozone leaders on this issue. For the life of me I cannot understand why he will not meet President Sarkozy on the issue. Will he explain why there have not been any major domestic initiatives on his part despite his commitment? There clearly have not been any and there are none in train because he is not meeting leaders in substantive bilateral meetings.

On my question on the European Central bank, before Mario Draghi was named ECB president he specifically and forcefully rejected Ireland's wish to burn more bank bondholders. Did the Taoiseach raise this issue before he agreed to his appointment? If not, why not? He mentioned that he made a number of interventions at the Council last week but said nothing about the ECB. Does he accept that it needs to be reformed? If he does, why did he not table a question on the matter at a summit meeting?

Very serious questions need to be asked about Gaza and what happened to the *MV Saoirse*. Representatives of the Government should meet the crew members to get a first-hand account of what transpired. I have spoken to them. The most important point is that the Greek and Cypriot Governments offered routes into Gaza last year and were rejected. There is a principal political objection to public aid and the impact it is having on the peace situation and so on.

The Government has been lacking in terms of upholding fundamental rights of our citizens to protest, object and highlight the injustice of the blockade in the context of the suffering of

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the people of Gaza. It should be done in a peaceful way which does not provoke violence. We should not allow ourselves to be sucked into a debate in which it is argued that somebody who travels with a flotilla is somehow looking for trouble. That nuance is creeping into the debate. We must uphold the right of people to protest and highlight issues that are fundamentally wrong. That is what democracy is about. We must ensure their safety in protesting, as long as it is a peaceful protest.

The Taoiseach: Nobody is denying the right of people to peaceful or legitimate protest. Nobody is denying people the opportunity to highlight what they consider an injustice. These things are all right and proper in any democracy. While we can understand the situation that arises in this case, it should not lead us to a point where people's lives are endangered. I hope that never happens.

The Tánaiste referred to following up on the incidents that occurred in respect of the *MV Saoirse*. I am sure in his responsibilities as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade he will deal with the issue during Question Time when the rota comes around. There is no question of not wanting to see that people have the right to protest and highlight what they consider to be injustices and concerns.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Does the Taoiseach condemn the sabotage?

The Taoiseach: The interim situation in Egypt opened another crossing into Gaza some weeks ago which was of great interest to citizens who were unable to leave before then. These matters are of interest to us. I respect the concerns of many people about what has happened and what is happening in Gaza. In respect of humanitarian aid, the European Union is a major contributor. For those who wish to collect humanitarian aid with a view to having an immediate impact and expect it to be delivered by flotillas leaving Greek or other ports, the Greek authorities have said they will see to it that it is delivered through Israel and Egypt with immediate impact and benefit for the citizens of Gaza.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What about the ECB president?

The Taoiseach: Mr. Draghi had a unanimous recommendation from ECOFIN.

Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2010: Second Stage (Resumed)

Question again proposed: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

Deputy Seamus Healy: I wish to share time with Deputies Collins and Wallace.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Seamus Healy: In the few minutes left to me I will deal with the number of Deputies and the reduction proposed in the Bill. I am strongly believe that the number of Deputies in this House is not the problem. The problem is the accountability of Deputies in the House to the public and electorate who elected them. It was brought home forcefully in the aftermath of the recent election. Parties stood on platforms and made promises, but came in here after the election and implemented policies that were totally at variance with those for which they campaigned during the course of the general election.

Reform is needed to ensure that Deputies are accountable to the public. The public should have a mechanism whereby Deputies who do not fulfil their obligations and mandate to the people could be recalled. A popular initiative should be available to the public, something which was in the first Constitution of the State and is available in many other European coun-

tries. If the public was dissatisfied with a law passed by Parliament it would be in a position to call a referendum on the issue. Accountability is the real problem with Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann and the Oireachtas.

On the number of Deputies referred to in the Bill, if one looks at international comparisons we are not out of line with other comparable countries such as Denmark, Sweden or New Zealand. Any reduction would disadvantage smaller parties and Independent Deputies. The reduction in cost would be small and there are other methods by which significant cost reductions could be achieved by the House.

I wish to comment briefly on matters raised by other speakers. Last night, a Sinn Féin Deputy indicated he was supportive of the list system. I am absolutely opposed to the list system, however, on the basis that if we had such a system in the 2007 general election we could well have ended up with Seanie Fitzpatrick as Minister for Finance.

Deputy Tom Hayes: Deputy Shane Ross wanted him.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Deputy Mick Wallace mentioned him also.

Deputy Seamus Healy: He was the financial guru of the day and we could have ended up with him here. There are all sorts of problems relating to the list system. Someone like Seanie Fitzpatrick, who was considered to be a guru then, might well have ended up as Minister for Finance, so we would be in an even worse situation than we currently are.

Deputy Joan Collins: This Bill is a sop to the whole question of political reform. Having spoken to people before, during and after the election, it is clear they want accountability from their public representatives. As Deputy Healy said, on too many occasions promises have been made only to be broken afterwards. Consequently, people feel they have no redress concerning the promises that were made. The issue of recall must be on the agenda, as well as a mechanism to seek a referendum to hold politicians to account.

Before discussing political reform, however, we need improved access to social welfare services, including medical cards. It is scandalous that TDs should have a role to play by intervening in decisions as to whether a person should have a medical card. If it is a person's right and entitlement they should get it. More resources should be afforded to the citizens' information bureaux as well as to local authorities in that regard. As elected representatives, it is the business of TDs to implement through legislation the pre-election policies they put to the people. That is our key role.

I support the Bill's provision to hold by-elections within six months of a vacancy arising. There should be no recurrence of the scandalous delays that happened under the last Government when we were waiting years for by-elections to be held. People should not be deprived of representation in their constituencies.

The proposal to cut the number of TDs by 20, which appeared in Fine Gael's election manifesto, is nothing more than a political stunt. One of the few good points about our electoral system is that it provides for a more representative range of political opinion. It allows Independents and members of small parties to gain seats. Despite the advantages the establishment parties enjoy through the media, financial backing and the support of big business, real electoral reform would mean tackling these issues. Apart from being a cheap electoral stunt, the Bill's proposal to reduce the number of TDs is aimed at Independent TDs and small parties.

If the Government wants to reduce the cost to taxpayers of running the Dáil there are much better ways of doing so. I estimate the overall cost of a TD is somewhere between €270,000 and €350,000 per year, depending on whether the Member is an Independent or in a large

[Deputy Joan Collins.]

political party. That estimate takes account of wages, vouched and travel expenses, employment of secretaries and personal assistants, phones, free post and office space, in addition to the party leader's allowance and party running costs. Cutting the number of TDs by ten, for example, would save approximately €3 million. The same amount would be saved by halving the wages of TDs and Ministers. We should be looking at these areas. This would also have the advantage of bringing a bit of reality to bear on making ends meet in the Dáil.

It is the policy of TDs in the United Left Alliance to take the average industrial wage they received before being elected — whether they worked in the post office, airports or elsewhere — and give the remainder to a solidarity fund. We are proud to be able to implement that policy, which keeps our feet on the ground. We therefore understand the reality facing ordinary people in our communities.

Cutting TDs' wages by 50% would do far more to lessen the damage done by certain people who abused the system by phoning celebrity contests, being unsure whether they lived in Dublin or Cork, or the activities of Deputy Lowry for which he has been censured in this Chamber.

I am not sure people are aware that €11,640,000 is being paid out annually to political parties, with €4.5 million going to Fine Gael, €2.3 million to Fianna Fáil and the same to Labour. A 50% cut in those payments would save taxpayers almost €6 million.

Deputy Tom Hayes: What about the Deputy's €40,000 tax-free allowance?

Deputy Joan Collins: If linked to really effective legislation to ban big business funding the political establishment, it would begin to end the hegemony of the pro-big business establishment and open this Chamber to ordinary people, rather than big business interests that are bankrolling the system. That would be real and meaningful political reform.

Deputy Mick Wallace: There are some positive elements in the Bill, even though the legislation is insubstantial. I am still not convinced how much the coalition Government wants to make serious changes or how much of it will be cosmetic. Much of the change that is needed would require the Government of the day to be more accountable. Therefore, asking the incumbent Government to effect serious change is a bit like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas——

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: With sauce.

Deputy Mick Wallace: ——which they would be reluctant to do.

The six-month by-election rule is definitely a good idea. What happened under the last Government was a complete sham, but it also occurred before that. It is definitely a good idea to introduce that provision.

I was shocked to hear Deputy Pearse Doherty say last night that the Supreme Court appeal to the High Court decision to force the Donegal south-west by-election is still being fought. It seems outrageous that we should be spending money on that at the moment.

It is a good idea to reduce allowances for presidential election campaigns from €1.3 million to €750,000. It is sensible but the new figure is still way too high. The €200,000 return figure is also high. We are nonetheless nothing like the American situation where it costs about \$1 billion for a presidential candidate to run for office. The USA has a population which is approximately 70 times ours but it is still a mad scenario over there. One must be a multi-millionaire to consider running for the White House. We are not quite as bad as that yet, but it would be a positive move to bring the figures down further, thus making the presidential

election more available to ordinary citizens with less money. We would also have to change the way a candidate can get on the ballot paper, which is pretty discriminatory at the moment.

With regard to the Bill's proposal to reduce the number of TDs, it would make a lot more sense to start with local government. If this country is to be run in a healthy fashion we must reform how local government operates. It is one of the biggest differences when one compares Ireland to how other western European countries run local government. The lack of local government here is the starkest difference.

I am sure many Members of the House have read Fintan O'Toole's book *Enough is Enough*, from which I would like to quote a short extract. It is a fabulous work and deserves attention. In the book, O'Toole argues that the process of radical political reform has to start at local government level. He justifies this on three grounds: 1. the elites are too deeply entrenched to have any interest in radical reform; 2. without real local government what will continue to happen is what has always happened — we get local politicians operating at national level, and national politicians continuing to function as if they were county councillors; and 3. because localism remains so strong, Irish people have a very weak sense of ownership of the State, but a very strong sense of local belonging.

O'Toole also draws attention to the fact that Ireland has some of the best civil society organisations in the world, "all of them built on a very strong sense of local engagement and participation". Commenting that centralisation has been "disastrous", he writes

Instead of being centres for strategic thinking, innovation, co-ordination and long-term planning, Government Departments got bogged down in day-to-day bureaucracy and crisis management.

At present, local government here has only one fifth of the average funding available in Europe. I would like to see greater taxation powers for local government as well as it being involved in education, health and economic development.

Local government input into economic development would provide a huge boost for the country. Also, rather than having civil servants make all the decisions, councillors, as opposed to only taking part in special groups, should also have the power to do so. More often than not, a county manager is a political appointee. I would prefer if such a person was directly elected by the people in order that if he or she did not perform well, they would have the power to remove him or her. Currently, they have little power over those who make decisions for them at local level.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I wish to share time with Deputies Buttimer, Donohoe and Tom Hayes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I have no great problem with this legislation and will only comment on it in general terms. I am not a great supporter of any attempt to diminish democracy. I have always held the view that we must safeguard it, as it is fragile. Any country which shrunk democracy paid a high price for so doing. I am not suggesting the proposals contained in the legislation will shrink democracy in this country unnecessarily. However, weaknesses have shown up in the system in recent years. In the short time available to me, I would like to evaluate these weaknesses.

Weaknesses have shown up in Departments, many of which did not do the job they were supposed to do. Ministers did not call the shots, did not recognise the problem and did not take action when they should have. Heads of Departments also did not do their jobs. They

[Deputy Bernard J. Durkan.]

should have taken action and issued warnings immediately when things were seen to be going wrong. The regulators also did not do their job. However, there is no point in going over the matter. The banking system did not do what it was supposed to do. The economy was turned upside down leaving us in a situation from which we will have great difficulty extricating ourselves.

The question that arises is whether the parliamentary system failed? I do not believe it did, as it was not allowed to function. It was dominated by a Government which slowly strangled Parliament. Once that happens, Parliament become irrelevant. Where does Parliament now finds itself? We are placed between local authorities which we all believe should have more power — in European Union member states greater recognition is given to regional authorities and as such, there is regionalisation with the establishment of the Scottish, Welsh and other assemblies — and the European institutions, including the European Parliament and the European Commission. There is no purer form of democracy than having direct elections to the national parliament. We can talk about the matter for as long as we like and can get as many experts as we like to analyse it, but there is substitute for this. Any attempt to circumnavigate the system, whereby experts are elevated to ministerial or any other office in the parliamentary system, is anathema and flies in the face of democracy.

Whenever we shrink democracy we enhance bureaucracy. It is as simple as that. When we remove, trim or reduce the powers or autonomy of parliamentarians, the corresponding change is the giving of more power to bureaucrats, which they love. For them, it is all about power. The longer one studies this issue, the more obvious it becomes. That is the reason so many experts are commenting on our situation. Have we ever before been beset by more opinions from experts than in the past two and a half to three years since the economy began running into the sand? The experts came out of the woodwork and continue to advise and tell us what we should be doing. Very often they offer contradictory opinions. However, where were they before everything went wrong? They were rallying the crowd and being populist. Let us not forget that populism is dangerous. Any European historian could tell us all about this and would not have to go too far back in time to do so.

I do not have a difficulty with the Bill. However, I caution that we must be careful not to trim democracy to the benefit of bureaucrats and administrators, thus reducing the quality of representation to which the people are entitled.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire agus molaim an Bille Toghcháin (Leasú) 2011. I welcome the Bill. It is important we have legislation which introduces a six month time limit for the holding of by-elections. During the last Dáil court intervention was required in the case of by-elections which had not held for 18 months. That is an example of where the Government turned its back on democracy, leaving some people without representation. The Government must allow people to be represented. The approach of the previous Administration undermined the principles on which our democracy is based.

Yesterday Deputy Niall Collins derided this legislation as piecemeal. The Bill addresses the real issues facing us. It is about ensuring a continuation of democracy. It represents a far superior way of legislating than the *a la carte* approach taken by the Fianna Fáil-Green Party Administration. This measure is necessary because the people were ignored. In many constituencies they did not have a voice. It is unfortunate that we have to take this prescriptive step, but it will ensure representation continues in the national Parliament.

Following on from publication last week of the preliminary census report, I welcome the establishment by the Minister of the constituency review committee. The census confirmed an unexpected increase in population which will have a profound impact in terms of changes to

Dáil constituency boundaries which will affect some of us. As Deputy Joan Collins stated, political reform was an issue in the last general election campaign. It was the lexicon used by many. In establishing an electoral commission the Minister is outlining the parameters within which reform can and will take place. Legislation states county boundaries and geographical features must be taken into account when reviewing constituency boundaries. It is important that social and day-to-day realities are also taken into account. There is a large degree of interdependence between urban centres and what are referred to as satellite towns. They share many of the same issues, facilities and services. It is important, therefore, that these factors are considered by the commission in order that boundaries will not be arbitrarily drawn without reference to the impact on local communities and, accordingly, the people living in them.

I welcome the reduction in spending limits in Presidential elections and the amount to be reimbursed to candidates, another demonstration of the Government's commitment to providing for a reduction in spending across the political divide. It is important that it continue to examine all items of expenditure to identify where savings can be made. Deputy Wallace has referred to what happens in elections in America. It is important that we proceed with caution. Every Member of this House knows the expense involved in running for elected office from a town council to the national Parliament and the European Parliament. Political parties and candidates are funded through individual, corporate or union donations governed by the SIPO. If we were to ban political donations, candidates would, without State funding, have to rely on their own resources. It is in no one's interest that participation in elections is only available to those who have personal wealth to fund their lavish campaigns. Regardless of the model of funding we decide upon, we must be conscious that if we are to ban donations, the State will inevitably need to provide increased resources to fund elections. It is time to have a proper debate on what it means to have State funding of political parties in our democracy. We are a democratic Republic and it is important that we have an open and transparent debate on that.

I very much welcome that we are having this debate and I hope the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government and the commission will be cognisant that in carrying out the electoral review it is not just about geographical boundaries, but is also about communities and giving people a strong cogent voice. As Deputy Durkan said, reform is not just about trimming and cutting, but about how we can engage and have real participation in bringing the voice of the people not just to this Chamber, but also to the local authorities where decisions that have a real effect are made.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I also welcome the Bill. I pick up on a theme mentioned by Deputy Buttimer, which is the role of Parliament in political life. There is one consequence the Bill cannot be allowed to have. As we move to reduce the size of our political system, it cannot be done at the expense of reducing the effectiveness of the political system or the total amount of politics and democracy available in our public life. That can really only be done if measures are put in place to increase the power of Parliament and make this a proper Parliament as opposed to a Chamber that can be dominated by Government.

A recent survey evaluated the effectiveness of different parliaments across similar sized countries. Of the 31 parliaments surveyed, we ranked 29th in the effectiveness of Parliament based on oversight, holding Government to account and particularly in giving a role to backbenchers. A recent article on the operation of the new parliament in the UK indicated that one of the innovations there was to give greater ability to backbenchers to raise matters they believed to be of national or local interest, which is something of which we continue to be deprived. There is a waiting list of matters to be raised on the Adjournment. Our inability to do that impairs our ability to carry out one of the roles for which we are elected, which is to raise local or national matters we believe to be important. I strongly support moves to reduce the size of our

[Deputy Paschal Donohoe.]

political system and that should be done. As we have seen change in the size and operation of every other public service, the same should happen to our political system. However, when talking about reform of our public services, we also need to talk about proper reform of what happens here. I believe the Government is committed to doing that and Members on the Government side as well as those in opposition have an incentive to see it happen.

I wish to speak about the calling of by-elections. I participated in the Dublin Central by-election caused by the sad death of Tony Gregory in the last Dáil. How that was handled was nothing short of a farce and did real damage to the legitimacy and value we seek to accord to being a Member of this House. The insight that must underscore all of that is that being a Deputy and having a seat in this Chamber does not make that seat the property of anybody elected to it. I stand here representing Dublin Central and that seat is owned by the people. The people through Parliament should have an expectation regarding when that seat should be filled if a vacancy arises for whatever reason. Therefore it is important that the Bill introduces a bounded time limit as to when that should happen.

I welcome the changes to the spending limits on presidential elections, but I would like to see that extended. We should consider the cost involved in participating in a general election campaign and find ways to ensure that money of itself does not have a disproportionate role in deciding how people get elected. Having contested a number of elections and knowing the amount of money I have spent on general elections, I recognise that in retrospect the effect of that money is always far less than I might have considered at the time. The qualities that still continue to be decisive at election time are the amount of work a candidate puts into getting elected, the quality of what is said and how he or she communicates it. We ought to ensure that the power of money is regulated and restrained at all times.

I conclude on the role of Parliament and strengthening the role of democracy — not just reducing it. I saw a very encouraging sign of that yesterday when the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Varadkar, brought a proposal to the Joint Committee on the Environment, Transport, Culture and the Gaeltacht regarding legislation he is planning to draft. He invited the committee to revert to him in four weeks with its input on what should be in that Bill before he begins drafting it. Those kinds of measures give testament to the intent we have to reform these Chambers and reform political life.

Deputy Tom Hayes: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the Bill. The Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2011 is a prime example of the Government's and this party's commitment to changing how politics works in this country. During the general election campaign and prior to it, Leinster House was seen as a place where there was nobody. I can count eight Deputies, including the Leas-Cheann Comhairle, in this House today. People and particularly those in the media will say this is a national disgrace, but last night at 10.45 p.m. I walked through the corridors in Leinster House and in almost every office there was somebody working. There is no other workplace in this country where people put in such long hours. However, the public's perception of this place is so wrong. We have done an injustice to ourselves over the years by hammering each other inside here. I passionately believe that, with the possible exception of a very small number, everybody elected to this House is committed to public service. Most people come in here with a passion to do something, and work long hours and extremely hard on behalf of their constituents. We have a very difficult electoral system that is clientelist and we all have constituency offices. We work on Fridays, Saturdays, Mondays and long weekends, but I believe the public perception is wrong. We need to generate a different idea of exactly we are doing — what Ministers are doing, what committees are doing and what each representative is doing in this House.

It was a big argument of the public and the media to reduce the number of Deputies. The Bill's proposal to establish a new commission tasked with setting boundaries with 30,000 people per Deputy is welcome. That is what the public wants and we must deliver what they want. However, in giving them what they want we must also explain what we are doing and how we are doing it. I have brought many people into this House on a constituents' day out. They are shocked and flabbergasted with the amount of hours we put in and the amount of work we do.

I participated in two by-elections, being elected in one and defeated in the other. While I welcome the introduction of a time limit on holding by-elections, I have a reservation. While I might be disagreeing with party policy, I believe that six months is too tight. I suggest the Minister give consideration to providing for a 12 month period because there can be tragic deaths and circumstances where a person must leave this House. I firmly believe the six-month period is too tight, although the Minister is right to put a limit in place. However, a 12 month period should be considered in particular circumstances, given the fact that many by-elections have resulted from people leaving this House owing to very serious events.

With regard to the amount that can be spent at a Presidential election, we are spending twice what we should be at all elections — local, national, Presidential and otherwise. There were far more posters used during the last general election than was necessary. I hope the Government will be in power for a five-year period during which time we should put a plan in place so as not to waste money on posters, advertisements and so on. I urge that we make inroads on this issue in the next couple of years.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I wish to share time with Deputy Troy.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I generally welcome many of the measures proposed in the legislation. Having a time limit of six months for the calling of a by-election is generally a good idea, although I agree with Deputy Tom Hayes that allowing a few extra months might be preferable. When one considers the logistics, it is never appropriate to hold an election in the months of July and August because many people are out of the country on holidays. Therefore, if a Member was to die in the early part of the year, the by-election would have to be held within four or five months to be completed by June and a six-month provision would not allow us to wait until September when the holiday season was over, people were back to work and the schools were open again. I suggest, therefore, that we consider the practicalities of providing for a six-month period, although the principle is correct.

I generally support the proposal regarding the Constituency Commission which will get on with its work. The third proposal concerns reducing spending limits and the reimbursement of expenses of candidates at Presidential elections. This is the issue on which I want to focus, not just as it relates to Presidential elections but to all elections. During the last Dáil, in April 2008, the Joint Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, of which I was Chairman, issued a report entitled, *First Report — The Future of the Electoral Register in Ireland and Related Matters*. All members of the committee signed up to the general ideas espoused in and the contents of the report. The Minister, Deputy Hogan, was a member of the committee, as were Deputies Bannon, Ciarán Lynch and Tuffy, and the then Senators Hannigan and Coffey, now Deputies, as well as the then Senator Cannon, now a Minister of State. Therefore, many members of the current Government parties were involved and agreed to the contents of the report.

The key issue on which I wish to focus in the context of the report is the cost of elections. I am very disappointed the Minister is not present, although I make no political point in that regard, as he is obviously otherwise committed. Nonetheless, I will try to make a point of

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speaking to him personally on this issue in the coming weeks to express my views to him. We are discussing reducing the amount that can be reimbursed to Presidential election candidates from €260,000 to €200,000 and the amount candidates can spend from their own resources from €1.3 million to €750,000. Therefore, for example, if there were four candidates in a Presidential election, the reduction of €60,000 per candidate would give a total saving of €240,000. While that sounds significant, it is not the issue. That is the point I want to make to the Minister.

I wish to quote figures for the 2007 general election, the election studied in the 2008 report of the joint committee of which the Minister was part. The most minor cost is the sum that must be reimbursed to candidates. Based on parliamentary replies from the then Minister for Finance, the cost of payments to returning officers in all the constituencies in the 2007 general election was €15,443,187.57. In addition, as shown in the report — the information was probably acquired by means of replies to parliamentary questions — the amount paid to An Post was €12,496,308.93. This gives a ballpark figure of €28 million for the cost of running a national election campaign, which includes the payments to returning officers for organising the counts and making arrangements for polling day, as well as to An Post, the biggest component of which is the *litir um thoghchán*, an issue to which I will return. My point is that while there will be a saving to the taxpayer in respect of refunds to candidates, the cost of staging a general election is about €28 million; therefore, the saving will not even represent 1% of total election expenditure. What we are doing in cutting the cost to the taxpayer of election campaigns looks populist, given the small saving involved. I am not suggesting an effort should not be made, but there is scope to make massive savings in two areas. One is the costs of returning officers, which I will highlight using as examples two five-seat constituencies, the information on which is contained in the report cited which is available in the Oireachtas Library and which I am sure is in the possession of the Minister's office and the Department of Finance, from where the costs of returning officers are paid.

Laois-Offaly is a large five-seat constituency in which the cost to the returning officer in the 2007 general election was €500,000 which I presume was money well spent. In the same election in another five-seat constituency, Wicklow, the cost to the returning officer was €780,000. There is no good reason it should have cost the returning officer €280,000 more to pay his staff in Wicklow than in a neighbouring five-seat constituency. If we want to make savings, this issue must be examined. The scale of fees is set out, with so much per counter, so much per person on polling day, so much for overtime and so on. It is all included, yet there are enormous differentials. If savings need to be made in the interests of taxpayers, this is the first area that should be considered.

The real issue to be considered in making savings — this is my suggestion to the Minister — is the cost of deliving to what we call the election address. This is the biggest single cost to the taxpayer. One point, in particular, aggravates the public. If there are four or five voters living in a house and six or seven candidates sending items to their address, 30 items of correspondence or more might arrive, all costing 55 cent to be delivered. The excess must be eliminated. The cost in sending this correspondence in the 2007 general election was €1.6 million in the case of Fianna Fáil, €1.6 million in the case of Fine Gael and €1.6 million in the case of any party which sent correspondence nationwide. The total cost to the taxpayer was €11 million. As I said at the Committee of Public Accounts, there is time before holding the Presidential election for the Department of Finance——

Deputy Michael McCarthy: Will the Deputy's party be running a candidate?

Deputy Sean Fleming: That is an interesting point to which we will come on another day. Members will see merit in the point I am making. Candidates in a Presidential election include

a photograph and a short biography that appears on the ballot paper. There is no reason a full CV cannot be handed in in order that one booklet could be posted to each registered elector. Instead of four or five candidates individually sending correspondence at a cost of €1.6 million per candidate to each registered elector, let there be one booklet for the candidates, to be listed in alphabetical order, in which they could include their blurb. There would be one postal communication to each registered elector. We could try to be smart by sending it to each household, but I would not want that to be done. In a democracy each registered elector is entitled to receive a communication, given that not every person in a household will vote the same way and the communication might not be circulated to other voters in the household. Therefore, each registered voter should receive one information booklet carrying the details of the four or five candidates standing for election. There would also be sufficient time for this to be done in a general election, as the ballot papers would be printed in advance and it could be made a requirement to include a photograph of each candidate and their CV.

A booklet would be sent to each registered voter during the election campaign with the details of the candidates in each constituency. Given that a number of referendums will be held on the same day as the presidential election, a summary of the referendum issues will have to be distributed and this will have significant cost implications. As we have sufficient time over the summer to complete the nomination process, we could provide information on the referendums and the biographies of candidates in the same booklet. By sending out one communication rather than several, the savings for the taxpayer could be massive. I am all in favour of cutting €60,000 from candidates' spending limits but this is only Mickey Mouse stuff which does not even equate to 1% of the cost of the campaign. If the Government is serious about saving money on the election, it should amalgamate the material. It is a source of public aggravation that 30 items of literature are sometimes distributed to registered voters when one would suffice.

Deputy Robert Troy: I ask the Leas-Cheann Comhairle to advise me when I have spoken for seven minutes. My colleagues opposite are seeking additional time because the Order of Business ran late. When dealing with electoral and political reform, actions speak louder than words, and I am happy to share time with my colleagues.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important Bill because every Member of this House dealt with questions on the need for reform while canvassing for the last election. While I do not question the Government's sincerity in proposing reform, I have reservations about the piecemeal manner in which it is pursuing its aims. The Minister is required by law to establish a constituency commission to review Dáil and European Parliament constituencies upon publication of the preliminary census report but there is no reason why we cannot go a step further. I will concentrate my remarks on the review of the constituency commission.

I support the reduction in the spending limit for presidential elections, although it perhaps could be reduced further. My experience of running a Dáil election campaign on a shoestring and being elected at a bad time for the party of which I am a member suggests that national elections could cost significantly less than what is being proposed in this Bill. I welcome that by-elections will be held within a specified period. I do not have an issue with a time limit of six months but perhaps the time could be extended by a few months in light of comments made by previous speakers.

The Government proposes to introduce radical political changes but reducing the number of Deputies by six or 12 will not achieve that goal. We need to examine the political system in its entirety, including the Dáil, Seanad and local authorities. We should bring forward a package of reforms on the same day. In April, the Taoiseach stated he would introduce a Constitution day within the following 12 months with a view to amending the Constitution. Fine Gael's

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election manifesto indicated it would reduce the Dáil by 20 seats but perhaps we could reduce this number still further by devolving powers to local authorities. These are areas that we need to consider collectively. There is merit in establishing a cross-party group to investigate political reform. Some of the newer Members of the House should sit on this group because, with all due respect to long-serving Members, it is hard to teach old dogs new tricks. Members who have fought several campaigns over a 20 to 30 year period become comfortable with the status quo because they know they can be elected and they sometimes appear afraid to embrace new practices. Previous speakers appeared nervous about bringing in outside expertise. However, I commend the Taoiseach on his lack of fear in appointing his 11 nominees to the Seanad. If, as some have claimed, we might have ended up with Seanie Fitzpatrick as Minister for Finance, we might also have appointed Matthew Elderfield. We cannot be afraid to embrace change and we need to reform radically the way our political system operates. We are national legislators but some of us spend too much time on local issues. While voters expect us to do a certain amount of local constituency work, they also expect us to deal with national issues.

The reason I want a cross-party group to review our political system is because I do not believe we can trust one party to operate on a consensus basis. The largest party in Government is at present blatantly blocking prospective candidates from entering the presidential election because it is in the fortunate position of controlling a large number of county councils and can use a whip to ensure credible candidates do not enter the field. If a credible candidate wants to undergo the process of nomination by local authorities, councillors should be given the opportunity to make a decision based on the individual's merits. Fine Gael has also broken its promises to reduce the number of junior Ministers to 12 and on reducing the number of Dáil seats. These issues should be considered on a cross-party basis.

The Minister was correct in stating that the failures of the political system over the past decade were key contributors to the financial crisis. This is why we need to examine the way we elect Deputies. The system provides for auction politics and empty promises. I remind Members of the broken promises on political reform, Roscommon hospital and ensuring the money follows the patient. These promises were made with the sole intention of electoral gain.

We need to rethink the way we do our business by considering the devolution of powers to local government or introducing single seat constituencies and partial list systems. I will not set out what is right or wrong but I ask why we must rush into these matters. Does the Government want to implement everything because it does not expect to last five years? In respect of other measures contained in the programme for Government, we are told there are five years for implementing them but the approach to political reform is to rush through a measure to reduce the number of Deputies by six. I do not agree this represents political reform and I propose that an all-party committee be established to consider reforms at Dáil, Seanad, European Parliament and local government levels.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: I am sharing two minutes of with Deputy Michael McCarthy. I thank Deputy Troy for his generosity in sharing time. Given the fundamental nature of this legislation we should have been given more time on Second Stage to allow us to express a diversity of opinions.

I wish to correct a report in *The Irish Times* today which cited the Minister as stating there is one Deputy per 20,271 head of population. However, according to the preliminary census results the correct ratio is 1:27,598. From reading the transcript, I understand the Minister actually said there was one representative for every 20,271 people, and he included Senators to come up with that figure. I think that is disingenuous on the part of the Minister. We in this House are the representatives of the people. We are elected by our constituents, so it is disin-

generous to include Senators in that sense. Constitutionally, the ratio is set out according to the number of TDs to population.

The Minister also talked last night about reducing the size and cost of government. With all our economic problems, we need to start naming the ideology behind ideas. The idea of reducing the size and cost of government is right wing ideology and Tea Party philosophy.

What will be the Minister's legacy on political reform in a few years? I reckon his gender quota initiative will probably fail on constitutional grounds. I reckon the Seanad will never be abolished. It looks like the Minister is already kicking it to touch. I would not be surprised anyway if, at the end of the day, the people rejected the abolition of the Seanad. His biggest achievement will then have been to cut the number of TDs by between six and 13. That will be it, even though the Minister could be looking at so many challenges now under his portfolio, including so-called local government reform. I do not wish to use the word "reform", because it is being debased by its use as a euphemism for cuts. We need to empower local government. Other issues such as climate change should also take priority over this at his Department. In his words and actions, the Minister is undermining the value of representation, which is the core of democracy.

These Houses were founded in 1919 and 1922, respectively. They brought us out of a civil war. They brought about a peace process. They had great achievements and successes along the way. At the whim of a spin doctor, the next opinion poll or the focus group he met last week, the Minister would just turn around and decide to cut the number of TDs and abolish the Seanad. He is butchering the Constitution before there is a proper analysis. His comparisons yesterday were again disingenuous. There are many countries with members of parliament representing between 15,000 and 35,000 people. Political scientists have a rule known as the cube root law of assembly, which is 166 Deputies for Ireland. The same formula would show that the UK and other countries are over-represented, and not Ireland.

There are flaws in the Bill. The figure of 153 Deputies may well end up being unconstitutional by the time the actual census results come out. The 2006 preliminary census figures were out by almost 5,000, so the Bill could be unconstitutional in a few months and provide unconstitutional terms of reference for the boundary commission. Where will that leave the commission? This is the first time in the history of the State that a boundary commission is being asked to reduce the number of TDs. This has never happened before. The commission has not done the populist thing and the Minister is abdicating his responsibility under the Constitution. It is the Oireachtas that sets the number of TDs, not an Oireachtas commission. The Minister is abdicating his responsibility in this area and, in that sense, it is a cowardly act.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: I acknowledge the generosity of the Minister and Deputy Troy for allowing me to speak on the Bill. What happened this morning is an example of how we need to reform the business of this House. The Order of Business and Leaders' Questions went over time, which then ate into other Members' time. This narrows the scope within which someone can make a contribution on a very important Bill and a very topical subject.

One of the many failings of the last Administration was to avoid for as long as possible the political responsibility of holding by-elections. That is an assault on democracy because it prevents the right of people to full representation. Sadly, people passed away and we also saw a number of resignations, so I welcome the Minister's initiative to hold by-elections within six months of the vacancy arising.

Another issue I would like to raise is that of the limited role of the backbencher. Since the election, new back bench TDs are finding it difficult to become part of the process, to contribute to debates and to be given a platform from which they can articulate their views, which is

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the primary reason they have been elected in the first instance. The back bench business committee is a group of MPs from both sides of the House of Commons who come together and propose and organise an order for at least one day's business. That committee was a radical move in the House of Commons and was the first time in 100 years that a government did not have a complete monopoly on the way business is done.

Much has been said about the Seanad, and whether it should be abolished or reformed. There is an interminable debate about the future of Seanad Éireann. I spent nine years in the Seanad and I found that House far more productive than the Dáil thus far, with a lot more scope to allow people to make contributions, especially on the Order of Business. A Leas-Cheann Comhairle, you and I shared a term in Seanad Éireann, and you will know that it is a very fine House, even though it is very much in need of reform. If we kowtow to a debate that is inherently anti-politics, be it about town councils, county councils or Dáil and Seanad Éireann, we are pandering to an agenda that is very cynical and is led in many respects by a right-wing media. The Seanad is a fine House and I would like to see it reformed as opposed to abolished.

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I thank Deputies on all sides for their contributions to this important debate. The comments focused both on the Bill itself and, as might be expected, across the electoral agenda generally. In the time available, it is not possible for me to comment on all the points made. I propose to respond to some of the issues raised and we can go into further detail on matters relating to the Bill on Committee Stage.

I welcome the strong support that was evident during the debate for the measures in the Bill. These provide for the holding of Dáil by-elections within six months of a vacancy occurring and a reduction in the spending and reimbursement limits that apply at presidential elections.

Many different views were offered during the debate on the proposal to change the terms of reference of the Constituency Commission to provide for a reduction in the number of Members in this House. Many were very supportive and some were not. As I stated in my contribution, I believe the political system cannot ask others to change and make sacrifices if it is not prepared to do the same. The reduction in the number of TDs is a first step along the path of electoral reform and leadership.

Some Deputies, including Deputy Humphreys and Deputy Doherty, spoke about the need for wider electoral reform. I agree. The programme for Government commits to a radical overhaul of the way Irish politics and government work. It sets out a wide-ranging series of commitments to this end, a number of which are within my area of responsibility as Minister. I am committed to working with my Government colleagues and, indeed, with all Members to implement these measures in full.

The Bill before us deals with three specific issues which will bring about real and meaningful change, but that is not all. In addition to the Bill now before the House, on 8 June 2011, I published the general scheme of the electoral (amendment) (political funding) Bill 2011. That Bill provides for the restriction of corporate donations, a reduction in the amounts that can be received as political donations and a reduction in the thresholds for declaring political donations. Political parties will also now be required to submit their annual accounts to the Standards in Public Office Commission for publication. The new legislation includes a provision that political parties will face a cut of half their State political funding if they do not have at least 30% female and 30% male candidates at the next general election. This will then rise to 40% after seven years. I remind Deputy Tuffy that I got legal advice from the Attorney General on these matters, who indicated that Part 5 of the Bill is legally in order. In line with the

Government's commitment to reform the way legislation is debated and implemented, I have published the general scheme and invited public input on its contents. I look forward to debating that Bill with Deputies in the autumn.

I wish to refer briefly to the concerns raised by some Deputies regarding specific recommendations of past constituency commissions. For example, Deputy Daly referred to the splitting of Swords. Deputies Browne and Colreavy discussed the fact that County Leitrim is split between two constituencies, and Deputy Collins referred to the decision of the last commission regarding Kerry and Limerick. We must bear in mind that constituency formation is not a perfect science. People do not always live in the areas which would enable constituencies to be drawn up that meet with general approval. The overriding constitutional requirement of equality of representation means that breaches of obvious boundaries are unavoidable in certain cases. In the revision process, someone's interest must inevitably be affected. That is the price we must pay for our electoral system which has generally served us very well and which is independent. I have no doubt that when the next commission issues its recommendations, resulting in a reduction in the number of Members in this House, there will be some people who will be unhappy.

The general consensus is that the job should be entrusted to an independent commission. That being the case, the commission should be allowed to do the job in the way that seems best to it within the terms of reference given to it by the Oireachtas. Difficult choices have been made in the past and will be made in the future. It is open to anyone to make a submission to the commission and, having considered the options, the commission will then come to a reasoned decision. Other Members or I might make a different choice but we cannot fault the commission for that. It carries out its appointed tasks in accordance with the mandate given to it by this House.

On this point, I take issue with the claims made, in particular by Deputies Ross and Mattie McGrath, which called into question the independence of the commission by suggesting that its members were open to political interference. That is an outrageous claim to make and I want to make it clear that I fully support and acknowledge the integrity and independence of each member of the commission. I regret that Deputies Mattie McGrath and Ross do not share my view of people who have served the country well in their positions of responsibility, in the public service and in the Judiciary. Contrary to the views of Deputies Ross and Mattie McGrath, it is vital the commission retains our support in carrying out its important work which is central to the effective functioning of democracy in this country.

Deputy Doherty and others made a number of points about the electoral register and postal voting. I doubt if there has ever been a discussion in this House on electoral matters where the register has not been raised. I have noted the points made and will consider them, but not in this Bill which needs to be enacted with speed.

During the debate, many Deputies referred to the need to have real reform of local government, with which I very much agree. I am pleased to say a great deal of work relevant to local government reform is under way. I recently established an independent implementation group to progress relevant recommendations of the local government efficiency review group in areas such as shared services, procurement, value for money and audit. I have asked the group to build on the extensive efficiencies that have been achieved by local authorities in the past two years and to focus on key recommendations that will remove costs and yield earliest financial savings for the benefit of the sector and the economy.

Good progress is being made on structural reform. Last week, the Government decided to implement the main recommendations of the Limerick local government committee involving the creation of a new single local authority to replace Limerick city and county councils. This

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is an historic decision which will lead to the first major change in local government in years. It will bring about a more cohesive and better integrated system of local government for Limerick city and county with the potential to provide better value for money, eliminate duplication and free up financial and human resources for critical projects such as the revitalisation of Limerick city centre and regeneration.

I am also considering wider proposals to renew and develop the local government system. Key objectives in this regard include devolution of greater decision making to local level, strengthening the powers and functions of local authorities, enhancing the development and leadership role of local government and strengthening its structures and funding arrangements. Relevant proposals in recent reports, including the special group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes and the local government efficiency review, will be taken into account in the development of policy in this area. I intend to publish a statement in the autumn on local government that will outline Government policy in this area in line with the programme for Government. I will bring proposals to Government to develop and enhance the local government system, improve its capacity to meet current and future challenges and make a substantial contribution to the national recovery effort. I say to Deputy Troy that more political reform proposals have been tabled by this Government in 14 weeks than in the 14 years of Fianna Fáil-led Government, so I do not accept the faulty assertions he articulated.

I stress again the Government's commitment to electoral and political reform. The Bill is a first step in that reform agenda. I thank Deputies again for their contributions and look forward to further debate on these important issues on Committee Stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2011: Referral to Select Committee

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):

I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport, Culture and the Gaeltacht, in accordance with Standing Order 82A(3)(a) and (6)(a) of the Orders of Reference of that committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Sitting suspended at 1.25 p.m. and resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Messages from Select Committees

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality has completed its consideration of the Criminal Justice Bill 2011 and has made amendments thereto.

The Select Sub-Committee on Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimates for public services for the service of the year ending 31 December 2011; Votes 33 and 45.

Ceisteanna — Questions (Resumed)

Priority Questions

State Airports

21. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport the steps he has taken to provide practical assistance to both Galway and Sligo Airports in order to ensure their survival before funding for both airports, under operating expenditure and capital expenditure ends in 2012. [18897/11]

Deputy Leo Varadkar: The question relates to practical assistance for Galway and Sligo airports. As I announced on 7 June, the Government has agreed to provide practical assistance in the form of additional funding to Galway and Sligo airports in 2011, along with the other four airports at Donegal, Ireland West at Knock, Kerry and Waterford. This involves providing an additional €5.9 million on top of the €13.4 million already allocated to the regional airports for this year by the last Government to cover operational and capital expenditure.

The Deputy will be aware that when I took office, I discovered that the previous Government had left my Department with just €600,000 for operational funding at all six airports. This was in spite of the disingenuous Government decision last February to fund all of the airports for the whole of 2011 without allocating the necessary funding. The €5.9 million allocation reverses the cut made in funding by that Government and involves making reductions on a once-off basis in other areas within my Department.

As the Deputy is aware, I will not be in a position to provide operational or capital funding to Galway or Sligo airports from 2012 onwards. This decision was necessary to make best use of scarce Exchequer resources and to ensure the efficient use of taxpayers' money. The aim is to ensure that Ireland has an adequate network of regional airports while taking into account significant improvements in road networks, shorter journey times by road and rail, and the collapse in passengers flying domestically. The additional funding being made available to Galway and Sligo airports in 2011 is to provide the airports with the time and space to engage with various parties, including business interests, investors and local authorities, to secure their ongoing viability in some form. I urge the airports concerned to make best use of this time to plan for their future.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I thank the Minister for the reply but it will come as no surprise to him that I am particularly disappointed about the decision made not to continue a level of operational expenditure for Galway and Sligo. With particular reference to Galway, the chamber of commerce and the business and tourism interests in the region have put forward a strong and compelling case to retain a level of funding. The Minister will be aware from the various presentations made to his Department that the ongoing requirement is in the region of approximately €1 million. I do not want to suggest that €1 million is not much in the current climate, as it is, but it can be considered in the overall context of the significant spend of the Department at €600 million in the course of a year.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question?

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I am trying to work towards it. If the Department is not prepared to fund the airports on an ongoing basis, it is important that it provide some practical help. In that respect, the provision of some consultancy or mentoring services would allow people within the airport to consider the potential to gain alternative funding from some other source.

[Deputy Timmy Dooley.]

In asking the question I put on the record of this House that we are talking about a relatively small amount of money in return for the level of foreign investment in the region. Has the Minister had any further discussions with the IDA or Enterprise Ireland and how do they intend to mollify the concerns of the companies supported by foreign investment who are large employers? They have indicated it will be difficult for companies to compete for future rounds of funding and it will be more difficult to be competitive with regard to other operators in the sector.

What level of engagement has the Minister had with the business community, and the tourism industry in particular, or State agencies with responsibility for job creation and retaining foreign investment?

Deputy Leo Varadkar: The airports should first make contact on their own behalf and have probably already done so. In Sligo, airport authorities should talk to the Coast Guard and the search and rescue helicopter contractor. They should also have discussions with the local authorities, as the two authorities own the airport. Officials at Galway should have discussions with the airlines, particularly Aer Arann, and I am sure discussions under way. They should also speak to potential investors and the local authority, which in contrast to Sligo does not provide any support to the airport. The business community and the chamber of commerce are the owners of the airport and could be in a position to fund it, if they so wish, with resources from the business community in that region.

No request has been made to me regarding support relating to consultancy or advice. There will be no change to the decision on operational expenditure and capital expenditure next year. If the airports are seeking some form of non-financial support I will consider any request in that regard.

The Deputy made a point regarding savings, and this cut saves quite a bit more than €1 million as the operational expenditure requirement for neighbouring airports is reduced. The saving is probably closer to €2 million on an annual basis in the case of Galway alone. The Deputy is correct to say that this is small in the context of my budget of approximately €800 million per year; unfortunately, it works the other way as I am required to remove approximately €100 million to €150 million from my budget. In that context the removal of support to Galway and Sligo is a small cut compared to others I must make.

Taxi Industry

22. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport if he will review the appointments to the Taxi Review Steering Group to ensure fair representation for all stakeholders. [19189/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): I do not propose to review the composition of the steering group for the taxi regulation review. In my announcements of 8 June and 24 June respectively I have clarified the terms of reference for the review and the membership of the review steering group in line with the commitment in the programme for Government. The review will provide a basis for the necessary further reforms of the sector to allow consumers to have confidence in the taxi system while ensuring that legitimate and competent operators and drivers can be rewarded fairly by operating under a regulatory framework that is adequately enforced. It will address a wide range of issues relating to the taxi sector, including the current regulatory policy and practices, licensing systems, enforcement and future dialogue with the taxi sector.

The diverse membership of the review steering group will allow an appropriate contribution from stakeholders, including dispatch operators, drivers, consumers and the regulatory and enforcement agencies. The consultation on the review extends to all interested parties and stakeholders through an invitation for written submission to be made before the end of July and further consultation opportunities will be presented from there.

Unlike the previous Government, I have spent considerable time consulting the various taxi representative groups and gave them considerable time so that I could hear their views. I met the representatives on a number of occasions. Also unlike the previous Government, I have undertaken to chair this group to demonstrate the importance Government is attaching to it. I have stated publicly on numerous occasions that I believe the taxi sector should be based around full-time owner drivers.

However, representation in the taxi sector is far too fragmented and this suits neither policymakers nor taxi drivers. If there is evidence of consolidation of taxi driver organisations into one constituted organisation, I may look at membership of the review group again.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I am disappointed that the Minister of State has made it clear he will not review the matter. As somebody who welcomed the steering group, I see it as a very important step. Previously, there was an elitist attitude on the part of the regulator who would not meet taxi men or public representatives even though many requests were made. I ask the Minister to consider the fact that the ordinary taxi man with a single licence is not represented on this group. It appears some of those represented on it hold multiple plates. It is not fair that the ordinary taxi man with a single plate is not represented. There is scope for officials from the Department of Social Protection, the Revenue Commissioners and, possibly, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service to be represented. I urge the Minister of State to consider including them in the group, as they could make a big contribution to examining all aspects of the taxi industry. There is a good deal of anger among ordinary taxi men who hold single plates. They constitute the vast majority of taxi drivers. I, therefore, ask the Minister of State to re-examine the matter.

Deputy Alan Kelly: There will be no elitism in the operation of the review group. I am taking on board the Deputy's comments in a very sincere way. There is somebody with multiple licences in the review group because this is one of the core issues with which we have to deal. I am absolutely determined to deal with the issues that have arisen, with which we are familiar. The process of managing, renting and hiring multiple licences, one of the reasons issues such as fraud and criminality are arising, will have to be addressed. That is why there is a requirement for someone who operates multiple licences to be in the group. Obviously, I am casting no aspersions on any individual. There is a full-time taxi driver in the group. Such drivers are represented.

I would welcome further consolidation of the representative associations. The fragmentation of the industry groups is not helpful. It is difficult to get a hold on the extent to which each association is representative. If all the figures were added up, the final figure might exceed the number of drivers in the country. I repeat what I have said previously — I will reconsider the composition of the review group if there is consolidation of the associations.

The first meeting of the review group took place yesterday and it was very successful. I was very happy with the manner in which it was dealt with. Deputy Ellis made a valid point about the Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners. I have put in place a process that will allow subgroups to work with officials from these bodies to address the issues raised by the Deputy. As chairman of the group, I am conscious that the income of drivers is

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an issue. I repeat that I want to ensure it is worthwhile to work in the taxi industry. That is a very important aspect of the work of the group.

Road Network

23. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport if he will provide details on the amount of funding to be allocated to Wexford over the next three years for the improvement of the national secondary roads network following the findings of the National Secondary Roads Needs Study; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[19295/11]

Deputy Leo Varadkar: The Deputy's question relates to the roads funding to be allocated to County Wexford in the next three years. As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding under the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of national primary and national secondary roads are matters for the National Roads Authority, under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. The assessment and prioritisation of individual projects are matters in the first instance for the NRA, working within its capital budget, in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act 1993.

As the Deputy is aware, the national recovery plan published by the previous Government in November 2010 envisaged that investment in the road network would be significantly reduced for the duration of the plan. Therefore, the scope for proceeding with significant projects is very limited. The capital investment review under way across all sectors will form the basis of a new national development plan for the period between 2012 and 2016. The plan is scheduled to be published in September. The review will examine the costs and benefits of capital projects against a range of economic, social and environmental criteria. Among the key considerations in the transport sector will be the need to continue remedial safety measures. When the funding framework for capital expenditure has been determined, it will be a matter for the NRA to prioritise projects within its funding envelope. Therefore, I am not in a position to provide the specific detail sought by the Deputy.

Deputy Mick Wallace: I can understand why there will be less money to spend on roads in the next couple of years. I would be the first to admit that people from less well-off sectors of society are probably more in need of the money available. I wrote to the Department two months ago to ask for an explanation of the relationship between the Minister and the NRA, with specific reference to the division of authority between them. Like many others, I have the general impression that the NRA is a very powerful body. I do not know whether the Minister has total control over it. Is it given guidelines within which it should work? Who decides the number of years over which the cost benefit analysis of a project should be worked out? One of our problems is that we have to pay over €110,000 a week to private operators because we over-estimated the volume of traffic that would use developments such as the M3 and the Limerick tunnel. Who made the mistakes in these cases? Most people are aware that many of the motorways built in recent years were developed to too high a specification. Is there a line of responsibility that can be traced in such cases?

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I do not have total control over the NRA. Similarly, I do not have control over the local authorities which take the lead in planning new road projects. I appoint the board of the NRA and provide funding for it in the context of the overall Government budget. I can also issue policy directions to it, although I have not done so to date. However, I will be in a position to do so after the capital spending review has been completed. It is likely

that I will prioritise maintenance, road restoration and safety works. New projects will be considered thereafter on the basis of cost benefit analyses. It will be difficult to do this until I know how much money will be in the roads envelope. As the Deputy said, the developers of two PPP projects are being compensated because traffic volumes are lower than anticipated. Such an approach was not taken in most PPPs, but it was taken in a number of cases. Compensation is being paid in just two cases. The reason for this is the major reduction in traffic volumes that resulted from the 20% contraction in the economy. In fairness, none of the doom-sayers of five years ago predicted an economic contraction on that scale.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Some of the those who have analysed the matter have said we would need a population of approximately 10 million to justify some of the traffic volume projections made. Perhaps the Minister would not agree, but that is the feeling. I would like some serious research to be conducted into what has gone on in the last ten years. We need to examine the developers who were getting the work on major projects. We should analyse the amount of money they were receiving per kilometre, by comparison with that paid elsewhere in Europe. Part of the equation was that the jobs for the boys became bigger and bigger as a result of over-specification.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I agree that there was over-specification. If one examines the files, one will find much of it was politically driven by politicians and Ministers who decided a motorway was needed, even though a dual carriageway might have done. Many State companies were put under pressure by the previous Government to build bigger and greater things than were necessary. I do not share that kind of “if you build it, they will come” view. The specification has to be appropriate. I have had discussions with the transport unit of the ESRI with a view to looking back at whether the major interurban motorways built could have been done better, as suggested by the Deputy. We have to learn from what happened in the past. A significant proportion of the high cost of the roads built can be attributed to the payments made to land owners and the arrangement reached with the Irish Farmers Association on land costs. It is fair to say that arrangement would not be made now. They got a very good deal. The files confirm the political pressure that a deal needed to be cut with the landowners.

Air Services

24. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport the specific commitments which he has received from air carriers to open new routes and expand capacity as a result of the removal of the remaining €3 of the travel tax. [18898/11]

Deputy Leo Varadkar: In line with the commitments in the programme for Government, the Government announced a three-pronged strategy to encourage in-bound tourism as part of the jobs initiative. The first element is the proposed suspension of the air travel tax, the second is a new growth incentive scheme which has been introduced by the Dublin Airport Authority applying to all of the three airports under its remit and the third is more targeted and co-operative marketing of new routes from key source tourism markets by Tourism Ireland, the DAA and airlines to encourage more tourists to fly into Ireland.

My officials and I have engaged with the Dublin Airport Authority and with the four main Irish airlines about these initiatives and I wrote to all of the other airlines operating services to and from the State airports. Some proposals for additional capacity and new routes put forward are being examined by my Department and by external consultants to assess their potential impact. I await the outcome of that assessment and responses from other airlines before making a recommendation to my Cabinet colleagues on whether to suspend the tax. The

[Deputy Leo Varadkar.]

recent enactment of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2011 has provided that basis for the suspension of the air travel tax if we decide to do so.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Is it the case that the €3 travel tax will remain in place until the Minister has received what he or the Cabinet believe to be an adequate assurance from the bulk of the airlines that they will come forward with a proposal that satisfies the Minister?

Deputy Leo Varadkar: The tax remains in place. The order has not been signed. In the jobs initiative it was pencilled in for 1 July. That date has passed because I have not been comfortable in advising the Minister for Finance that the responses have been sufficient. There are meetings ongoing with the airlines. There will be another meeting on Monday next. I hope in the next few weeks to be in a position to give advice to the Minister for Finance. Where it may arise, is that some airlines may increase capacity and others may cut it. That creates a certain dilemma. I do not wish to punish the ones that are increasing capacity but one cannot apply one tax to one airline and another to the other one. I should be in a position to make a determination at a later stage.

Certainly, I do not want to take away the travel tax and then find that most or all of the airlines end up cutting routes in the winter. That would be a mistake.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I do not want to gild the lily or overstate the obvious, but it is clear at this stage that we are well into the tourism season. While I welcome elements of the Minister's initiative in a focus on attracting tourists to Ireland, in terms of the capacity to assist in that regard we are nearly past the date that it would be of benefit for this year. I urge the Minister, and particularly his officials in their interaction with the airlines, to bring this matter to a head.

I note the Minister's comments that while they have engaged, they have failed to get broad agreement or agreement that the Minister finds acceptable in order to lift the tax. That is something with which we all were familiar in that some of these airlines in the past have made public comment about what they would do if certain conditions were provided to them and they are relatively slow or tardy in 'fessing up to that on the other side. I would like to see it progress as quickly as possible because we need to enhance in whatever way we can the level of tourism coming through.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: The discussions are ongoing. They certainly have not yet concluded. The real issue arises around the schedules for the winter and for next spring. It is in the next few weeks that the airlines will determine their schedules for the winter. What they do will be the best test of whether they have responded not what they say.

In the event that it does not go ahead for the winter schedules, there is always the possibility of doing it in the spring or using the moneys to promote tourism in another way or to promote flights in another way. I definitely do not want to give the airlines something for nothing. I am not prepared to do that with taxpayers' money.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I welcome that approach.

Public Transport

25. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport if he will agree to a meeting with a group (details supplied) recently established to campaign against the cuts to Dublin Bus as a result of network direct; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18994/11]

Deputy Leo Varadkar: As the Deputy will be aware, I do not have an operational role in Dublin Bus. As such, a meeting would be more appropriate with the management of Dublin Bus rather than with me and I am happy facilitate that for the group.

I generally support Dublin Bus efforts to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness under the Network Direct programme. The Deloitte report on the cost and efficiency of Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann identified significant scope for the redesign and more efficient operation of the Dublin Bus network to provide a more attractive service to existing and potential users. The redesign would achieve more frequent, streamlined and reliable services. Following the publication of the report, Dublin Bus undertook an extensive review of its bus network and announced plans for the reorganisation of routes and timetables.

Given the losses recorded by Dublin Bus in 2010, and further reductions in the PSO subvention due over the coming years, it is important that the Deloitte report and the Network Direct programme are fully delivered upon to ensure the viability of the service.

During the review Dublin Bus has consulted key stakeholders, customers and local representatives. The redesigned routings are being introduced on a phased basis to allow for a manageable and orderly process to take place and are expected to be completed by late summer of this year.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I am extremely disappointed with that answer. It is the same script that the communities that have been affected by these bus cuts have heard since the swingeing cuts in the provision of bus services across the city have been ripping through the bus service.

The Minister should meet the people affected. It is astonishing that we get this stuff, which we got from the previous Government, about the Minister having no operational control. As I understand it, and the Minister may correct me if I am wrong, he must sign off on any route changes. It would be incredible if he did not have to sign off.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Ask a question please.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: If the Minister does not, it seems he should.

Will the Minister meet the users of bus services — pensioners, those with disabilities, young people, and so on — who have been affected by these cuts and they will explain what is going on. If he met them, he would discover that the line being spun by Dublin Bus is disingenuous and akin to the logic of the United States in the Vietnam war that we must destroy our bus services in order to save and improve them. The Minister should take that back to Dublin Bus and do something about a situation where elderly persons in this city are being made prisoners in their homes because their bus services are being withdrawn. One does not improve bus services by taking 200 buses out of the Dublin Bus fleet.

Has the Minister read the Deloitte report? The Deloitte report points out that the Government provides a lower level of subvention for public transport than most of its European counterparts. It does not recommend cutting the number of buses in the bus service, but under the language of so-called reform and streamlining, cuts are what are happening.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I have read the Deloitte report. I acknowledge that the subvention for Dublin Bus is lower than that for other European cities but they are not in the financial position in which this country finds itself where we must cut spending significantly. Certainly, if Deputy Boyd Barrett's policies were pursued, by sending the IMF home and pulling out of the bailout, we would probably have to close down bus services and train services altogether

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as there would be no money to subvent public transport. We would have to make €18 billion in cuts in one budget rather than only €3.6 billion to €4 billion, as we must do at the end of the year.

I have no role in routes. They are signed off by the NTA, which is the independent regulator for public transport and which works in the same way as the CER or other regulators work.

I meet people all the time about bus services — certainly, public representations and my constituents. The Minister of State, Deputy Kelly, has had several meetings on bus routes. I meet the users all of the time. I am disinclined to meet campaign groups set up by political parties, but there have been other campaign groups. The most important aspect of all of this is that there is a public consultation process. None of these changes was made, and Network Direct was not established without a full public consultation process.

The changes were advertised, there was proper consultation and the matters were considered. It is not true to say that network direct is some sort of stealth cutting mechanism. Network Direct has been applied to my constituency and I am aware of how it has affected my area. In many places it has involved improving services and making services more frequent. In other areas it has involved a reduction in services because the routes had to be straightened out in cases where there were too many routes with too many legs and too many spurs and where services were too irregular.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I put it to the Minister that there is a contradiction in his statement. On the one hand he maintains it is about a review and streamlining services but then he admits that the constraints are all to do with the EU-IMF deal and the package of budget constraints that follow from it. I suggest this is the truth of the matter: it is about the EU-IMF austerity package but it is glossed over with the language of a review.

Is it not the case that if one takes 200 buses out of the Dublin Bus fleet one does not get a better service, one gets a worse service? I call on the Minister to meet these people. Although public representatives played a role in organising and facilitating some of the meetings, I assure the Minister this involves hundreds or thousands of ordinary residents throughout the city who wish to meet the Minister. There need not be any public representatives present at the meetings. These are ordinary citizens who wish to meet the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to explain to him how they are suffering as a result of these cutbacks. I appeal to the Minister to meet their request.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: It is about efficiency. We are in a situation whereby Dublin Bus must do more with less not simply because of a cut in Government funding, but because of a fall in the number of passengers as well. The numbers are down significantly because of the success of the Luas. This programme is about using the resources more efficiently and delivering services in that way. Essentially, this is what Network Direct is about. I remind the Deputy that if the policies of his party or those of the public representatives who set up the group were pursued, it is probable we would have no bus services at all.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: By not giving €9 billion to the ECB.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Were it not for the money coming from the EU and the IMF we would have to balance the budget this year.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We are giving it to them.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: We would have to reduce the deficit to zero in one year. Can the Deputy imagine the effect of that on bus services? The only bus and train services in the

country would be those which turn a profit, of which there is virtually none. That would be the effect of the Deputy's policies.

Other Questions

Cycle Facilities

26. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport the possibility for using disused railway lines as walking trails in view of the success of the Westport railway line walk, County Mayo; if a feasibility study will be performed to identify other suitable sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18965/11]

Deputy Leo Varadkar: The Westport to Achill cycle and walking route also known as the great western greenway has indeed been a great success. Mayo County Council was responsible for initially identifying the route, investigating the feasibility of the route and for the actual delivery of the route. Phase 1 of the project was completed in April 2010, and phases 2 and 3 are expected to be opened by the end of this month. Based on information from Mayo County Council, the first phase has been remarkably popular with more than 2,000 users during the Easter weekend alone. Financing is being provided through co-funding from the Department and Fáilte Ireland.

Such cycle and walk ways represent an area which is directly relevant to two key aspects of my Department, that is to say, smarter travel and tourism. The great western greenway is a prime example of this, being a resource for the people of Mayo and tourists to the region. While the development of such proposals is in the first instance a matter for the local authorities, I, my Department and the agencies of my Department are keen, bearing in mind the financial constraints, to support such initiatives.

Similarly, feasibility studies for potential routes along other abandoned rail lines are a matter for the local authorities concerned. With regard to the potential of other disused rail lines for similar projects, Kerry County Council has proposed the development of a cycle route from Tralee to Fenit and the Department has agreed to provide €200,000 for funding for this.

Although not utilising disused railway lines, Meath County Council carried out a feasibility study for a cycle route along the Boyne Valley linking Trim to Drogheda. This would have obvious benefits from a smarter travel and tourism perspective. However, the cost of such a scheme would be at least €13 million and this does not take account of any land acquisition. Given the financial position of the State at present, it is not possible to provide such a level of funding.

The National Roads Authority completed a scoping study for a national cycle network in 2010. This study is available from www.smartertravel.ie and identifies potential route corridors, although not actual routes, between urban areas with a population of 10,000 or more that could constitute a national cycle network. Following this, the Department tasked the National Roads Authority to conduct a feasibility study of a cycle way from Dublin to Galway and onto Clifden. The public consultation on the Dublin to Mullingar section of the route is due to commence shortly.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: In view of the success of the great western greenway, the effects it has had on tourism in the area and the fact it has provided a great service at little cost for the local people I seek a feasibility study to be carried out in several places. The Minister outlined some of them, including the proposed Kerry route and the cycle route along the main carriageways. We are also considering linking north Dublin to south Dublin with a cycle route. I hope the

[Deputy Dessie Ellis.]

Minister could further examine other routes, perhaps unused railway stations and other such places, and pressurise the local authorities to come up with some reports in this regard.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I welcome the Deputy's suggestion. We are willing to do that and I have indicated as much in my reply. However, I am keen to avoid spending hundreds of thousands or even millions of euro on feasibility studies and plans for projects which cannot be paid for or brought through to fruition. I would rather deliver one project and make it happen than carry out studies or consultancy reports on ten projects that will never happen.

I have not yet been to see the great western greenway. There is an outstanding invitation from the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, who is determined that I should come down to see it and I intend to do so in the coming months.

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring):
On 29 July.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Minister should bring his cheque book when he goes to Mayo.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: It is paid for already.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: There has been no great expense in this regard. Many of these proposals could be carried out with little or no expense. Some of the properties are in State ownership and some belong to communities. The expense would not be vast. From this point of view I hope we could further consider schemes that will not cost a great deal of money.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I welcome the support from the Department for the Tralee to Fenit line, which is important. My wife and I visited the Newport to Mulranny line last summer. It is an impressive and fantastic infrastructure. Last Saturday morning as I cycled the Ring of Kerry I passed the Mountain Stage railway line in south Kerry. There are fantastic tunnels and viaducts along the line. At present, South Kerry Development Partnership Limited is carrying out a feasibility study on the line. It hopes to open a greenway from Glenbeigh to Caherciveen. I call on the Minister to keep his eyes open for the feasibility report when it comes back.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: In respect of the great western greenway it is important to acknowledge the council's work and especially the co-operation of the landowners and farmers which is essential if one is trying to do a project such as this. The key thing at the end of any feasibility study is the cost. In the case of the great western greenway, the cost was €1.4 million for phase 1 and €1.75 million for phase 2. There is a 50:50 split in the cost with the whole project costing just in excess of €3 million. By contrast, the other attractive project along the Boyne Valley would cost €13 million without getting any land along the way. These can be relatively inexpensive or rather expensive. I look forward to examining the proposals mentioned by Deputy Griffin. I am not familiar with the spot but the Minister of State, Deputy Kelly, assures me it is a good spot.

Olympics 2012

27. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport the efforts he has made to maximise the use of sporting facilities and accommodation here by teams, staff and supporters in the run up to, and during, the London Olympics in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18966/11]

Deputy Michael Ring: I chair a high-level co-ordinating group which is identifying opportunities for Ireland that may arise across the sports, tourism, cultural and enterprise sectors as

a result of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. One objective is to attract international teams and athletes for training camps. To date, four international teams have chosen the National Aquatic Centre, NAC, as a training base. Last month, the NAC hosted the Hungarian and British water-polo men's senior squads for a training camp and two international matches, while the US Olympic synchronized swimming squad and the British paralympic swimming squad have also chosen the NAC as a training base. A number of other sports facilities such as those at UCD and the University of Limerick are also directly promoting their facilities to attract international teams and athletes. In addition, my Department has produced for widespread circulation a CD which contains the details of a number of Irish elite sports facilities that would be suitable as training camps. I would be happy to make a copy available to the Deputy. A difficulty in attracting teams and athletes is that cities in the United Kingdom are offering financial incentives to every national Olympic and Paralympic committee to locate in the United Kingdom to prepare in an approved pre-games training centre.

The co-ordinating group is also considering other potential benefits. The tourism agencies are working closely with a range of partners at home and overseas to maximise the tourism opportunities. Enterprise Ireland is actively pursuing opportunities for Irish business, while the cultural agencies are developing proposals for a cultural programme around the London games. The London 2012 co-ordinating group will continue to meet on an ongoing basis in the coming year to maximise opportunities across each of the sectors.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: This is a golden opportunity to advertise Ireland and the facilities available here. As the Minister of State noted, facilities such as the National Aquatic Centre and the National Sports Campus, as well as other sites in Limerick and elsewhere, will be utilised. As this is a great opportunity to attract both teams and tourists, it is important that we make an effort. Any way by which incentives can be made available to visitors to come here should be considered because of the importance of this event. It also will provide Ireland with an opportunity to demonstrate what it can do to support these events, even though they are being hosted by our nextdoor neighbours. However, this constitutes an important relationship-building exercise with them.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Deputy is correct and we have been lucky thus far. The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has been working with Irish companies in building facilities for the Olympic Games. In this context, projects worth €300 million have been secured. Moreover, Enterprise Ireland is confident that more will be gained in this regard. Tourism Ireland is working hard to avail of cultural and tourism opportunities. It is in discussions with agents and encouraging people visiting Britain to travel to Ireland. In particular, on foot of the introduction of the new visa arrangement, people who intend to attend the Olympic Games are being encouraged to visit Ireland for a few days. In addition, a number of agencies are working to try to arrange cultural events in Ireland to encourage people to leave London. As that city will be very busy during the Olympic Games, the hope is people will decide it is too busy and travel to Ireland. They are being encouraged to visit any part of the island they wish. Everyone is working hard in this regard.

This important event constitutes a great opportunity for Ireland. In particular, I compliment Enterprise Ireland because of its hard work with Irish companies which has yielded the great total of €300 million in revenue and I hope more will be achieved. The major obstacle to getting groups to visit this country is that the British Government and cities within Britain are offering £25,000 and more to encourage teams to use their facilities. We lack the resources and the money to do this and as such, have done well to attract four teams. Nevertheless, we have ideas to try to encourage other teams to come to Ireland in the remaining months. The Government is working hard on this issue.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Perhaps the recent VAT reductions in respect of accommodation, restaurants and so on might be promoted and people made aware that it now is cheaper to come to Ireland. In addition, will the Minister of State be able to ascertain whether the Olympic torch can pass through Ireland? As it would be a great advertisement, is it part of the plan? My recollection is that there have been some discussions in this regard. Will the torch pass through the country before crossing over into England?

Deputy Michael Ring: I had thought there would be some news this week on the Olympic torch. I must compliment Mr. Pat Hickey who is working hard on the issue. A number of meetings have taken place both here and abroad and I expect an announcement to be made within the next month which I hope will be positive. I compliment the Taoiseach, all of the State agencies and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron, who have held meetings on the issue. However, to be fair, Mr. Hickey has been working extremely hard and I am very confident in this regard. Although I had hoped for an announcement this week, it did not happen, but I am confident it will be made next month. As I stated, a number of meetings have taken place and it would be a great boost for the country. Certainly, it would be the first time for many years that the Olympic torch had left the country in which the event was taking place. It would be a great signal for Ireland and provide a great boost for the economy. I hope and I am confident it will happen.

Road Safety

28. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport the date on which the tender for the National Car Testing Service is due for review; if he is satisfied himself with the level of the service the current company provides; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18863/11]

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Following a competitive tender, the contract for the provision of the national car test service, NCTS, was awarded by the Road Safety Authority to Applus for a ten—year period from 2010 to 2019 and it assumed responsibility for the provision of a national car testing service on 4 January 2010. The contract requires the company to meet a number of specific performance standards in a wide range of operational areas, including customer waiting times, customer satisfaction and test integrity. It sets out the penalties that can be imposed in the event that the contractor fails to meet the performance requirements set out. The RSA monitors the performance of the NCT service continuously and has regular meetings with the service provider to ensure compliance with contract requirements.

The question of performance is a matter for the RSA and I will convey the Deputy's question to the agency for a direct reply. I ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within ten days.

Deputy Derek Keating: The nation was shocked by RTE's exposé on "Prime Time Investigates" of the carry-on of some employees in a NCT centre located in my constituency. I acknowledge some elements of this matter may be *sub judice*. This essential service contributes enormously to road safety and standards of vehicle inspection in Ireland. On occasion, one hears about the difficulties experienced by some customers in obtaining prompt appointments and I was pleased to hear the Minister address that issue, together with waiting times and penalties. As the monitoring of performance is equally important, does the service contract contain a get-out clause if, for example, the NCT service provider is not performing or is found wanting?

Deputy Leo Varadkar: While I must double-check the position on the Deputy's last question, it is standard practice in most public service contracts of this nature to have such a break clause

in the case of failure by a party to uphold its side of the contract. In respect of the first year of the contract, the performance of the company was assessed over the course of the year. This has changed and from this year onwards, performance will be assessed on a quarterly basis. In so doing, the Road Safety Authority will be assisted by PricewaterhouseCoopers and AA Ireland. In 2010 the overall satisfaction rating was at 84%, which constituted a slight fall on the 88% figure recorded in the previous year. However, the number of complaints is very low — fewer than 0.1% complained about their test. Moreover, of the 21 appeals lodged, 17 were rejected, while only four were upheld.

Deputy Derek Keating: I take a great deal of assurance from the Minister's comments and look forward to discussing the issue of a possible get-out clause with him again should this prove necessary.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Have sanctions been imposed on Applus as a result of the revelations on the recent "Prime Time Investigates" programmes about irregularities in the industry? Has the Minister made representations about people being informed about tests? Test dates appear to pass people by and they are not notified that their test date is approaching. This happens constantly and constituents complain to me all the time that they were not informed that their test dates were approaching in the manner that used to happen years ago when others handled the NCT service. The Minister should consider this matter.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: One point I should have mentioned in my previous reply to Deputy Keating is that performance was measured at 92% which was ahead of the target of 90%.

The issue of people receiving notice of renewal has come up several times and was mentioned in committee recently. Consequently, I have undertaken to make contact with the Road Safety Authority and the company to ascertain whether a system of notification of renewal can be introduced similar to that in place, for example, for driving licences.

As for sanctions, in some cases staff have been dismissed or suspended in respect of what was revealed on "Prime Time Investigates". I am confident that Applus has acted in these cases. The only sanctions that can be applied to the company arise when it fails to meet performance standards in respect of waiting times for test appointments, as well as at the different test centres. If that occurs, a performance-related financial adjustment is made to their payment. In 2010, a downward adjustment was made to their contract for their failure to meet some of the required targets

Tourism Promotion

29. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the overlap and duplication of roles performed by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland; his plans to address any inefficiencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18961/11]

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Fáilte Ireland was established under the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003, following the amalgamation of Bord Fáilte Éireann and CERT. Its primary functions are the development of quality tourism product, domestic tourism marketing, tourism standards, enterprise support, capability building and human resource development for the tourism industry.

In December 1998, the parties to the Good Friday Agreement decided that a publicly owned limited company would be established by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Bord Fáilte Éireann to carry out functions related to the promotion of tourism to the island of Ireland. The company, Tourism Ireland Limited, was incorporated in December 2000. Tourism Ireland is accountable to the North South Ministerial Council, of which I am a member, with funding for its operations being provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in

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Northern Ireland and my Department. The primary remit of the company is to promote the island of Ireland as a tourist destination in overseas markets. The company works closely with Fáilte Ireland, NITB, and the tourism industry in delivering its remit.

The close working relationship between the organisations is strengthened by the chief executive of Fáilte Ireland and the chair of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board both sitting on the board of Tourism Ireland. The Fáilte Ireland authority also meets the board of Tourism Ireland and the NITB to discuss issues of mutual interest. The chief executive of Tourism Ireland regularly attends the meetings of the Fáilte Ireland board on an observer basis. Furthermore, the chief executives and senior management teams in Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and the NITB, work hard to foster closer working relationships between the agencies.

Regarding any overlap in activities, the Government is of the view that it is important that all State agencies constantly review and monitor their operations to ensure that optimal returns are received for public investment. Subject to discussions with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland, if there is scope for potential savings from eliminating any duplication between the relevant bodies, this will be pursued in the months ahead. I am aware that on the corporate side, the agencies in the South are already working to share services, where possible, with a view to driving economies, and so divert all available resources to programme areas.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: As the Minister said, Tourism Ireland was set up as part of the Good Friday Agreement and as a body of the All Ireland Implementation Bodies. It markets the island of Ireland internationally while Fáilte Ireland markets the 26 Counties locally and the Northern Ireland Tourism Board markets the Six Counties locally. There seems to be a significant overlap in the work of the bodies. Does the Minister see any possibility of merging these agencies into one all-Ireland tourism grouping? This would result in significant savings all around with an end to duplication. Does the Minister see any merit in this suggestion?

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Tourism Ireland is a North-South Body established under the Good Friday Agreement and it is accountable to the North South Ministerial Council, of which I am a member. At one meeting I had the opportunity to speak to my counterpart and a bilateral meeting is planned in due course. When this issue was initially discussed it was the view of the Government at the time that there would be a single tourism authority for all Ireland. If there were to be a united Ireland this would be the case. However, for this to be the case, there would have to be agreement from the all-party Executive in Northern Ireland and this is not the case because the Unionist community wishes to retain the separate Northern Ireland Tourism Board as a separate entity to promote Northern Ireland and it is not prepared to move from that position. This is the case at the moment.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I have heard the Minister's reply. I still believe there is much scope for linking up as regards tourism and the promotion of the canals and boating, for example. There is a significant potential to push this forward. We should aim to push forward an all-Ireland tourism approach and not to have a fragmented approach with money being expended in duplication. Proper co-ordination would result in a far better advertisement for the whole island of Ireland.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Our aim is to have a united Ireland and it is the aspiration in Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. However, the Deputy will know better than me that these issues are sensitive and complex and we do not wish the Unionist community to perceive a threat or that we are trying to take over their authority. I understand the Deputy's viewpoint and I have sympathy with what he is suggesting, that efficiencies could be delivered by having a single entity but this would have to be agreed with the Northern Ireland Executive and would require

a change in an international treaty. This would be as much a matter for the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade as it would be for me.

Public Transport

30. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport in view of a recent report in the published accounts of Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus conducted by a company (details supplied), the reason such large provisions for liabilities and charges were made in their balance sheets; if such large provisions could be used to artificially inflate losses at the companies in order to attract greater State subsidy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18902/11]

52. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport the reason, in a recent report into the published accounts of Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus conducted by a company (details supplied), Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus have made loans to the CIÉ parent company totalling €143.1 million; the rationale behind these loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18903/11]

54. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport in view of a recent report in the published accounts of Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus conducted by a company (details supplied), if he will instruct CIÉ to repay loans of €76.6 million received from Dublin Bus rather than introduce cuts that will further restrict the company's services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18904/11]

Deputy Leo Varadkar: I propose to take Questions Nos. 30, 52 and 54 together.

I am aware of the report referred to in the questions. Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus strongly dispute the conclusions in the report.

All figures included in the published financial statements of the companies are subject to independent audit by the companies' auditors. Claims provisions are also reviewed by external consultant actuaries under the supervision of the NTA, National Transport Authority. I have been informed by the companies that they take all reasonable steps to ensure they have appropriate information regarding claims exposures. In estimating the cost of claims notified but outstanding, the companies have regard to the accident circumstances as established by investigations, any information available from legal or other experts and information on court precedents on liabilities with similar characteristics in previous periods.

The inter-company loans from Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann are included in the balance sheet of CIE and its bus subsidiaries. The inter-company loans relate to a banking pooling facility operated by the CIE group, which is common in many large businesses, in particular, those with subsidiary companies. When Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus generate cash from their operations it is pooled in a CIE group bank account. The CIE group believes this is a very efficient system which reduces banking costs and fees considerably.

I am informed that their repayment will not have any impact on operations of the companies which are fully accounted for in the profit and loss account of each company.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I have a question on procedure to ask the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I ask why questions being dealt with in the House use the term, "details supplied". Is there a ruling? It seems unusual to me that we are not supplied with the information.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The ruling is that persons outside the House should not be referred to in debate.

Sports Capital Funding

31. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport his priorities, as Minister for Sport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18957/11]

Deputy Michael Ring: In my role as Minister of State with responsibility for tourism and sport, I have delegated responsibility for sport with particular focus on the sports capital programme; the national sports facilities strategy; engagement with the Irish Sports Council and the local sports partnerships on promoting participation in sport, recreation and physical activity; the charring of the high level co-ordinating group which is identifying opportunities that might arise from the proximity of the London Olympics and Paralympic Games in 2012, and the European agenda on sport, including attendance at Council of Ministers meetings when sports issues are being discussed.

The programme for Government provides that, “In future sports funding should prioritise projects which further greater participation in sport on a local and national level.” This will underpin my priorities in the area of sport. I will also work closely with my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in progressing the development of the national sports campus project on an incremental basis. During my time as Minister with responsibility for sport, I would also like to bring increased emphasis to the need to involve more women in sport; to increasing the opportunities for people with disabilities, and to providing facilities for those in disadvantaged areas.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Many sports are not being promoted which are of significant benefit to communities, particularly in disadvantaged areas. I am also conscious that many local sports clubs, be they GAA or soccer clubs, are in debt. This will become a bigger problem and many clubs will struggle to survive. When this happens I hope the Minister of State will look favourably on many of these clubs.

Deputy Michael Ring: In regard to people taking part in sports, I published a report last week for the Sports Council. I am delighted to say more people are taking part in sports. Some 15% of the population does not take part in any sport in this country, an area which I will target in conjunction with the local sports partnership company to determine how we can encourage people to take part.

As I said in my reply, I am very anxious about disadvantaged areas. The Deputy referred to volunteers. This is the year of the volunteer and, but for them, we in this country would not have many of the facilities, organisations and people taking part in sports. I thank them for their time and effort. I was in Athens last week. More than 200 young people travelled there on their own time as volunteers. They gave of their time, holidays and travel to support and help athletes. I thank them on behalf of the Government for the effort and time they give to voluntarism in this country.

My priority as Minister of State is to ensure women, people in disadvantaged areas and those with disabilities get every possible opportunity. I was delighted to see 4,500 women taking part in a mini-marathon in my county of Mayo. I hope it happens in every county. If one gets women involved, children will become involved. We should try to make it easier for people to become involved. I compliment the GAA, the FAI and the IRFU on reducing their prices recently to allow families to take part in sport.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I concur with the Minister of State in regard to volunteers. A large number of people are volunteers and they are a great credit to communities. Sport has helped to improve areas massively. People participate in sport from an early age. In my area there have been major sports festivals. There was one in Farnham in Finglas recently in which 35

teams and hundreds of children participated. Encouraging it enhances communities and volunteering is magnificent.

Deputy Michael Ring: I could not agree more with the Deputy. As I said, this is the year of the volunteer. We could never speak strongly enough of them and the time and effort they give to sport in this country. We could not pay for it. We do not thank them often enough for their effort, time and commitment. People volunteer from Monday to Friday and Friday to Sunday. None of the national sports organisations could operate without them and we need to keep thanking them. I read a report recently which stated that more people want to volunteer and give of their time but there is a problem, namely, that organisations do not ask them to come on board and provide courses to try to help them do what they are asked. If they provided them, they would do them because this is a great country for volunteers. I thank them for the job they do.

Sports Capital Programme

32. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to reestablish a sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18666/11]

34. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport when the sports capital programme will be announced; his policy on the way that this will be managed compared to the manner in which it was managed by the previous Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18862/11]

36. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport when a decision will issue regarding a new sports capital programme; the level of funding provided in respect of the sports capital programme for 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18964/11]

Deputy Michael Ring: I propose to take Questions Nos. 32, 34 and 36 together.

Under the sports capital programme, which is administered by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, funding is allocated towards the provision of sports facilities at national, regional and local level. It is the primary vehicle for promoting the development of sports and recreational facilities in Ireland. The programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improved facilities in virtually every village, town and city. The facilities funded range from new equipment for the smallest clubs to regional multi-sport centres and national centres of sporting excellence.

In excess of 7,400 projects providing a range of essential sports facilities have now benefited from sports capital funding since 1998, bringing the total allocation in that time to more than €739 million. These grants continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring the provision of modern, high quality facilities throughout Ireland that attract more people to participate in sporting activities. While no new round of the programme has been advertised since 2008, the programme is still very active, with €33 million provided in 2011 to fund existing allocations.

The programme for Government provides that: “In future sports funding should prioritise projects which further greater participation in sport on a local and national level.” This will be a central focus of any new round of the programme. I am considering the options available to me with regard to a new programme within the current financial constraints, but no decision has been made about the timing of future rounds of the programme.

Deputy Derek Keating: I thank the Minister of State for his comprehensive reply. I know he is aware that many people in this country consider investment in sports and sporting facilities

[Deputy Derek Keating.]

to be a luxury and that it should not take precedence over what some people consider to be essential services. We have many health problems in Ireland today. Diabetes is a growing problem. Obesity, especially among young people, mental health problems and suicide, an issue in which I am involved, anti-social behaviour and crime are all problems. I understand, based on discussions I have had with the Minister of State, that he knows investment in sport helps to reverse such problems.

I want to refer to what I consider to be the *ad hoc* decisions taken by previous Governments in distributing the precious resources we had in sport. I live in Dublin Mid-West, part of which is the fastest-growing community in Ireland. There is no swimming pool in Lucan. A Fianna Fáil Minister opened many swimming pools during his tenure. That is just one example. I note the Minister of State will allocate the resources we have based on need and merit.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to frame a question.

Deputy Derek Keating: Does the Minister of State envisage significant cutbacks in investment in sporting facilities due to the economic crisis and difficulties we have inherited owing to the previous Government's mismanagement of our resources?

Deputy Michael Ring: I thank the Deputy for tabling his important question. As he knows, every Member of the House is anxious to know when the sports capital programme will operate again. As I said in my reply, sport is very important in this country. We love it and people want to take part in it. It is my job and that of the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, and the Minister of State, Deputy Kelly, to ensure whoever wants to take part gets every opportunity to do so at a reasonable price and that facilities are made available to everyone.

There has been a comprehensive swimming pool programme in recent years. We are examining whether to enhance the programme. Local authorities have said they find it very difficult to get matching funding, which is a big problem. There is some funding within the Department and we will complete the programme. I understand 58 projects are involved and a number have not been completed.

On spending responsibilities in this country, the Department has laid down a criterion. There are marks in regard to disadvantaged areas and who should and should not receive funding. If and when there is a new round of programmes, funding will be fairly distributed throughout the country. I agree with the Deputies that it should be prioritised for areas that need it badly.

The Minister and I have had discussions on reopening the programme. My priority will be to work from the bottom up. We have the Aviva stadium, Croke Park and Thomond Park, which are worthy national projects. There are some regional projects but I want to work from the bottom up. There are clubs working and trying to encourage young people to become involved in sport. I have had discussions with the Minister, Deputy Howlin, to reopen the programme. I hope it will happen before the end of the year. That is the goal towards which we are working.

I cannot yet say when the programme will reopen. Many Deputies have asked me when it will be reopened. Many clubs throughout the country have projects which are ready to go and need some funding. It will be more difficult for them now to get matching funding. It was a great scheme which worked very well. There are great facilities in this country and that is why we are working hard to try to get people to come from all over the world to use them for the Olympics.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: The sports capital programme has been the lifeblood of communities. There is no doubt it has delivered hugely for them. In certain areas it has been politically

driven. I take the comments of the Minister of State on board when he said he would not be part of any politically driven funding.

There are sports capital projects in my area. He has given a guarantee before that projects that have been promised over recent years will be delivered and that there is no going back on them. There are two in Finglas, one in Kildonan and one in Johnstown. I want to ensure there will be no rowing back on commitments that have been made.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Deputy has raised that matter before and I reassure the House that there are €77 million worth of projects outstanding. There were more but we have written to give all the organisations and clubs every opportunity to try to draw down funding. We have not pressurised them but have given them that opportunity. Many projects are ready to go but, as the Deputy knows, there are a lot of problems, including planning, matching funds and legal problems over property. I am giving a guarantee, however, that the Government is committed to the sum of €77 million for projects that are ready to go. I compliment my officials in Killarney who are working closely with sporting organisations that have funding to draw down. They will work with them to assist in any way that is possible. That money is there for them when they are ready to draw it down. We will not pressurise them but the time will come when, if we are seeking a new round, we will have to clarify what is happening with the old round. It is important therefore that clubs which can draw down the money will do so as quickly as possible.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Based on his experience in the Department, will the Minister of State clarify that the schemes to date have been run in a fair and unbiased way, without undue political influence? Given the way the question was phrased, there is a suggestion that what went before was somehow bad, but that would be a wrong assertion. I note the Minister of State's point about working from the bottom up. Having received representations from all sides of the House, however, it is clear that many communities across all constituencies received money. There are many fine community facilities throughout the country. Perhaps the Minister of State could clarify that point.

Deputy Michael Ring: The criteria laid down by the Department are carried through by my officials. When I took office I had some reservations about the way the scheme had been operated in the past. My officials have told me quite clearly, however, that those schemes were done on a fair and balanced basis. The criteria include disadvantaged areas. Some of the biggest problems they have is that there are not matching funds from some of those drawing down funding. I am quite happy that, in the past, the scheme was run appropriately.

As regards this and past rounds, there are disadvantaged areas that do not have the support or manpower to make correct applications for schemes. I will be asking my departmental officials, therefore, to make it easier for these organisations to make such applications and to help and support them in every way we can. Sport is very important for the country. It is about targeting disadvantaged areas and ensuring everyone is included.

Deputy Keating said earlier that if more people took part in activities such as walking and cycling, there would be fewer people in hospitals in five years time. There would be fewer people suffering heart attacks and strokes, so fewer hospital beds would be required. It is everyone's job to ensure we get as many people as possible to take part in sporting activities.

Deputy Derek Keating: I sincerely thank the Minister of State for his comments. One only has to examine the record to see the geographic spread of new swimming pools in the past. That historical record cannot be changed. We are now in a new era, but I take heart from the Minister of State's response. Despite what will be severe restrictions in sports investment, we can take great heart from the reports we have had. The Minister of State is clearly passionate

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and honest about what he is doing. I look forward to the future, despite those financial restrictions.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I would say that will help with the objective criteria.

Deputy Michael Ring: I thank Deputy Keating for his remarks.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: That was a plea for the swimming pool.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Minister, Deputy Varadkar, as well as the Minister of State, Deputy Kelly, and I, will be fighting hard to hold on to what we can. I have told the Minister for Finance and the Cabinet in general that sport is so important for the well-being of the country. We will be fighting every step of the way to hold as much of the budget as we can.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: If the Minister of State had €10 million, it would not be enough.

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 Paschal Donohoe — the provision of capital funding for the new national children's hospital; (2) Deputy Martin Ferris — the loss of a special needs assistant at Presentation primary school, Listowel, County Kerry; (3) Deputy James Bannon — the need to provide adequate resources for St. Brigid's school, Mullingar, County Westmeath; (4) Deputy Mattie McGrath — the way in which Bord Gáis deals with plumbing contractors and sub-contractors; (5) Deputy Patrick O'Donovan — the development of transport links to the port of Foynes, County Limerick; (6) Deputy Brendan Griffin — the benefits to the health service presented by organisations such as Acquired Brain Injury Ireland and the need to follow this model further; (7) Deputy Dominic Hannigan — the need to clarify the position in relation to the GMS contract and the provision of free blood tests for medical card patients and GP visit card holders; (8) Deputy David Stanton — the recruitment of staff at Cork University Hospital to enable the PET-CT scanner to become operational; (9) Deputy Ciarán Lynch — the provision of adequate medical facilities for all children suffering from diabetes; (10) Deputy Simon Harris — the need to introduce measures to support retailers in combating fraudulent online purchases; and (11) Deputy Brendan Ryan — the need to reverse the removal of applications for rent supplement from community welfare officers in Balbriggan, Swords and other areas of north Dublin to a central facility.

The matters raised by Deputies James Bannon, Brendan Griffin, David Stanton and Ciarán Lynch have been selected for discussion.

Foreshore (Amendment) Bill 2011 [Seanad]: Second Stage

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

This Bill is being enacted for the benefit of all foreshore matters currently dealt with by my Department and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. It is bringing greater clarity to the operation of the existing administrative functions of the two Departments in this area. It is hoped this will facilitate the speedy determination of foreshore applications made to both Departments in a sector which is of immense economic benefit to and growth in the economy. The Bill will transfer all foreshore functions under the Foreshore

Acts 1933 to 2009 to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government with the exception of: designated fishery harbour centres; activities which are wholly or primarily for the use, development or support of aquaculture; and activities which are wholly or primarily for the use, development or support of sea fishing, including the processing and sale of sea fish and manufacture of products derived from sea fish.

The Foreshore Acts 1933 to 2009 require that a lease or licence must be obtained from the relevant Minister prior to undertaking any works and placing any structures or materials in or on, or for the application of, or removal of material from, State owned foreshore. The foreshore consists of the land from the high water mark to the 12 nautical mile limit, and is 39,000 sq. km in size. In recent years, the size, scale and complexity of projects developed on the foreshore has changed considerably. At one time, foreshore consents covered primarily small piers and jetties. In recent years, however, applications received concern major State and private sector infrastructure projects, such as municipal waste water treatment plants, large commercial harbour developments, gas pipelines and large-scale offshore wind, wave and tidal energy projects.

To deal with this increasing scale and complexity, it is vital the development of these large projects accord with the development plans for the functional areas of the local authorities to which they are contiguous. Both land-based and offshore developments in the coastal zone impact each other in significant ways, despite the different environmental conditions in each zone. Balancing the impact on one zone of a development in the other zone is a major component of the impact assessment of such projects. At a higher level it is also essential to align and integrate the strategic development plans for both zones.

While it is acknowledged that some elements of the Foreshore Acts, first enacted in 1933 and often amended, require modernisation, it is important to note that, in relation to large projects, the assessment of environmental impact statements and the public participation and consultation elements are fully up to date and in accordance with all environmental directives. Regulations in respect of the Foreshore Acts have been implemented under the European Communities Acts dealing with the environmental impact assessment directive, the public access to environmental information directive, and the public participation in decision making and access to justice in environmental matters directive. Therefore, the Foreshore Acts are at this time in compliance with the Aarhus Convention.

Administration of the foreshore under the Foreshore Acts generally involves two distinct components. First, the licensing of the activity or development on the foreshore, which is a regulatory role akin to the role of a planning department and second, the vast majority of the foreshore is State owned and managed on behalf of the Minister for Finance. Property management is a key role under the Foreshore Acts. This role of property manager on behalf of the State can, in very rare circumstances, give rise to competing applications for the same area of State foreshore. The Foreshore Acts have always provided for this situation. Sections 2 and 3 of the Foreshore Act 1933 stipulate that all decisions must be made solely in the public interest. For this reason the 2009 Act made specific provision for co-ordination between Departments before any decisions or consents are made. Both Departments are deeply committed to the establishment of an efficient and effective structure designed to ensure that information on applications is managed in a co-ordinated fashion.

The cumulative effect of developments in the coastal zone has been a major challenge for national governments throughout Europe, leading the European Commission to issue recommendations in this regard. Integration of the onshore and offshore development process has proven quite difficult in all countries. The Foreshore and Dumping at Sea (Amendment) Act 2009 amended the Foreshore Acts 1933 to 2009 to the effect that foreshore responsibilities were split between the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, now the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. It provides for a complex division of responsibilities for foreshore licensing between the relevant Ministers based on the nature of the application. As a

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result, a significant element of the foreshore licensing function was transferred to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government while others were retained in my Department. It is accepted that the wording of the Act is difficult for business to clearly understand and follow. This outcome is not good for people wishing to do business in Ireland or to develop our green and other energy sectors.

The core functions transferred to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2009 include all energy related developments, including oil, gas, wind, wave and tidal energy on the foreshore; aggregate and mineral extraction developments on the foreshore; foreshore projects in respect of port companies and Harbours Acts, other than development in fishery harbour centres, including expansion or relocation of such port or harbour or development intended for commercial trade; all other foreshore projects, other than those relating to aquaculture, designated fishery harbour centres and sea fisheries. The transfer was effected to provide proper and effective co-ordination and consistency with the land-based planning process.

Provision was made in the 2009 Act for Ministers to consult each other in respect of all foreshore applications received. This consultative approach has been working reasonably well since the Act took effect on 15 January 2010. Since the transfer of foreshore functions in 2010, in excess of 60 foreshore consents have been granted by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government and a further 96 cases are as we speak being progressed through the formal foreshore application process in the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Certain sections of the Foreshore Act 1933 concern the overall management of the coastal zone rather than the licensing of developments on the foreshore. For example, section 6 of the Foreshore Act 1933 provides the means to prohibit the removal of beach material and section 11 provides for the removal of dilapidated structures. To provide for the coherent management of the coastal zone under one administration, these and other coastal management functions were transferred in full to the then Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

As an island nation, the status of the sea fishing and aquaculture industry is hugely important from an economic and social perspective. It is a development to which I am committed, as Minister. The future of aquaculture and sea-fishing related projects needs to be secured given the often isolated locations of the coastal communities which these industries support. The grant of a foreshore licence for an aquaculture project is currently an outcome of the detailed consideration of the aquaculture licence application process. In certain circumstances an Environmental Impact Statement must accompany the aquaculture licence application. I assure the House that the licensing of aquaculture sites, including foreshore licensing for such sites, remains with my Department. This is particularly important given my Department's role in food production. It is also worth noting, that the Department is building up a great deal of expertise around aquaculture and its potential. It makes sense to keep all the elements of the application process for an aquaculture licence within the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food be it in respect of foreshore or licensing of the project.

I have decided to introduce this short Bill for various reasons, including the increasing number of applications being made year on year for foreshore consents to each Department; the need to facilitate a streamlined and clearly defined decision making process to ensure the ongoing and sustainable development of foreshore for the benefit of the State and future generations; the ongoing challenge for Government to examine existing procedures and practices with a view to eliminating red tape and unnecessary bureaucracy or confusion; the provision, where possible, of clearer and more easily understandable legislation for those who have to use it, of which there are many people; developing the faster consent system we all want to maximise the employment potential of the foreshore in a sustainable and green manner. As

part of this, we must encourage development within the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government of streamlining between the foreshore and planning application processes. Many interests, when applying for a development that involves foreshore, also need to apply for planning permission. It makes sense for one Department to deal with both applications.

It is important that any perceived obstacles to achieving what I have outlined are removed. To achieve these objectives I am introducing this legislation today, before the summer recess, to ensure that a clearer legislative framework will be in place as soon as possible. This Bill will bring greater clarity to the management of foreshore matters, which is very much in line with the thrust of the programme for Government. It is hoped it will help stimulate the sector and the economy and provide much needed employment in many rural areas of the country that do not have too many options.

I will now deal in greater detail with the sections of the Bill. Section 1 provides for the transfer of all foreshore functions under the Foreshore Acts 1933 to 2009 from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. The only exceptions are functions relating to designated fishery harbour centres; functions in respect of activities which are wholly or primarily for the use, development or support of aquaculture and functions in respect of activities which are wholly or primarily for the use, development or support of sea-fishing, including the processing and sale of sea-fish and manufacture of products derived of sea-fish, all of which remain with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Section 2 provides for the amendment of the Foreshore Act 1933 by substituting a new section 1B for existing section 1B which was inserted by the 2009 Act. The New Section defines the functions to be carried out by the relevant Ministers. Section 3 provides for the preservation of certain continuing contracts and the adaptation of certain references to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in certain documents in relation to the transfer of foreshore functions to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Section 4 provides for the saving and amendment of certain Statutory Instruments made by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in relation to functions to be taken over by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. Section 5 provides for the transfer of certain property and liabilities of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government which are connected with the functions being transferred.

Section 6 deals with the effect of the transfer of foreshore functions of certain acts performed and documents which relate to the matters so transferred. Section 7 provides for the substitution or addition of the name of the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to any pending legal proceedings to enable those proceedings to continue. Section 8 provides for completion by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, in relation to functions transferred, of matters commenced by or under the authority of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Section 9 provides that any foreshore function exercised in whole or in part by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government since 15 January 2010, including any consultation and other requirements under the Foreshore Acts 1933 to 2009, are deemed to have been exercised as if that Minister was the appropriate Minister for the purposes of the Acts. In addition, anything commenced but not completed may be carried on or completed by that Minister after the enactment of the Bill. Section 10 provides for the short title of the Bill when enacted and a collective citation for the Acts as amended.

In summary, therefore, this is short but important amending legislation to clarify and co-perfasten the transfer of specific foreshore functions from my Department to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. I am introducing it now for the approval of the House to bring absolute clarity to the administration of foreshore functions

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within the two Departments and to facilitate the ongoing work of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in integrating the foreshore consent process for major infrastructure projects with the strategic consent process operated by An Bord Pleanála, as well as the wider planning consent process in the case of non-strategic projects. In other words the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government wants to integrate the planning process with the foreshore process for obvious reasons as I mentioned already. The Bill will assist in the further development of a strategic focus on aquaculture licensing by my Department in the months ahead. We wish to complete this now in advance of the very busy autumn schedule for my Department and the Oireachtas.

Deputy John Browne: I wish to share time with Deputy Moynihan.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy John Browne: I welcome the Bill and thank the Minister for introducing it. From this side of the House we will support the Minister in getting it passed as quickly as possible. Having spent some time in that Department particularly when the original Bill was introduced to divide the functions between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I am well aware of the difficulties in the area of foreshore licensing, and the aquaculture and fishing industry. I wish the Minister well in his efforts to clear the backlog of licence applications. When I was at the Department I made several attempts to deal with the backlog of licence applications and always found it very difficult. This was partly because of a lack of resources, particularly inadequate staff numbers, but also because of all the hoops — approximately 16 or 17 — through which an applicant was required to go before getting an aquaculture licence. I will return to that matter shortly.

The Bill gives us an opportunity to put on the record of the House the importance of the fishing industry to coastal communities. It is not just aquaculture, but all areas of the fishing industry. We have the six major harbours, including Kilmore Quay in my county. Earlier in the Seanad, Senators paid tribute to the Minister's late father. When he was Minister for the Marine he played a very important role in making money available for the development of Kilmore fishery harbour. Several years ago I attended a meeting in Kilmore Quay with the Minister's late father and the fishery people there appreciated his efforts at that time. I say this because Kilmore Quay is now seeking more money to develop the harbour further. Those fishermen are very important to the fishing industry and when the Minister is dishing out the funds — if he has any funds available — I hope he will not forget Kilmore Quay, Ballyhack and Duncannon. I invite the Minister to come and meet the fishermen in those areas, which is a very important part of the Wexford coastline. We also have the Bannow Bay mussels, which is a very important industry and I am sure the Minister will visit that area in coming months when he gets the opportunity.

I have visited most of the aquaculture centres in the west of Ireland. Aquaculture is a very important industry employing approximately 2,000 people with opportunities to expand it further. During my time in the Department, approximately 1,000 tonnes or 1,100 tonnes of fish were produced through aquaculture. Deputy Moynihan and I recently travelled to Brussels to meet some of the Commission's fishery people. They pointed out the opportunities that exist in the aquaculture industry. Scotland has developed greatly and Norway is the leader in the field. We should be in a position to expand and develop. However, the licensing system is a problem. There was a large number of new and renewal licence applications in the Department when I was there and I am sure it is still the same. What additional staff will the Minister make available to deal with the licence renewal applications and new applications? When responding in the Seanad, the Minister said he was anxious to consider pushing the farms further out to sea.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I was not referring to the existing ones.

Deputy John Browne: No, it will only apply to the new ones. I would like him to clarify his views on new applications, which have been very contentious, particularly in bays and harbours also used by the general public. There has been a kind of “them and us” situation and we need to have some kind of consensus in the aquaculture industry. I am sure Mr. Richie Flynn has met the Minister since he came into office — he came a number of times when I was there. He is very dedicated to the aquaculture industry as are all the aquaculture people along the coastline. It is important that the communities would work together and reach consensus. We had the very successful CLAMS project where people in the community and the producers met and agreed on the way forward which is the appropriate way to proceed.

When we went into Government with the Green Party, I strongly objected to the split of responsibility between the Departments. I felt it would cause problems with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government dealing with certain sectors and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food dealing with other sectors. It was only divided because of the Green Party input at the time, and the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government demanded to have control of certain sections. That may be one of the reasons we now have such a backlog.

If there is an application for a foreshore licence and a planning application for the same project, there should be co-operation in that area. I always felt that by the time the planning application was approved the foreshore licence application should also be approved. However, in one case in St. Helen’s Bay in my county the planning permission had been granted 18 months earlier and the foreshore licence was held up, not in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. As a result the development did not proceed when it should have and now I doubt if it will ever proceed given the economic situation of the country. There should be contact between the planning application process and the foreshore licence application. There is also involvement from the EPA and other NGOs, and various hoops through which an applicant must rightly go to protect our foreshore and coastline.

During the boom era of development some built illegally on the foreshore and others took short cuts, and some bad decisions may have been made. I hope this legislation will clarify once and for all what is in the remit of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and what is in the remit of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. There will be times when there will be an overlap and the Departments will have to consult each other, which is the way it should be.

At the end of the day, the role of the Minister, Deputy Coveney, and the role of those from maritime communities is to ensure the development of both sides of the fishing industry, namely, conventional fishing, as I would call it, and the aquaculture industry. If we can work hand in hand on those two areas, we can develop the fishing industry in a planned way that will create extra jobs. In the present climate, the farming and fishing industries are probably the two areas where there is huge potential for food development. As the Commissioner’s officials in Brussels pointed out to us, 65% to 70% of fish must be imported into the EU so there are obviously tremendous opportunities for adding value to products and developing products. I hope this legislation will make life easier for the people.

To come back to my original point, the Minister must put extra staff and financial resources into the Department to ensure the backlog is cleared as quickly as possible. We in Fianna Fáil will facilitate the passing of the Bill as quickly as possible today. The Bill will make the Minister’s life easier in the Department and, I hope we will see the backlog cleared as quickly as possible.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I, like my colleague, welcome the Bill and do not intend to delay it going through the House. I wish to raise a number of points. We cannot under-estimate the potential of aquaculture and the amount of work done in that area. Some of the issues raised with us concern delays in processing foreshore licences in the Department. If this Bill goes any way towards speeding up that process, we must welcome it and ensure its passage.

Deputy Browne, referring to his time in the Department, noted that this area was moved incorrectly to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and is now back in its rightful place in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Again this week, as we were last week, we are tidying up issues that were left over from that process. It is important that at every hand's turn we acknowledge the work done on foreshore licences.

An issue I want to highlight in this regard is the harvesting of offshore wind and wave energy, which was raised in the Seanad earlier today. As we go forward, we must consider innovative ways of getting cheap energy into this country as well as into the world economy. Ireland has huge potential in offshore wind and wave energy. As procedures develop over time and applications are made, we must ensure the Departments which will grant and scrutinise these licences have their systems streamlined so that, if somebody has a huge commitment to one of these projects and is willing to put resources behind it, it is not delayed by bureaucracy. Over time, we have seen cases where onshore wind energy has been delayed due to bureaucratic nightmares and planning issues that have stifled badly needed development which would bring energy on to the national grid. It is important to remove any unnecessary bureaucracy.

During the last Dáil, one of the committees investigated the level of bureaucracy that was stifling not just this but other projects and considered the ways we could reduce bureaucracy within Departments and systems. If the Bill goes any way towards removing and streamlining any amount of bureaucratic legislation, and brings all of this process into one Department, it will be an important step. We have no problem with the Bill as bringing all the legislation under the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will ensure all of these issues are dealt with in one location. For too long, we have had a fragmented structure. I could point to other cases where issues fall under the remit of three or four Departments. For example, at an earlier stage, child care came under the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and Children, but it has now been streamlined. This is the direction we are taking, which I welcome.

To turn to the detail of the Bill, section 5 provides for the transfer of certain property and liabilities of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. This is the fundamental issue, in that the Bill is moving responsibilities back to where they rightfully belong.

If we consider how Government adapts to specific issues in the community, we may need to examine the work of Departments overall and the way they mirror what is happening in a particular industry, whether in regard to education or any other issue. For example, the nitrates directive wrongly comes under the remit of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. Any issue related to agriculture or the fishing industries should be streamlined and put under the Department that has the title in regard to dealing with that issue, which would streamline the position for those who go out every day to work and provide employment and investment in those sectors. I welcome the Bill and hope it passes all Stages and is enacted for the betterment of the society we represent.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: Officials from both Departments have informed us that the Bill is simply a housekeeping issue, clarifying issues in the current legislation. I always welcome clarity and note that we need to ensure that legislation as laid down is clear and comprehensive. Any legislation that claims to clarify previous legislation would always be welcomed, partic-

ularly in a situation where there had previously been some confusion. This is an area that needs to be managed in as efficient a way as possible because it is of huge importance to the State.

The foreshore in Ireland covers 39,000 sq. km. Within this area, there are many possibilities for different sorts of activities, many of which would be of tremendous potential to all. In Sinn Féin, we want to protect and promote all of our natural resources so we understand the need for legislation in this area. We appreciate the need for licensing and for leasing in terms of facilitating wind and wave power. We look forward to a greater promotion of this type of energy because it is time we all put our backs to the wheel and got behind the promotion of our own natural resources. These are the future, and we all need to understand this. The State as owner of the foreshore must make arrangements to ensure that this resource is utilised. However, it must be utilised in a responsible and controlled manner.

Our fishing industry certainly has tremendous potential, although we would argue that it is not being fully exploited. The industry will thrive if it is given sufficient support and organised in an efficient and business like manner; if not, it will fall away and become defunct. If the west, in particular, is to become more prosperous, the industry needs to be reinvigorated and made ready for business. The review of the Common Fisheries Policy does not fully support its development. This needs to change in order that the industry and ancillary activities can achieve their full income and employment generating potential.

If the Bill provides for greater protection and promotion of the foreshore, I welcome it. However, I ask the Minister to clarify certain issues that arise. Will the Bill finally provide an answer for those waiting for licences and leases? In excess of 60 foreshore consents were granted in 2010 and a further 96 are being processed. These figures do not give me confidence in the efficiency of the processing mechanism. How will it be ensured licences will be granted in a fair and transparent manner? We do not want to see a repeat of the process that led to the granting of the Corrib licence, in which regard information was difficult to come by.

I hope the division of duties between the Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be as clear as the Minister and his officials have claimed. The last thing we want is for people who are trying to set up businesses to be sent from Billy to Jack and the decisions to fall somewhere between the two Departments. As public representatives, we are all familiar with the phenomenon of one Department kicking the ball to another. I seek the Minister's assurance that there will be clarity from the point of view of the customer who deals with the organs of government.

There is a considerable number of small fishermen around the coast. We do not want conflict between large industry and local fishermen. I acknowledge the importance of attracting large companies, but they should not be the winners because small fishermen are the losers. Good legislation which is implemented fairly would ensure everyone was a winner, whether large industry, a medium-sized company or a small fisherman. The Government has promised real change and we expect it to protect small as much as larger interests. We will be holding it to account in this regard.

The transfer of functions from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government should not create a threat to the use of lobster pots or nets. We seek assurances that the amendment clarifies responsibilities and does exactly what it says on the tin because otherwise it will benefit no one. Will it impact on decisions on consents, for example? I welcome the Minister's assurance that responsibility for the licensing of aquaculture sites, including foreshore licences, will remain with his Department. When applications for leases and rentals are being processed, the need to generate business in the areas concerned must be taken into account. There is no greater indictment of the Government or the industry than the availability of vacant sites. Weed killer costs money

[Deputy Michael Colreavy.]

but industry brings income. It is heartbreaking to see vacant sites which could be the base for thriving businesses. The State owns the foreshore and, naturally, expects a return from it. We welcome a return from all foreshore activities, but we need to ensure the governance of licences and leases will allow for transparency and fairness in order that the fishing industry will be treated with the respect it deserves and the foreshore will be protected and promoted. All of us would benefit from such a policy.

I ask the Minister to clarify, if possible, whether those who will monitor adherence to the revised legislation will have a cross-departmental mandate. We do not need and cannot afford an army of monitors if each of them brings only the perspective of his or her respective Department. Subject to clarification on the issues I have raised, Sinn Féin will be supporting the Bill on Second Stage.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Tom Fleming who is sharing time with Deputy Mattie McGrath.

Deputy Tom Fleming: I welcome the amending legislation. It is more relevant for the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to be in charge of the physical infrastructure around the coast and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to play a role in developing sea fishing, aquaculture and seafood products.

The acquisition of foreshore licences for projects around the coast has been the responsibility of various Departments, with the result that the process has been lengthy and tedious for organisations and individuals applying for licences. For example, a major development was proposed in County Kerry by Shannon LNG which wanted to locate its activities on the Tarbert land bank. The land bank was purchased approximately 30 years ago for industrial development purposes, but the prospects for attracting viable industry to the area were bleak until Shannon LNG made its proposal. From the date of application for a foreshore licence, it took two and three quarter years for the licence to be issued by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The irony is that there were no objections to the application. It is ridiculous to treat a long awaited viable proposition in this manner. For instance, the planning process through Kerry County Council and An Bord Pleanála took approximately six months, which puts the whole thing into perspective. The company would probably never have located in Kerry, or even in Ireland, if they envisaged that these impediments involving the foreshore licence would occur. Fortunately, the company persisted and against all the odds and obstacles, 400 people are to be employed over the next few years during construction, reaching up to 600 at its peak. This is a typical example of the lack of joined up thinking, where An Bord Pleanála and the local authority were expediting matters, while the Department was falling down and causing major obstacles.

In the first phase, an investment of €600 million will be made in the terminal, while the second project will see an investment of €400 million, and this €1 billion investment is much needed in the south west. It is a major coup for Kerry and Ireland, but due to the unnecessary impediments that were put in place and the bureaucracy involved, it could easily have been lost to the UK or some other EU country. We are very fortunate that it is proceeding.

The sensible thing is to have foreshore licence legislation amalgamated under the planning Acts, which would allow for a more straightforward and quicker procedure. I am aware of difficulties for Kerry County Council in acquiring foreshore licences, and the council had to endure long hold ups under the previous Administration. In many cases, some of the emergency work to be carried out by the council would not be of any great significance, and I am sure this applies to all other county councils along the coasts of our country. In the case of emer-

agency works of a small nature that would be below the high water mark, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government should display flexibility on this in the future, allow county councils to carry them out and exempt such works from any planning requirements. This process would be much closer to the county councils if responsibility for these issues was moved to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. There is a need for co-operation and close links between the Department and county councils.

Our new Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has a great interest in his portfolio. As we are talking about his responsibilities regarding aquaculture and sea fishing, I do not have to tell him the huge potential out there. At county council level along the coast, there is probably a need to set up the fisheries committees that were present before. They had a good function to work closely with the Department and I am sure the Minister will take note of that. There is also potential for the development of our food products on the coastline, as well as our fishing potential.

There is a number of designated harbours around the country, such as Dingle, Killybegs and Castletownbere, which are still under our portfolio. There is an ongoing matter regarding the ice plant in Dingle. There was a recent announcement that it will be retained for the short term and funded by Bord Iascaigh Mhara. The Minister should seriously consider taking this under his Department, provide the necessary funding and work with the local harbour board to ensure the future of a very necessary plant in Dingle.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am delighted to be able to contribute. I do not come from a marine county, although I am not too far away from one. I will support the Bill, like most members of the Technical Group. I welcome the appointment of Deputy Coveney as Minister in this area. I compliment his late father on the positive actions he took in the past in this area. I know it is an area that is close to his heart. I note he has a bit of a tan. I hope he got some of it last Sunday at our spectacular show in Clonmel. I am sorry I was not able to meet him. He had gone when I arrived, but he is welcome in Tipperary anytime.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Thanks.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Deputy Browne might want him in Wexford, but he can always stop off in Clonmel on the way.

He has a good feel for the industry. Fishing, agriculture and licensing should be closely linked. The Foreshore Act 1933 requires that a licence must be obtained from the State in advance of any works on State owned foreshore. It applies to jetties, slipways, marinas, fish farms, coastal wind and wave projects and to larger projects such as the Corrib gas development and the Ringsend incinerator. We can understand the reasons this is needed.

As of February 2011, there were 521 aquaculture licence applications awaiting determination, consisting of 271 applications for first-time licences and 250 renewal applications. That is a very positive situation, but it is unacceptable to have that many stacked up. The backlog for new licences and renewal applications arose from a number of things, but most areas for which the licences are being sought have been designated as special areas of conservation under the EU habitats directive, or special protection areas under the EU birds directive. We are all for preservation and conservation, and commend the previous Ministers of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Seán Connick, and Deputy Browne, and the honest efforts they made to deal with issues. I know from talking to them that it is a very hard area to crack.

[Deputy Mattie McGrath.]

However bad that was, it was made 1,000 times worse by the attempts of the former Minister, John Gormley, to rein it in under his Department and his ideas. I had major issues with the efforts made by the Green Party to implement policy and control different policies from different Departments. We had a similar problem with the nitrates directive. I know he did not bring in that directive, but he was adamant when enforcing them. It was the same regarding the time limits on spreading slurry. A farmer in Monaghan might not be allowed to spread his fertilizer, while a farmer in Fermanagh would be allowed to do so, even though there might be only an open drain dividing the two farms. These were nonsensical ideas. We were meeting with the former Minister and begging him to change his mind. Those issues should be related to the climate, rather than to calendar months, due to the kind of weather we have.

I would like to hear the Minister clarify his views on the new licence holders and what kind of stimulus he has in mind. There are jobs in this area waiting to go. It is wonderful that we have businesspeople, whether they are sole traders or co-operative groups, who are willing, ready and able to put a licence application together. They do not do this for fun. It is right that there are planning applications, but we need to cut out the bureaucracy. The fact that two Departments were involved the last time has left us a very bad legacy. I compliment the Government for putting it all back under one Department. It is a very wise move. We should support self-employed persons, who are mainly sole traders, and encourage them rather than try to frustrate them. There are instances of bad planning and we cannot have this. However, we need to cut out the bureaucracy. The planning process normally takes three months, although it could take up to 12 months. Surely if an application for a foreshore licence is made at the same time as a planning application, they should run in tandem. The Environmental Protection Agency is rightly involved, as are the NGOs. However, we may have lost investments as a result of too much bureaucracy.

The previous speaker, Deputy Colreavy, said that it cost a great deal to supply weed killer and to keep villages and towns tidy, but some of them are desolate. People who are interested in investing and have put plans together and secured funding should be facilitated. However, I do not know if they can wait and hold on to that funding. If one gets approval for funding from a bank for investment, one would want to spend it the following day because the next day and it might be cancelled, the manager might have been moved or somebody else could decide the investment is not viable.

We need to support these fishermen as there are many jobs involved. We are told by our colleagues who travel to Brussels to meet the Commission that imports into the EU total 50%. We know how badly the fishing industry fared from the deals during the years. It is the poor relation, although it has huge potential. Every job created is needed. The employment may be seasonal but it will be good employment and will result in spin off industry.

We must cut out the bureaucracy and have joined up thinking between the local authorities and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. If we must have consultation with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, which is over the local authorities anyway, it must be logical. It must not be on silly issues and to satisfy the whim of some party of idealists. The Green Party in government was idealistic. It was fine in opposition but it was dangerous in government because it raised too many issues which frustrated the enthusiasm of business people in many areas.

There are 500 applications for licences stacked up in the system and I am surprised the European Union and the IMF are not looking at these areas and seeing the inefficiencies. I do not want to bash public servants, civil servants and local authorities but it is not acceptable in

a modern economy, especially at a time like this, to have such backlogs and impediments put in the way of business people. I wish the Minister well.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I welcome the legislation and commend the Minister for being proactive in this area. In his first term in office, he has articulated his passion to do something to realise the potential in aquaculture and to tackle the aquaculture licensing challenges, on which I congratulate him.

This legislation will increase the productive capacity if the Department focuses on food. Shellfish and finfish from Malin Head to Carlingford Lough will be the focus of Department staff in Clonakilty. I am sure this line in the sand will result in a positive outcome in terms of tackling head on and formalising the process.

The Minister has stated on numerous occasions since taking office that our biggest challenge is volume, including the marine harvest from my constituency heading to elsewhere in Europe. We do not have enough salmon for the market. The same applies to shellfish, including oysters and scallops. There is considerable demand but we are not producing the volume. This is where the challenge lies.

From a technical point of view, a positive development is needed in the Department. A cultural shift is needed to address what we can do rather than what people in the industry cannot do. We differ from the United States in that any time there is a change of government there, there is a complete change at an administrative level. That does not happen here. Many of my constituents allude to this point not only in respect of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food but in respect of other Departments. If the same people remain in the Department, is there a shift in the way they do things?

I understand leadership comes from the Cabinet and the Minister. I believe the Minister will follow up on his conviction that things will be done differently. That will require a complete cultural shift in the way people in the Department think. That must happen because there has been a negative relationship between people in the Department and those in the industry. I am confident that there are good people in the Department with years of experience. It is up to the Legislature to show leadership, and the Department will not be found wanting.

There must be a new template for licence renewal. There are questions as to why licence renewal is not progressing in SAC areas. The Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board should be up and running for new applications. That could be done straightaway. It is important that licence renewal does not go through ALAB and that the Department takes a hands-on approach in regard to renewal. New applications will have to go through ALAB but it is important the Department deals with renewal directly.

I spoke to a young man in the oyster business today. He works in probably one of the most isolated parts of Europe, never mind in Ireland, Trawbreaga Bay. He employs two people and seeks to expand his oyster business. In the next four to five years, he seeks to increase the number of employees from two to 12. That is a massive increase in capacity. He is positive he will do that but he needs the break in terms of volume. He has markets in France telephoning him daily looking for oysters but he cannot supply them even though he has potential sites for which he cannot get licences and these are in non-SAC areas.

These are the real challenges. We say the major task of government is to create jobs. If someone in a rural isolated place like Trawbreaga Bay in north Inishowen can increase employment from two to 12 employees, what could we do from Malin Head to Carlingford Lough? I am glad the Minister appreciates the potential because he knows the marine and the challenges in the coastal zone.

[Deputy Joe McHugh.]

Those in my constituency will not even enter the Asian market or market in China because they know they cannot provide the volume. Norway produces almost 1 million tonnes of salmon per annum while we produce 12,000 tonnes. These are the areas of potential which we are not addressing and they must be looked at closely in the future.

Bureaucracy has driven everybody mad and not only those in the marine and agriculture. Bureaucracy went completely crazy in this country in the past ten to 15 years. There has been too much Government and State involvement, with too many pen pushers deciding the fate of an industry. That is the cultural challenge we have and the creation of a leaner Government will bring its own challenges. Government became too fat and heavy and the industry relationship was tarnished, especially in the marine industry involving aquaculture and sea fisheries.

There was too much of an intrinsic State link in the introduction of layers of procedure and bureaucracy. The lame duck excuse used in the past was that it was a European problem and the European Union was to blame. I know the Minister will face the challenge head on, as we must take responsibility for our own actions in sea fisheries and aquaculture. We have only to consider the statistics. In Irish waters alone since 1973, we have lost up to €500 billion in revenue from fisheries. We have given up much in this country. The Italians and French have not given up their natural resources, such as their wine-producing regions.

As we gave up so much, we must embrace the worldwide demand, especially in Far East countries such as China and India, as their middle income classes demand more fish. There is such potential and we must face it head on. We must take responsibility and control of our own actions and I know the Minister will do this. He has already initiated a new vision within the Department.

It is easy to be critical of the past, although the public is more interested in the future. A former Minister of State, Deputy John Browne, is in the Dáil, and I acknowledge the challenging portfolio he had. He took a personal involvement in it and he should be commended on the positive action he brought about. We are now at a juncture where we want to sell our food, and not just as a raw material. We are sending oysters to France which are being processed and labelled as French. The French are commenting on the great quality of oysters they have in France but we should not forget those oysters come from Ireland.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I begin by signalling the support of Sinn Féin for the amending legislation, as anything that clarifies legislation is always welcome. I am glad the Bill sets out exactly what will stay with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and what will be transferred to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

This area must be managed as efficiently as possible as it is very important to the State and its citizens. The foreshore in Ireland covers a vast area and is very significant. We in Sinn Féin want to protect and promote all our natural resources and we understand the need for legislation in the area. I hope the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government will give the foreshore the same importance accorded to it by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I look forward to the exploitation of wind and wave power in the near future and look forward to a greater promotion of this type of energy production. They are the future and we must realise this.

The State owns the foreshore and the resource must be utilised in order that the people can gain from it. We must ensure the fishing industry is given enough support to thrive rather than left to fall away and become defunct. There has been a significant reduction in the fishing industry since we joined the European Union, or the Common Market as it was called. If we

are to help this sector become more prosperous, we must reinvigorate our fishing industry and make it ready for business.

The current common fisheries review group prevents the development of the fishing sector and this must change. If the Bill allows for greater protection and promotion of our foreshore, we should welcome it. I am a little sceptical of the Bill, however, and we must be assured that the granting of licences and leases will be done with as much transparency as possible. There can no longer be a question mark over the manner in which some are granted because that is unacceptable.

I hope that dividing the duties is as clear as the officials have indicated. We do not want a position where people will be passed from one Department to another or Departments deal with issues on a geographical basis, as opposed to the activities taking place. Under the new Government, which promised real change in its election manifesto, we expect that smaller interests will be protected as much as the larger examples. We assume the Government will stand by these promises and we will hold the Government to account in this respect.

We do not want a scenario where local fishermen cannot go about their daily work because the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government interferes with their rights. We do not want a position where because responsibility has been transferred from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, there will be a real threat to the use of lobster pots or use of certain nets.

The previous speaker from the Government benches noted there is significant potential in the fishing industry and mentioned the lobster sector. In raising the point that there are untapped markets, he complained about EU interference. I remind those on the Government benches that during their parties' terms in Government, not much was done to stop EU interference. It is good to be part of Europe but we should be mindful that the big foot of the European Union must not stamp so heavily that it will squeeze the economic life from the country.

We must be assured this amending legislation can clarify responsibility and does exactly as promised. Otherwise it will be of no use to us. We welcome the amending legislation nonetheless.

Deputy Andrew Doyle: I welcome the speedy introduction of this Bill by the Minister, which demonstrates a serious commitment on his behalf to ensuring the parts of the foreshore that are correctly the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will remain at that Department. It will bring clarity to the functions which are not the responsibility of that Department.

There are two elements to the Bill and because it has been introduced by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, it is natural that we have tended to focus on the agriculture and aquaculture potential. We should also remember that the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government is probably a far more appropriate home for many of the other functions for the area, especially those relating to natural resources and energy.

One argument has been that the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources should bear some responsibility and it was argued earlier that many applications for non-agricultural activities, such as wind farms, would come forward. I do not have the same parochial interest in the Bill as some of the commentators but we do have potential for further wind farm development on the Arklow Banks. There is also the possibility of locating an additional interconnector at my constituency, if and when the time arises for it.

[Deputy Andrew Doyle.]

The Ceann Comhairle was Chairman of a committee in the previous Dáil dealing with energy security and climate change, and he led the initiative to develop a foreshore licence Bill that would transfer all the functions for foreshore licensing to the Department dealing with the environment. It was presented to the former Minister in the Department who showed little regard for it and commenced drafting another foreshore licensing Bill. The idea behind it was that a framework plan would be prepared for the zoning of the foreshore rather than the marine.

It was intended that the plan would identify the areas most suitable for wind farm and wave energy developments and the landing of the power onshore. When that process was completed, the intention was that any application would be seen as relating to critical infrastructure and forwarded straight to An Bord Pleanála. Therefore, it is appropriate that responsibility for these foreshore functions is being transferred to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government which is responsible for An Bord Pleanála. There is huge potential. The greatest natural resource is available to us, onshore and offshore, for the supply of energy. I should acknowledge that the Minister was a member of the committee also. There is huge potential to generate far more energy than we will ever need. If interconnection proceeds, we will have the ability to offer a significant amount of wind and wave energy to the European grid.

5 o'clock
I would like to speak about the functions being retained by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under the Bill. As others said — it goes without saying — we have huge potential in the aquaculture sector. Every health nutritionist says we should be eating more fish because it is good for us. As a nation, we do not eat enough of it. The reality is that if everybody on the planet ate the appropriate amount of fish from natural fish resources, there would be no fish left in the sea. We would actually plunder the resource. The only alternative is to develop a fish farming or aquaculture industry. As mentioned, when Norway was in a state of economic depression, it decided to develop its aquaculture industry which now accounts for a significant part of its GDP, notwithstanding the fact that the country has extensive oil resources. We should examine the Norwegian model which operates in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner and adds value to all of its products.

Deputy McHugh mentioned that Irish oysters were sometimes labelled as French. Perhaps they are labelled as coming from Mediterranean areas of France, even though they come from the North Atlantic. This is replicated all over the place. The Deputy also spoke about one of the biggest problems we were facing in trying to market and process our fish products. Our scale of production is not big enough to allow us to offer Ireland to major suppliers as an attractive source of such products. I note that the Minister was in Clonakilty on Monday. Someone had managed to bring a significant number of French and Irish fisheries organisations together. They were in the same place at the same time and the building is still standing. It was an achievement to recognise that common good could result from landing more fish from off the Irish coast in Irish harbours for processing. The same can be said in the case of aquaculture.

A good job was done when the SACs were drawn up. Significant territories in harbours and inlets were designated as SACs. When one completes an SAC assessment before proceeding with an application for an aquaculture or fish farming licence, the problem is that one is not sure what the authorities were trying to conserve in the special areas designated for conservation purposes. This issue has to be addressed. The figures speak for themselves. Some 271 new applications are awaiting approval. I have been told no significant inroads in that regard will be made until 2014, at the earliest. I hope that, as a result of this Bill, the officials in the Minister's Department who specialise in this area will be able to concentrate on expediting

these applications which need to be addressed urgently. There is huge potential to create jobs and add value which will help people in remote coastal areas in which there are few employment options other than moving away or emigrating. These scattered communities can survive if they receive support and industries of this nature are developed.

I do not doubt the commitment of the Minister to the marine and fisheries sector and wish him well in his endeavours. Other speakers have mentioned that bureaucracy has been a deterrent. It will continue to be, unless those Ministers and departmental officials in charge are willing to streamline the process. That has to be done because bureaucracy is a nightmare for those who do not have a steely determination to proceed with ventures in which they believe. It is clear when one looks at the length of the waiting list to have one's licence application expedited that solid determination is needed to bring such projects to fruition. A hands-on, proactive approach is needed. The officials in the Department who have the power to do this must realise that such industries need to be promoted. At the end of the day, their salaries are paid from the proceeds from these industries. That is the relationship we have to build and the understanding we have to create.

I commend the Bill which has been welcomed by Deputies on all sides of the House. I find that the simplest and most effective legislation is usually welcomed. I congratulate and commend the Minister for the introduction of this legislation. The fact that it will be enacted before the summer break is a statement of intent on his behalf. I commend the Bill to the House.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Foreshore (Amendment) Bill 2011. Like other Deputies, I welcome the Bill, the intention of which is to bring clarity to the overall position on foreshore licence applications. It is vitally important that it map clearly the responsibilities and roles of the Departments of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in adjudicating on such applications, including those from local authorities. As other Deputies said, difficulties are being caused by the backlog. A large number of foreshore licence applications, particularly those relating to aquaculture developments, are awaiting adjudication.

As the Minister said a couple of weeks ago, when Bord Bia brought representatives of 30 companies to a seafood show in Brussels, the companies' order books were filled on the first day of the event. This country's industry is unable to deliver enough produce and secure enough raw material to fill greater numbers of orders. Coastal areas, particularly in the north west and along the west coast, have huge potential in the fisheries sector. If the logjam can be broken and more licences brought on stream, such businesses can be developed. I know of a couple of companies in south-west Donegal which would be in a position to employ people immediately — to create between 25 and 30 jobs — if licence applications could be moved forward. This is an example of the huge potential that can be developed, particularly in rural Ireland. It is vitally important that we ensure people can have a sustainable future. As an island nation, we should be in a position to create jobs by adding value to this natural product and promoting it to the best of our ability.

After the Bill sets out clear lines of responsibility, we need to see progress in developing appropriate assessments of aquaculture developments in order that when applications for licences are made, the applicants will be able to receive clear instructions from the Department as to the requirements to be met in terms of the overall area and the particular SAC in which they might be looking to carry out a development. By doing this, we can open up the industry for significant development and create employment, which is vitally important. I hope the Minister will make these moves after the Bill has been enacted. I imagine there are other Departments which need to work together with him. I hope he will work to ensure this happens in order that appropriate assessments can be made and the logjam removed to ensure move-

[Deputy Thomas Pringle.]

ment. It is difficult enough in the current climate to create jobs. We see the attempts being made in the jobs initiative, but here are initiatives that are ready to go. The Government has been slow within various Departments to map out the route to be taken by the promoters of developments. We need to get moving to ensure applicants for licences will be able to move forward as quickly as possible to allow development to take place. From looking at the background to the Bill, it is an attempt to break what might be one of the stumbling blocks in order that it will be clear within a Department whose responsibility it is to move applications forward. That stumbling block can be removed. If the appropriate assessments are made, we will see movement and a real jobs initiative in areas of the country crying out and badly in need of such an initiative. I fully support the Bill.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I thank everybody for his or her support. I acknowledge that this is not the ideal way to steer legislation through the House which normally would take more time. There would be a time period between the different Stages to allow Members to bring forward amendments and make suggestions for change, although this is amending legislation that is short and sharp and it is unlikely amendments would have been tabled. That is why we were anxious to get it through the House today in order that we would have it finished before the summer and I could get on and do my job with reference to some of the things Members have asked me to do.

Everyone raised the issue of aquaculture development. There are a number of points that need to be understood. The licensing and foreshore processes are different. The reason we have not seen the granting of an aquaculture licence in two years is Ireland was taken to court by the European Commission for not having in place appropriate licensing mechanisms. Unless we put in place a system that will satisfy the Commission, it will start to impose fines and, potentially, shut down the aquaculture industry. We are in a vulnerable position and the Commission is literally holding a stick over our head in asking us to put in place a gold-plated system for accepting applications for aquaculture licences.

Ireland has a series of what are called Natura areas, special areas of conservation. Practically every harbour and port in the country, with a few exceptions — Bantry Bay being an obvious one — is now an SAC. Within SACs there is a process that has to be gone through in either renewing a licence or applying for a new one. To start with, an environmental impact assessment must be made in the bay before there is even consideration of the invitation of applications for licences. The National Parks and Wildlife Service is involved with my Department.

For what it is worth, I am as frustrated as anybody else in the House. Deputy Browne experienced this when he was in the Department. It is not due to a lack of urgency among staff in the Department who want to make it happen. We are trying to streamline a system to allow us to provide for environmental assessments of harbours and bays as quickly as possible. We will have a number done and dusted by the end of the year and aquaculture licence applications under consideration, some of which I hope will be granted. There is no one who wants to progress this issue more than me, but there is a process that we must follow. If we do not, unfortunately, the Commission which has already won a court case on the issue will come down on us like a ton of bricks.

The frustration stems from the fact that what we are expected and being asked to do is not replicated in other European countries. That is why last year Ireland produced only 12,000 tonnes of farmed salmon, whereas Scotland, one of our closest neighbours, produced 150,000 tonnes. That is why processors in Ireland have to spend hundreds of thousands of euro on importing farmed salmon each week from Scotland in order to be able to process the amount of salmon demanded by consumers. Norway, as mentioned by Deputy McHugh, is producing

1 million tonnes of farmed salmon per annum. Within five years, it wants this figure to be 2 million tonnes. We are still at a figure of 12,000 tonnes, despite the fact, to which Deputy Pringle referred, that Irish organic farmed salmon is in extraordinary demand. The biggest argument aimed at Irish seafood companies at the European Seafood Expo in Brussels recently was what were they doing there if they did not have volumes of fish to sell.

This is a growth industry waiting to be exploited to create employment and wealth in coastal communities which can take advantage of it. We want to do this in a sustainable way in order to allow people with concerns about these developments to have their say. We will develop Natura areas and SACs in a way that is responsible in terms of proper environmental management but which will allow businesses to grow. We will also try to move to a new playing pitch to try to encourage some of the new applicants for licences for large developments, in particular, fin-fish farming, to do so outside Natura areas and SACs, slightly offshore in the lee of islands and elsewhere.

The Ceann Comhairle will remember the debate we had about offshore zoning and spatial planning at the Joint Committee on Climate Change and Energy Security when looking at foreshore legislation. In the case of aquaculture, we are asking the Marine Institute to earmark certain suitable areas which are sheltered but also far enough offshore to be outside SACs to allow us to look at new fish farming developments that could dramatically increase volumes without causing any environmental damage. That is the kind of project we are trying to progress.

There is much enthusiasm for measures aimed at facilitating a dramatic expansion of the aquaculture industry. I intend to continue to try to give leadership to allow this to happen. However, we are constrained in SACs and Natura areas and need to find a solution in working with the Commission. It is not purely a question of human resources, unless one wants to introduce hundreds of people to make environmental assessments of every bay in the country for which my Department does not have the required level of resources.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am afraid I must now put the question.

Deputy Simon Coveney: If Members have specific issues or concerns, they should put them to me, either in writing or verbally, and I will try to answer them. I thank everybody for his or her understanding of the way in which we have brought the Bill before the House and, obviously, for his or her support for it.

Question put and agreed to.

Foreshore (Amendment) Bill 2011 [Seanad] : Committee and Remaining Stages

Sections 1 to 10, inclusive, agreed to.

TITLE

Question proposed: "That the Title be the Title to the Bill."

Deputy John Browne: I wish to ask the Minister a question that I meant to raise earlier. Will there be an appeals process? Will the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board still be in existence?

Minister for Agriculture, Marine and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Yes, it is legally required. It is somewhat like An Bord Pleanála. It has been on ice in recent years because there has been no aquaculture licensing process, but we have kept the structure in place. Now that we will get live applications, the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board, ALAB, will be in operation.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Can I ask one question?

An Ceann Comhairle: Strictly speaking, I am going through the procedure of the Bill, but the Deputy may speak briefly.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for his indulgence. In his closing remarks, the Minister stated the licensing procedure enforced on us through the EU judgment is not replicated in other EU countries. Will he expand on this point? Are we being forced to bring in a more onerous system than other EU countries?

Deputy Simon Coveney: The straight answer to the question is yes. In the past, we had no satisfactory system and, let us be honest, as a result there is a good deal of aquaculture activity out of licence at present. We must regularise it and this is why we are putting in place the process to make it happen. As a result of the case taken against Ireland, the Commission decided to require that we put in place a system that may be used as a template for the way aquaculture licences will be assessed and granted and how they should be assessed before aquaculture applications can be made, especially when they relate to Natura areas. Unfortunately, there is an element of Ireland being the guinea pig. This has resulted in an onerous obligation on us from an environmental assessment point of view. In some ways this could be a good thing if we have the time to develop it and the patience to do it. However, I would prefer to believe that it is possible to meet the type of environmental criteria in place and to do so in a shorter timeframe than proposed. This is what my Department and Deputy Deenihan's Department, which is responsible for parks and wildlife, aspire to, but it is not a simple process. I have spoken about this many times. We are going to try to make progress as quickly as we can. However, the idea that we can simply ignore what the Commission has stated does not hold up. There is a legal judgment against us. We must put in place a process that prevents the Commission taking further action in terms of implementing fines and shutting down parts of the industry.

We are negotiating from a position of some weakness. Having said that, the EU Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Commissioner does not understand why the Irish aquaculture industry is not expanding apace. There is something of a contradiction between the Commissioner with responsibility for the environment and the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Commissioner. When one considers the reason, one can begin to understand it and I am not criticising either of the Commissioners. My job is to find a political way forward that allows our industry to expand as opposed to watching in utter frustration while an industry expands apace in Scotland when we could have such a stimulus in Ireland. That is the long answer to a short question.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Finance (No. 3) Bill 2011: Order for Report Stage

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I move: "That Report Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

Finance (No. 3) Bill 2011: Report and Final Stages

Bill recommitted in respect of amendment No. 1

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I move amendment No. 1:

In page 66, between lines 15 and 16, to insert the following:

“

235	section 864A(1)(d)	Chapter 1 of Part 44.	Chapter 1 of Part 44 or Chapter 1 of Part 44A
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”

This is a technical amendment which I commend to the House. It ensures communications with Revenue by civil partners in respect of joint assessment can be made electronically.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill reported with amendment.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 70, column 4, lines 66 to 69, to delete “the civil partner of one or more of his or her lineal descendents” and substitute “a lineal descendant of his or her civil partner”.

This is a technical amendment that I commend to the House and which corrects a typographical error.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 76, column 4, line 54, to delete “made under section 175 of” and substitute “under Part 15 of”.

This is a technical amendment which ensures qualified cohabitants who apply to the court for a redress order under the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act will be exempt from capital acquisitions tax on transfers under all such orders. This aligns the capital acquisitions tax treatment of court orders made on the break-up of a cohabiting relationship with the treatment of similar court orders made on the breakdown of a marriage or civil partnership. The non-inclusion in the Bill, as published, was an oversight.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill, as amended, received for final consideration.

Question proposed: “That the Bill do now pass.”

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I thank Members opposite for facilitating me by coming into the Chamber so expeditiously this afternoon, as the call came sooner than expected.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I thank the Minister and his officials for advancing the Bill so efficiently following on the adoption last year of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act. This is landmark legislation and the all-party consensus in the House is particularly to be welcomed. I look forward to the enactment of the Bill.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I also thank the Minister and his officials for introducing this legislation in such a speedy manner and I am delighted that I have been able to facilitate its passage. Maturity in politics and the State is demonstrated by Members’ ability to reach agreement on this legislation and the previous legislation that necessitated its passage in the first instance,

[Deputy Pearse Doherty.]

namely, the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act. It is welcome that the Bill is being given legal effect.

Question put and agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joanna Tuffy): This Bill which is certified to be a money Bill in accordance with Article 22.2.1° of the Constitution will be sent to the Seanad.

Sitting suspended at 5.40 p.m. and resumed at 7 p.m.

Private Members' Business

Hospital Services: Motion (Resumed)

The following motion was moved by Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin on Tuesday, 5 July 2011:

That Dáil Éireann calls on the Government to stand by its commitments and ensure:

- the continuation of all existing accident and emergency services at hospitals across the State as promised by candidates of the Fine Gael and Labour parties in advance of the general election, including Roscommon, Navan, Letterkenny, Portlaoise, St. Columcille's (Loughlinstown), Portiuncula (Ballinasloe), the Mid-Western (Limerick), Clonmel, Mallow and Bantry;
- the retention of key services such as orthopaedic services at St. Mary's Hospital, Cork and the return of comprehensive breast cancer services to Sligo, also as committed by candidates of the parties now in government; and
- equal access to safe and efficient hospital services for all, without discrimination based on income or geographic location.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 2:

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

- “— recognises that the first and over-riding priority for all hospital services must be the safety of patients;
- supports the Government's approach to ensuring that all patients have access to timely, high quality emergency services;
- notes the growing evidence that larger hospitals with a higher volume of patients treated by appropriately trained health professionals have significantly better outcomes for patients with complex or life-threatening conditions;
- endorses the recommendations of the independent Health Information and Quality Authority on this issue and welcomes the Government's commitment to implementing the approach advocated by the Authority;
- strongly supports the Minister for Health's establishment of the Special Delivery Unit within his Department, which has already started its work to reduce unacceptable wait-

ing times in emergency departments, and will also address lengthy waiting times for inpatient, day case and outpatient treatments;

- supports the Government’s continuing emphasis on providing high-quality diagnostic and treatment services for patients with cancer irrespective of where they live;
- commends the Minister for Health’s work to ensure that there is a sufficient number of non-consultant hospital doctors to provide high quality acute hospital services throughout the country; and
- endorses the Government’s intention to introduce a system of Universal Health Insurance, which is based on fair access to healthcare for all, irrespective of income or geographic location; and

resolves that no hospital will close but that some services will change.”

(Minister for Health, Deputy James Reilly).

Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan: First I wish to say, “Well done to the Rossies, ye turned out in good numbers today, I am proud of you.”

After the election I was asked by the media whether I would vote for Fine Gael in order to put them into government. I said, I might because they actually agree with quite a lot of my policies. I agreed with their policy on health care and the future of Roscommon hospital; I agreed with their policy on turf-cutting; I agreed with burning the bondholders. As a result, I was asked by RTE why did I not join Fine Gael if that was the case. My answer was, “I don’t think Fine Gael actually believes in those policies.” Unfortunately, I have been proven to be correct.

Fine Gael’s policy in advance of this election from the now Minister was as follows: “I would like to confirm that Fine Gael undertakes, in accordance with the Fine Gael policy on local hospitals, to retain the emergency, surgical, medical and other health services at Roscommon hospital which are present on the formation of the 31st Dáil.” However, one does not have to lie to get into this House. I did not lie. I could have gone down the same route at the general election. I could have lied to people about my views on the legalisation of cannabis because there are no votes in Roscommon on that issue. I could have lied to people on the fact that I do not have a problem with a mobile phone mast beside my house. That certainly did not get me any votes but that was my opinion. Unfortunately, that cannot be said for Deputy Denis Naughten and Deputy Frank Feighan, unless today they vote with the people of Roscommon and south Leitrim rather than voting with Fine Gael.

The spin in the past few days has been very hard to take. Even our own elected representatives have attempted to convince us that we will be better off without our accident and emergency department. The reason given is that they cannot argue with medical evidence being presented to them. Well, the medical evidence has been made quite clear today in *The Irish Times* and the GPs in our area have said the following: “We are in no doubt that lives will be lost and patient outcomes will be adversely affected.” General practitioners in the county’s catchment area have warned of serious consequences and they have said: “Every GP in the catchment area of County Roscommon, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Galway, Westmeath and Sligo, is appalled at the proposed downgrading of the hospital and the effect it will have on patient care and safety.” The former head of the IMO, Dr. Martin Daly, stated: “My colleagues are very angry that they should be asked to provide a service which facilitates the downgrading

[Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan.]

of the hospital, given their concerns about the capacity of other hospitals to cope with the extra load and safety issues associated with that.”

I looked at the Fine Gael website and I discovered that Fine Gael is a Christian Democrat party. I also checked out the Ten Commandments which Christians are meant to follow. The ninth commandment is, “Thou shalt not lie”. If Fine Gael does not do as it promised in advance of the election, I challenge its members that they are not Christian nor are they democrats.

Ultimately, this is down to money. The IMF and the EU will make a profit of €9 billion over the lifetime of the bailout. We require 0.5% of that sum to keep our hospital open this year. The question is who is more important, the bankers or the people of Roscommon and south Leitrim and surrounding areas who will die if we let this happen.

As for the Fine Gael amendment to the motion, the people of my constituency are on the ball and if the local Fine Gael Deputies vote for the amendment, then they will be seen to be voting for the closure of our hospital. The amendment proposes the deletion of the fact that the Minister said he would stand by his commitments.

Deputy Denis Naughten and Deputy Frank Feighan promised the people they would stand by them. Today they must vote in favour of this motion otherwise they will be classified as traitors until kingdom come. The surrounding Deputies from the surrounding counties, from Longford, Westmeath, Mayo and east Galway, must do the same thing; they must choose between the bankers or their constituents. Let them die but the Deputies will pay the price if they do.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I commend the people of Roscommon for coming out and protesting to defend their hospital. I commend the people of Portlaoise who are mobilising to defend their accident and emergency services. I want to encourage the people of Shankill and Wicklow and Loughlinstown to join the people of Roscommon and Portlaoise in protesting to defend their hospital's accident and emergency service which is coming under attack. They will have the opportunity to do so this Saturday at 2 p.m. in Shankill.

We all need to stand together against this madness. The attacks on our hospital services are falsely being presented as something to do with health and safety. This is nothing but a lie to cover up a brutal agenda of cutbacks and downgradings of public services and of vital hospital services in order to satisfy the greed of bankers and bondholders and to do the bidding of the IMF and their EU masters who are dictating to this Government that the lives of ordinary people and the services for ordinary people in this country should be sacrificed in order to ensure the EU, the IMF, the bankers, the bondholders and speculators in Europe, can make €9 billion profit out of the lives and services of people in this country. The logic that this Government is applying to justify what it is doing to hospital services in Roscommon, Portlaoise and Loughlinstown, is like the logic the US applied in the Vietnam war when they said, “We are going to save your village by destroying it.” It is the same logic that is being applied here — “we are going to save your health service by closing your accident and emergency service; we are going to save your health service by closing and downgrading your hospitals”. It is nothing but nonsense and lies to cover up brutal and unjust cutbacks. People will die as a result of this. There is a choice and the choice is to make the bondholders and speculators who caused this crisis pay for it, not the ordinary citizens of Roscommon, Portlaoise, Loughlinstown, Shankill, Wicklow and the other places around the country whose hospital services are being attacked.

I appeal to people that this is part of a bigger agenda. We need to mobilise now against this mad, IMF-EU austerity package. People will have the opportunity to do so on Saturday, 16

July, at 2 p.m., at the Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square. I hope the whole country comes out to stop this madness and these unjust cutbacks.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: This debate must be about survival, not of any particular accident and emergency service but survival of patients. We all want equal access to safe and efficient medical services. If one has a stroke, a heart attack or a serious accident, one's chances of survival should not depend on where in Ireland you are. For this to work, our hospital system must use its resources smartly. There is no point going to Loughlinstown if the skills one requires are in St. Vincent's. There is no point going straight to St. Vincent's if one is going to spend half an hour in an ambulance in the car park waiting for a trolley.

It would be easy for me, as the only Opposition and Independent TD for Wicklow and east Carlow, to say that I will fight to retain a full, 24-hour accident and emergency department at Loughlinstown. But I do not believe this would be the safest outcome for the people of Wicklow and east Carlow. The medical experts I have spoken to also are of this view. The accident and emergency department at Loughlinstown is routinely bypassed by the ambulance services in serious cases. Loughlinstown accident and emergency department does not have sufficient patient numbers to be at the cutting edge. If one has a serious injury one is told to go to St. Vincent's Hospital because the extra seven or eight minutes travel will radically increase one's chances of survival.

In recent years I have spent a lot of time working on improving health care systems abroad and I promise to bring that experience to the Dáil. My experience tells me that Loughlinstown is being run down year after year by cutbacks and a lack of vision and leadership from politicians and the HSE. It does not stop at Loughlinstown. Wicklow and east Carlow have suffered from years of under-investment. There are not enough ambulances and the ones we have are getting old. The primary care strategy has disappeared. Where are the primary care centres? The doctor on call service is a joke; people are left waiting for hours at night for a GP to arrive.

If the Government is to change the accident and emergency service at Loughlinstown, it must not be a cost-cutting measure, but rather part of improving the entire health care system for Wicklow and east Carlow. It is not acceptable that someone in Carnew must drive more than 60 miles to have a minor injury treated. It is not acceptable for a parent in Arklow with a sick child to wait for hours at night for a GP to arrive. It is not acceptable for a heart attack victim in Blessington to have to hope that an ambulance will be ready to bring him or her to hospital.

We must have primary care centres in Arklow, Wicklow town, Blessington, Greystones and Bray, doctor on call services, a modern ambulance service and fully functional accident and emergency capacity at St. Vincent's Hospital. If the minor injury unit is to be closed at night in Loughlinstown, one should be opened in Arklow during the day. We have to invest in Loughlinstown hospital. It needs a vision. It should not cling to an outdated and potentially dangerous idea of what a hospital needs but become a truly excellent hospital serving our community as part of a comprehensive, modern and responsive health care system for Wicklow and east Carlow. That is a vision for which I will fight.

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Sean Sherlock): I wish to share time with Deputies Regina Doherty and Buttimer.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I wish to speak specifically on Mallow. I am not aware of any commitment that was given on Mallow General Hospital regarding accident and emergency services but I am open to correction. I am a member of the Mallow Hospital Action Committee since

[Deputy Sean Sherlock.]

I entered public life. In Mallow and north Cork we have been through a very difficult and dramatic time, especially when on Tuesday, 19 April, it was announced by the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, that it would investigate the services at Mallow General Hospital. At the time it was purported that the investigation was on foot of a complaint, which turned out not to be the case. When HIQA visited the hospital, it found the staff, clinicians and physicians were absolutely and utterly beyond reproach.

I note the comments of Deputy Donnelly. In parallel with the investigative process, there was a roadmap for the reconfiguration of Cork and Kerry hospitals whereby the designation of Mallow would evolve or change to reflect the concerns that arose in the HIQA report. All the stakeholders, including the hospital action committee of which I am a member, physicians, GPs and those who were referred to the hospital were part of the process. The endgame was to ensure we could maintain the capacity of the hospital to deliver in order that more services would be taken out of Cork University Hospital on an elective basis, acute surgical services could be maintained and an urgent care centre or medical assessment unit established which would allow for the vast bulk of cases that present on an emergency basis to continue to be dealt with in Mallow. We were on that route map until I discovered this week that certain forces within the HSE wanted to derail it and go way beyond the HIQA recommendations to reduce the capacity of the hospital to deliver.

I am encouraged by a meeting I had with the Minister for Health, Deputy James Reilly. He reflected a statement he made when the HIQA report was issued, namely, that he was strongly committed to the role of smaller hospitals. I can only speak for Mallow with any great authority. We now need to get the roadmap back on track so that if we have to go through change management, it will reflect HIQA. However, it must not be solely for budgetary reasons. It has to allow for a situation to arise whereby we can take more of the elective procedures that can be done in Mallow and have a short stay surgical unit in order that we can continue to have an emergency department facility and begin to facilitate the structures around CUH.

If we proceed along a pathway that seeks to excise acute surgery or the acute medicine programme from Mallow in a short space of time, I have no doubt it will contribute to the risk profile of larger hospitals like CUH. We must be cognisant and very wary of the need to ensure hospitals such as Mallow have a role. We need to consider in a more lateral way how the role can proceed. Mallow differs from other hospitals in that HIQA has examined it and provided recommendations. The issue of licensing is coming down the track. No matter what one's political hue is — I accepted this a long time ago — one has to take the view that one does not reduce the capacity. The HIQA requirements should be met, we should ensure that a hospital has a license to practice and that services can be delivered, albeit possibly in a different way.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I am a resident of Ratoath in County Meath. My local hospital is Navan and I have been supportive of the Save Navan Hospital Committee for the past number of years and will continue to be so, not just because I am on this side of the House. It is fundamental to Government policy to provide quality health services in this country.

The concern about the state of the health care system has reached a slow bowling point in the country over recent days. The delivery of health care consistently ranks among the top three issues the electorate want policymakers and politicians to address. Lately, it is increasingly intertwined with the growing worries about Ireland's economic insecurities. High costs, gap ridden coverage and sporadic quality are the health care problems that most Irish citizens talk about, yet Sinn Féin wants to keep all the policy discussions focused on coverage, which is disingenuous.

To ensure the other problems are not forgotten and that delivering system reform is central to his plans, the Minister, Deputy Reilly, set up the special delivery unit. It is charged with promoting quality, efficiency and patient centredness in a high performing health system that the people of this country have been promised and are waiting on for many years. Reconfiguration and the old HSE plans for hospitals are null and void. They are definitely not our plans.

The long-term plans for our smaller hospitals will deliver extended day surgery, expertise in particular areas, much-needed capacity and doctor-led services. We need our smaller hospitals now more than ever. We need patient-led services, more capacity and the expertise that we get in our smaller regional hospitals, but most of all we need them to be safe. Let us be very clear about that.

We are currently experiencing, as we have for many years in the past, a non-consultant hospital doctor shortage. I welcome the Minister's recent move to address this issue to ensure it does not keep cropping up time and again. Temporary registration, the new two-year contract term, the new training programmes and the new supervisory roles are all very welcome and show the Minister's intelligent approach to dealing with the issue.

Deputy Ó Caoláin said yesterday that the right to access safe health care should not be reliant on one's purse or geographical position. To an extent I agree with him, but I am very happy that the priority and concern of the Government is to defend patients and ensure their safety when they are most vulnerable.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: I am pleased to support the Minister for Health and his Government colleagues who are committed to ensuring that hospital services are of the highest quality, centred on patient safety and focused on successful treatment. When Fine Gael and Labour went before the people we did so on the basis of a vision for a reformed health service. Those comprehensive proposals have been amalgamated to form a policy for a successful Government. That policy will have the patient at its core.

To the dismay of most people, we have now had a dramatic change in the situation concerning junior doctors. Without these doctors it would be impossible to deliver a service of the highest quality. The Minister, the Department and the HSE have ensured that a recruitment drive will be undertaken to overcome the difficulties that have arisen in recent years. The decision of previous Administrations not to include training for junior doctors as part of their contracts has resulted in this mess. In addition, these roles were not sufficiently attractive. We cannot expect to retain high quality doctors if we do not provide sufficient training for their professional development. There must be a clear path of advancement.

Recently, the quality of nursing home care has rightly been a matter of concern to Members of this House, to the public and, most importantly, to the patients receiving such care and their families. In discussing these matters, everyone in the House relied upon HIQA's reports which were acted upon to ensure patient safety. Now that we have received HIQA reports on certain hospital services that do not suit the short-term political gain or motivations of certain TDs, they choose to ignore them and HIQA is cast to one side. When nursing homes are closed, based on a HIQA report, the actions are applauded, yet the Government has been, and is being, criticised when it acts on HIQA reports regarding hospitals. The hypocrisy would be laughable if it was not such a serious issue.

In the North of our country, Sinn Féin has held the Ministry of Health under Bairbre de Brún. She commissioned a report that recommended "emergency services should be phased out at Whiteabbey Hospital, Lagan Valley Hospital and the Mid-Ulster Hospital". The report went on to recommend that Mid-Ulster Hospital should be replaced with "a local nurse-led emergency unit providing a comprehensive minor injury and illness service". Since then, of

[Deputy Jerry Buttimer.]

course, Sinn Féin has refused to take on the Ministry of Health in the North, thus abdicating its responsibilities. It has avoided the difficult decisions necessary to deliver improved services for all our citizens. Sinn Féin prefers, as it has done here, to stand on the sidelines, shouting and roaring, and playing on people's fears for political gain.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: That is the Deputy's own game. He is the author of it.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: People are rightly concerned about health. They deserve the collective, non-partisan support of all Members of this House. Public apprehension has been caused by all politicians who have used health as a political football, and never more so than inside and outside this House today and yesterday. When it comes to reforming the health service, patient care must be to the fore. It should be our only concern because we cannot allow health to be used as a political football by vested interests.

The reform of our health service must not be based on *ad hoc* decisions, but be part of a vision for change which will deliver improved services to patients who are our fellow citizens. Those of us who profess to be republicans must look inside our hearts and do what is best for our people. We must do what is best for all our citizens, not just for the ballot box or cheap headlines. We should not cast slurs on Members of the House by making disparaging remarks about them.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Deputy has just done that. He should practice what he preaches.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: The Sinn Féin motion is a cheap political ploy which does not deserve support.

Deputy Damien English: I am glad of the chance to speak on this important issue. I thank Deputy Ó Caoláin for quoting last night what I said a couple of years ago.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Accurately.

Deputy Damien English: I stand over those quotes absolutely and will not change my views because it is still a capacity issue. People may talk about trying to close Navan accident and emergency unit and putting those patients into Drogheda instead, but it cannot happen. It should not happen and it is wrong. I stand over what I said because Drogheda cannot cope. We were told for a long time in Meath that Fianna Fáil and the HSE planned to close the accident and emergency unit at Navan eventually or to reduce the opening hours. We were also told that would only happen if there was capacity elsewhere, but there is none. As a GP in that area in his previous occupation, the Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, knows exactly what the capacity issue is in the north east. It cannot cope.

Deputy Ó Caoláin is also familiar with the position and I am glad he quoted me last night, thus giving me a chance to clarify the matter because it is wrong. People need access to accident and emergency services, without standing in a queue of 50 other patients or lying on a trolley, as is happening in Drogheda now. I want to clarify one thing Deputy Ó Caoláin said last night which was wrong. It is important to get it right because in arguing with the HSE and Ministers to keep services open, they must know that they are open. Last night, the Deputy said no ambulances are accepted in Navan at the moment and those that are presented are assessed and diverted, but that is not true. All medical cases are accepted in Navan except those involving trauma. That amounts to about 80% of those who would attend Navan accident and emer-

gency unit or 17,000 people annually. It is important to clarify that because if people think it has already gone we will certainly not get it back.

The fight here is to ensure we keep the service in Navan. I am glad to be part of a cross-community, cross-party group which is fighting for such services at Navan hospital. It is a good group comprising TDs from all parties, as well as consultants, GPs and other health staff.

Medical staff must be involved in and consulted on any changes in any of our hospitals, although it has not happened to date. It is lunacy to withdraw services from, or even add services to, hospitals without asking those who work there about it. I am glad we will have a meeting next week with the action group, and the consultants and staff of Navan hospital, to put their case to the Minister and thus be involved in any future plans.

Deputy Ó Caoláin specifically mentioned Navan accident and emergency unit last night but there is no reason why it should close next week, or have its hours reduced, because the same staff who are operating there today will be there next week and the week after. There is no change so there is no excuse for anybody to try to reduce services there.

We must end this stupid way of doing business whereby every six months we must check to see if there are enough junior doctors in place. It has been the same since I started in politics over ten years ago, but it is not the way to run a service. I am glad the Minister for Health has plans to change that. Hopefully the bands can be addressed and adjusted to suit various areas. At least he is going to try to tackle it and not let it drag on for ten or 15 years, which happened in the past. It was not good enough, so we must fix this once and for all.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Equally, there is no excuse for closing Roscommon.

Deputy Colm Keaveney: I thank you, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle, for the opportunity to speak on this matter. As always, it is a great honour to speak in the House. Before getting to my primary point, however, what really galled me today was to see the Fianna Fáil backbenchers laughing at the notion that they had handed over a destroyed economy to the new Government and the people of Ireland. There is nothing less amusing than what they have left the people of this country with and that is their legacy.

The Government's only option is to do the best it can with the disastrous situation that has been left by Fianna Fáil and its neo-liberal friends in the last Administration. It is important to make this point regarding Roscommon. We are all aware that the Roscommon accident and emergency department will be replaced by an emergency care centre, which will operate between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., seven days a week.

In recent weeks, we have heard a lot of scaremongering about the delivery of emergency medical care in Roscommon and the safety of patients. Anyone taking part in such scaremongering is doing a great disservice to the people of Roscommon, as well as a disservice to the people of my own County Galway, who are being led to believe these decisions concerning Roscommon are being made to save money. The reality, however, is that the decisions are being taken to save lives.

We should ask ourselves what really lies behind the term "accident and emergency". What is in a name? It does not take too much research to uncover the fact that many of the multi-disciplinary services that fall under what we understand to be an accident and emergency term, do not actually exist in Roscommon and never did. There are no orthopaedic, obstetric or paediatric facilities there. One simply does not go to Roscommon hospital for those medical services. If someone was to fall and break a leg, they would not go to Roscommon. If I were in Roscommon and had a sick child, I would not take him or her to Roscommon County Hospital because it does not have a paediatric unit. I would go to where the services were. We

[Deputy Colm Keaveney.]

are fighting here over a title. Let us be clear: this is not a downgrading because the accident and emergency department at Roscommon County Hospital is not and never was a fully functional unit. The notion of having no accident and emergency department gives the impression that the service was available in the first instance. As I stated, in this instance the term “accident and emergency” does not honestly reflect the services available at Roscommon County Hospital.

This initiative is about patient outcomes and the necessity to streamline and modernise services to make the Roscommon County Hospital more efficient and effective. General practitioners will be available from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m., while a medical emergency unit will be operational between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. There will be four full-time ambulances and an advanced paramedic medical team based in Roscommon on a 24-7 basis, which I envy. These will deal not with patient transfers but with emergency medical calls. Roscommon County Hospital is and will remain safe if this is done in the correct manner. The goal is to match patient needs with appropriate services. The decision of an emergency medical technician on the side of the road in the event of a road traffic accident is best in terms of patient need. Case by case judgment by emergency service workers will always be required. Twelve additional emergency medical technicians appointed to assess patients in the event of unforeseen circumstances will decide what service a person requires, consider the specialties, supply all of the information to the necessary medical facility and make a decision based on the best possible outcome for the person concerned.

The population of Roscommon is more than 63,000. According to the Western Regional Authority, the population will grow by approximately 10,000 over the course of the next ten years, bringing it to approximately 73,000. This will, no doubt, put extra pressure on Roscommon County Hospital and surrounding medical facilities, which is all the more reason to commence modernisation and ensure emergency service operations in Roscommon and the surrounding region will be maintained. Protesting will not save lives in Roscommon. It will not result in medical solutions to the problem. Having said that, I completely understand the reason people are angry, but this problem was caused by the previous Administration. We have limited resources and must do the best with what we have. The Government is making the best decisions to ensure the best outcomes for the people of Roscommon in the context of the future of Roscommon County Hospital.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I wish to share one minute of my time with Deputy McLoughlin.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I welcome the motion, many aspects of which I agree with. I thank Sinn Féin for bringing forward its argument in a measured and cohesive manner, which is how it should be done. Anger will not get us out of the situation in which we find ourselves. I fully understand the concerns and anger of the people of counties Roscommon and Leitrim and other parts of the country who like me are proud of their hospital and the important role it continues to play in the community. The confusion and uncertainty about services, primarily created by the Health Service Executive, have not been helpful.

My family, friends and others I know have relied on Roscommon County Hospital in time of need. I assure the people of counties Roscommon and Leitrim that will not change. Like my constituency colleague, Deputy Naughten, I gave a commitment in good faith before the general election that I would stand by the hospital and safeguard its services. However, events have overtaken that commitment, including the Health Information and Quality Authority report, the Mallow report and the position on junior hospital doctors. I am sincerely sorry that

I cannot stand by that commitment. However, I am doing everything possible to live up to my commitment.

The changes being made at Roscommon County Hospital are not ideal for local people. The vast majority want the services currently available at the hospital to continue. I am sure everyone in Roscommon wants to ensure the safest levels of health care are provided at the hospital.

Deputy Colm Keaveney: Hear, hear.

Deputy Frank Feighan: Patient care is paramount. I attended the meeting last Friday week with members of the Health Information and Quality Authority, the Health Service Executive and other Members from across the political spectrum. HIQA opened my eyes to exactly the standards we need to comply with patient safety. I wish everything could remain the same but it cannot.

I looked at what happened over the years and in the last week. I took a position that I would be measured and try to take on board the views of the HSE and the people who wanted the hospital to be maintained and that is what I have done. I want to say one thing to Dr. Ming. His behaviour during the past week has not helped this situation. He has acted like a political thug. He has a responsibility to tell the people the truth.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: Do I have a right of reply?

Deputy Frank Feighan: What he has done has shamed politics. I will tell people the truth. I come from a position of telling people the truth, and if they do not like this, that is fine. The Deputy is a political opportunist who is more worried about his re-election than about the innocent people in Roscommon.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: Do I have the right of reply?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No.

Deputy Tony McLoughlin: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. Following a meeting of Oireachtas Members with the Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, organised by Senator Henry and me, I welcome the Minister's commitment to the provision of a screening centre for colon cancer, will full colonoscopy services. Furthermore, the Minister has announced that a second oncologist will be appointed at Sligo General Hospital in the autumn. He has stated the matter of breast cancer surgery remains under review. Members will be aware that the previous Government put in place a national cancer strategy under the direction of Ms Susan O'Reilly, with whom the Minister must work hand in hand on this review.

During the general election I gave no commitment to a timeframe for the reinstatement of cancer services. It is my firm belief the Minister must be given the time and space to do his job. I am prepared to afford him that time and space. The original decision by the Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government not to select Sligo General Hospital as one of the centre of excellence cancer hospitals was catastrophic for people in the wider region. I have no intention of resigning my seat as the people of Sligo-North Leitrim democratically elected me. Since being elected to the House, I have worked hard on the issue of cancer services at Sligo General Hospital.

Following the decision by the last Government to remove breast surgery services from Sligo General Hospital, like many others, I joined the campaign to seek the return of these services and attended many meetings of protest in Sligo and Dublin. As a candidate in the last general election, I sought commitments from my party on this issue and gave no more assurances than I had received. As a member of the Fine Gael Parliamentary Party, I continue to lobby the Taoiseach and his team of Ministers, in particular the Minister for Health, on behalf of the people of Sligo-North Leitrim on issues of importance, including Sligo General Hospital, against the backdrop of the presence of IMF and European Union officials in this country.

[Deputy Tony McLoughlin.]

I urge the Minister to work with Ms O'Reilly to explore all avenues to ensure full cancer care services are returned to Sligo General Hospital. The recent positive announcements made by the Minister which I restated are to be welcomed and illustrate that the Government is committed to Sligo General Hospital. There is still time to study the review together with the national cancer strategy. I urge the Minister to review the merits of having services based in Sligo and the past surgical success of Mr. Tim Hanrahan and his team at the hospital. The absence of a centre of excellence north of the line between Galway and Sligo is a tragic legacy of the last Government. The north-west region must not be forgotten when it comes to cancer care services. I will continue to work with the Save our Cancer Care Service committee to achieve our common goal, namely, the return of full cancer services to Sligo General Hospital.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tá mé ag caint i bhfabhar an rún a mhol Sinn Féin aréir. Iarraim ar na Teachtaí eile vótáil linn ar an ábhar tábhachtach seo. I call on all Deputies, but especially those from constituencies that will lose health services and accident and emergency units and those who made election commitments, to stand with their constituents and support the Sinn Féin motion. I commend all those who are campaigning to save their accident and emergency units and commend the people who are outside in the rain calling on their Teachtaí Dála anseo to stand with them. Thaistil gnáthdhaoine ó Ros Comáin inniu ag impí ar an Rialtas gan leanúint leis na ciorruithe seo agus gan airgead á bhaint ó othair faoi chúram chroí.

The scale of the crisis in the health service and the refusal by Fine Gael and Labour to stand by communities is staggering. I offer some fraternal advice to colleagues opposite. As people are now too wise, they should be careful about the old trick of pretending to be in government and opposition at the same time. They are part of government and they cannot defend, argue and place themselves on action committees locally and then be part of decisions that, for example, result in the closure of the accident and emergency unit in Roscommon. This is especially true of Labour Deputies who are acting in total contradiction to the general election commitment of their leader to reverse any cuts in Roscommon County Hospital.

The previous Government oversaw local hospital services being stripped from local communities. Tallaght Hospital, which has the largest accident and emergency unit in the State, was described recently by the Dublin city coroner as a dangerous place. The hospitals in Monaghan, Nenagh, Ennis and Dundalk were decimated by Fianna Fáil. Louth County Hospital is an example how this operated. The children's ward was the first to go, followed by the maternity unit and then the gynaecological unit. As these services were reduced and undermined, it impacted on Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda. Despite the efforts of a wonderful staff, that hospital cannot cope with the demands being made of it. This tactic of removing one medical service and then using the absence of that to justify the closure of other services is being cynically used by the HSE and Government.

Roscommon is the focal point today. Where will it be next week, next month or the following month? The Government seeks to excuse all this by claiming there is no money. However, today the Government handed €10 million to unguaranteed bondholders in a busted bank, Anglo Irish Bank. The money is there and it cannot blame Fianna Fáil for that; it is a Government decision. Politics is a matter of political choices and today the Government chose to give away €10 million of taxpayers' money instead of investing it in these threatened hospital services. Tá an Rialtas ag tabhairt airgead na gcáiníocóirí do bhaincéirí dona nach bhfuil fiú aithne againn orthu. I still find it hard to absorb this. On 2 November the Government will hand €703 million to senior unguaranteed bondholders in the same bank. This is not part of the bank guarantee, any deal or the bailout. The money is being given by the Government out of charity while we have this ongoing crisis in our public services.

I am asking Deputies to stop playing politics with this issue and make a stand. The Minister for Finance has said the next budget will introduce €4 billion in cuts. Will we see health targeted again? Whatever else is happening in the State, citizens need to have some certainty that they

will have basic rights upheld by people in this institution. Citizens are making a stand and Deputies need to make a stand with them. I ask the Dáil to back this motion and oppose the cutbacks.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I welcome the people from Portlaoise and Roscommon some of whom are in the Gallery and more of whom are outside protesting. I heard a Government Deputy describe one of them as a political thug. I was outside with him on a few occasions this afternoon and this evening and I did not see any political thuggery. The protest was noisy but was certainly good humoured. People were there to make a point and if we do not allow that in our democracy, we are on the road to nothing.

Sinn Féin believes it is essential that emergency services are retained in regional hospitals. We are all aware that there are serious threats to Portlaoise hospital because of the crisis with NCHDs. Following the meeting with the Minister for Health on Monday — I welcome that he met us quickly — it could be said that there appears to be a slightly more optimistic outlook for the moment. As the Minister has said that he does not want to see a closure and reduction in emergency services in Portlaoise, we appear to have a stay of execution. Sinn Féin will be supporting the emergency legislation on Thursday to facilitate the registration of new junior doctors in the State. These doctors are badly needed to alleviate a crisis, but it is just short-term crisis management.

In the medium term, the Minister may be trying to say that things will be resolved at Portlaoise hospital, but this does not take from the serious concerns for the long-term future of regional hospitals in general. If Portlaoise is to continue as a major regional hospital, there needs to be a significant increase in the hospital's budget as well as the number of consultants attached to it. This was confirmed by senior Department of Health officials when we met them on Monday. The hospital cannot continue to operate on a budget of only €42 million. It is a hospital that provides major services, including maternity, paediatric, medical and psychiatric service, and a very busy accident and emergency unit that served more than 41,000 patients last year. Some of the services need to be upgraded, not ended. In particular, the maternity and accident and emergency units in Portlaoise are operating under severe pressure.

On Sunday more than 5,000 people turned out in Portlaoise to protest against the original plans to downgrade the hospital. I welcome the HSE statement following those protests that it will be able to maintain 24-hour emergency services from 11 July pending the remaining number of junior doctor posts being filled. However, following yesterday's meeting of the Dublin mid-Leinster regional health forum, a Fine Gael member of the forum stated that the position for accident and emergency services and acute surgery is only secured for six months.

I commend the 5,000 people who came out to show their support for the retention of hospital services in their town, but I also want commitment from the Government that at some point down the road it will not suddenly decide to end certain services there because it reckons it is cheaper to do that than to address a health system that is broken. I heard my constituency colleague, Deputy Charles Flanagan, say on Midlands 103 radio that the HSE must tackle the lack of trust people have in the organisation. Does he not realise that his party colleague, the Minister, Deputy Reilly, now has his hands on the reins and that his party and Labour now control the health service directly? The Minister stood down the board of the HSE and has told us that he and his Department officials now run the health services, so this is a red herring. I welcome that the board has been stood down but the Minister needs to introduce the necessary reforms.

The Minister is asking the people to trust the HSE days after this same organisation failed to co-ordinate air transport for Meadhbh McGivern on Saturday night in order that she could have the long-awaited liver transplant she needs. That did not happen ten years ago; it happened last weekend. These are life and death matters and we are placing them in the hands of the HSE. Deputy Charles Flanagan said that before he was in government he regarded the HSE as dysfunctional, and went on to say that nothing has changed since his party went into

[Deputy Brian Stanley.]

government. I agree with him on those two matters. However, Deputy Flanagan's party and Labour are now in Government and it is his Government's responsibility to create trust by fixing the health service.

Only a couple of weeks ago, it was being reported that outpatient clinics in Portlaoise hospital would not be in operation for July and August with the exception of maternity and the warfarin clinic, with corresponding reductions in accident and emergency services, and at that point the HSE was apparently in talks to put together a contingency plan, but no public decision had been made on what has to be done. If it has been made, we have not been made aware of it. I ask the Minister when exactly we will see a health service that does not continually operate on the basis of lurching from one crisis to another.

Health care is a fundamental human right. If this Government had the capacity and the political will to manage the economy effectively and fairly, it would realise it is a right for everyone. Giving people equal access to proper health services and tackling the social and economic inequalities that lead to poor health for many would go a large way to saving money in the long term. I ask the other Members of the House to support the motion.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis labhairt ar an rún rí-thábhachtach seo. Gabhaim comhghairdeas leo siúd ar fad atá lasmuigh. Chuala mé go bhfuil siad ag éisteacht leis an díospóireacht seo. Tá súil agam go n-éiríodh leis an rún, nó ar a laghad leis an bhfeachtas. Thaisitil na daoine sin ó Ros Comáin chun agóid a dhéanamh i gcoinne an cinneadh atá déanta ag an Rialtas an aonad timpistí agus éigeandála san ospidéal sa bhaile sin a dhúnadh. Ní hiad amháin a bheidh síos leis má leanann an Rialtas seo ar an mbealach atá siad ag tabhairt faoi cheana féin.

The Government amendment to the Sinn Féin motion is a sick joke. The second paragraph refers to "the Government's approach to ensuring that all patients have access to timely, high quality emergency services". What is timely about adding hours to people's journey to hospital in emergency situations, as happens when emergency departments are closed, such as is happening in Roscommon? What is timely about sitting in accident and emergency for hours on end, as happens in most big hospitals in this city every day, particularly at weekends?

The Government amendment makes no reference to any of the specific hospitals mentioned in the Sinn Féin motion. This is no wonder as the pre-election commitments of both Fine Gael and the Labour Party in regard to these hospitals, such as Roscommon, Navan, Letterkenny, Portlaoise, Loughlinstown, Portluncula, Limerick, Clonmel, Mallow, Bantry and others, have all now been exposed for what they were, namely, attempts to deceive the people and to buy votes.

Recently, the Minister for Health, Deputy James Reilly, stated that the Government would be accepting the Trolley Watch figures of the INMO rather than the doctored figures we have seen and still see from the HSE and the national treatment purchase fund. This is a welcome move, and it is about time it happened. The Minister should also take heed of the INMO statement of this week, which reads: "The INMO...reaffirms its absolute conviction that the current policy of the HSE and Government, to reduce services in some hospitals and to centralise them in major centres, is ill-timed, will not succeed and will simply result in further misery for patients requiring inpatient care in a hospital bed in a proper ward." The INMO statement was based on its six-month comparative study, just published, which shows the disgraceful level of accident department overcrowding taking place in 2011 as compared to the same period in years since 2006.

With regard to 2011, the survey confirms over 46,000 people were on trolleys, having been admitted to a hospital, in the first six months of this year. This marks a 20% increase on the same period in 2010 and a 37% increase since 2006, when it was declared "a national emergency". There has been a dramatic increase in overcrowding in hospitals in the north-east

region, where other services have been curtailed and centralised into the already crowded two main centres. A significant deterioration is also happening in a number of other hospitals outside of Dublin and there has been a further deterioration in the greater Dublin area, which includes the major hospital in my constituency, St. James's Hospital, where numbers on trolleys and chairs in accident and emergency have risen continuously.

Little attention is being paid to the maternity hospitals. One of the largest is the Coombe hospital in my area, where there is the highest birth rate in the EU. Our maternity hospitals are struggling to cope, resulting in higher numbers of caesarean births but also in less time being spent in hospital by mothers who have given birth because they are literally being pushed out the door to make room for other expectant mothers.

I have spoken many times in the House about the situation in Crumlin children's hospital. The Government amendment refers to providing high quality diagnostic services. With regard to vital diagnostic services for children, what will the Government do about the 12 to 18 month waiting time for endoscopy for children at the only national centre, Crumlin children's hospital? All that is on the cards for that hospital this year is that it will have to curtail its services, close its operating theatre and restrict outpatient services because of a shortfall in funding, despite taking on extra patients and being more efficient and effective in the use of consultants, time and money. It is being punished, as it was in the past under the previous Government.

The Government has a choice, as do its Ministers and backbenchers. They should support the local and national hospitals, make a change and vote against the Government amendment.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: At the outset, I echo the comments of a number of previous speakers that health care is a fundamental right. Sinn Féin has proposed a health service based on universal public provision, one that provides full equality of access and is free at the point of delivery. Access should be based on need and paid for through progressive taxation. Instead, we have a rotten system which is driven by the three Gs of health care — genes, giros and geography. The other G, genius, is certainly not running the health service.

Those with chronic illnesses, earning just above the medical card threshold and living in rural Ireland, are worst affected. The Minister, the Department and the HSE would do well to recognise that Ireland is not the Netherlands, or anywhere else for that matter. The subtleties of this country, its demographics, landscape, transport infrastructure, and where and how people choose to live, need to be reflected in a health service which caters for the needs of all of the people equally. Instead, we have listened to consecutive Ministers talk about the transformation and reconfiguration agenda. Political decisions are cloaked in carefully selected, so-called expert opinions. Unfortunately, the actions which follow that talk consistently amount to major downgrading and reduction of services, and the lives of ordinary people are being put at risk.

The latest push to close accident and emergency services is happening despite the fact that a number of medical professionals have expressed their strong opposition. This includes doctors, nurses and other health care workers, as well as general practitioners, who are expected to pick up the pieces.

The Minister and gurus in the HSE have to be aware of the most comprehensive study carried out investigating the relationship between distance to hospital and patient mortality in emergencies which was conducted at the University of Sheffield in Britain. After analysing data from 10,315 cases, the research showed that increased distance was, in fact, associated with increased mortality. Every 10 km increase in straight-line distance was associated with approximately a 1% absolute increase in mortality. One might have thought such a study would be relevant, given the implications of the decisions being made in regard to Mallow, Bantry, Roscommon and other at-risk emergency departments.

[Deputy Sandra McLellan.]

This is the essence of the argument people in those affected areas want to make. It is what brought people onto the streets today and over the past number of weeks and, indeed, years. People instinctively know the downgrading of emergency departments will endanger lives and cost lives. The Minister knows this too. There is real evidence to prove it, not only from researchers in Sheffield but from families in this State who have already been affected by this change agenda in Monaghan, the mid-west and elsewhere.

We cannot forget that these decisions are being made in the shadow of a legacy of poor planning and a complete lack of foresight within health service delivery in Ireland. This Government seems intent on continuing in the same vein as the last Government.

Once again services are being cut back and downgraded, while the necessary provisions are not being put in place elsewhere. I have seen this happen in my own local hospital in Mallow where the accident and emergency department is on the Government's radar, but at the same time paramedic and primary care cover is also being downgraded. Crucial ambulance services are being replaced with first responder cars, while the number of SouthDoc out of hours cars is being reduced.

The people of Roscommon realised their worst fears when they heard the news yesterday that their accident and emergency department was to be demoted to being little more than a medical sorting office. They made their opinion about this decision known outside Leinster House and now inside this House their elected representatives and the representatives of all areas affected, including my constituency of Cork East, have a clear choice between supporting the Sinn Féin motion and retaining essential services or doing otherwise and guaranteeing the opposite. The decision is theirs.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I dtús báire, ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le gach éinne a tháinig amach ar an agóid inniu, go háirithe iad siúd ó Laois agus Ros Comáin. Tá ár gcóras sláinte ag dul in olcas mar gheall ar na ciorruithe atá curtha i bhfeidhm ag an Rialtas seo agus an Rialtas a chuaigh thart. Caithfidimid stad a chur leo. Tá na daoine ag fulaingt agus níl gá leis.

Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which the State has signed calls for the creation of conditions which ensure everyone medical services and attention in the event of sickness. Can we say with honesty that the State is fulfilling this basic right? Can we say that, regardless of wealth or geography, we are guaranteed adequate medical services and attention to ensure the highest level of attainable health, as is strived for in the covenant and demanded by those who pay their taxes every week? I am not alone in believing we cannot say this, certainly in this House. I hope the Government Members who have attempted to neuter our motion with their amendment will take the time to speak to the ordinary people who have rallied outside Leinster House in support of the principle of the motion. They have come from as far away as Roscommon and other places similarly affected by the Government's policy of treating the rights of the people as an afterthought with deference afforded to bankers, developers, judges and highly paid consultants.

I have spoken to nurses and doctors in my constituency who have told me horror stories about the way cuts, embargoes and other pressures are seriously damaging their ability to provide care. One nurse has told me that she feels she is merely going through the motions in providing a service because there are insufficient staff to provide real long-term benefits for patients who are struggling to keep their heads above water. I was told that it was not possible to provide cover for two staff who were injured for more than two months, with the result that nurses had to work additional overtime shifts, even though this required them to work beyond the limits of what was safe in providing patient care. Students have told me that their preceptors have no time to teach them. The most they can do is contribute to the most basic of work in

the hope of lightening the load of overburdened staff members who are already stressed by the damage the crisis is doing to patient care. One evening last week only two porters were on duty in one hospital in my constituency, which meant delays in the provision of X-rays, blood, urine and stool samples and two blood transfusions. Thankfully, the latter were not as urgent as was usually the case. In one hospital the number of intern doctors has been cut by one third for night shifts from midnight, placing further burdens on already overworked interns who are often dangerously tired in carrying out their vital duties. The stories of wards being used as excess accommodation for accident and emergency departments and rotating staff to make up for short-falls, even in specialised areas, were shocking to me, but for anyone professionally concerned with infection control and quality of care, they are heartbreaking and soul shattering. I feel for the people who have studied long and hard and dedicated themselves to the provision of care because they have been failed by this system.

We are also faced with reduced hours for home help services. My area of Dublin North West has a large population of older people, many of whom require help in order to retain their independence at home, but their independence is becoming more difficult to preserve because the amount of care they are receiving is decreasing. For several years I have heard, as I am sure have other Members, stories I have found to be unacceptable. People who need assistance are facing cuts in care hours from eight and ten hours per week to two or as little as one. For these reasons, I ask Deputies to support our motion.

Deputy Martin Ferris: While today's protests and the anger of people in Roscommon have brought the issue to a head, there has been mounting evidence of a crisis in accident and emergency departments. The problems have persisted for many years and they will not be solved by subjecting health services to more cutbacks.

Research published late last year found that only 13 of the 31 accident and emergency departments in the State were properly staffed because vacancies had not been filled. Enormous pressure was put on junior doctors to fill the gap. The long hours many of them had to work endangered their health as well as the health of their patients. While guarantees had been given that the accident and emergency department at Kerry General Hospital would be secure, the research found that its vacancy rate of 66% was the second highest in the State. The failure to fill necessary posts is imposing massive pressures on staff and impacts on the level of care provided for patients.

A report published by the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine criticised the dependence on junior doctors to staff accident and emergency wards and stated full-time staff needed to be appointed in order to ensure the efficient operation of the system. Instead, however, we are seeing a programme of cuts which will further impact on accident and emergency departments and, as we have seen, is already leading to closures. The cuts in the health service do not only impact on accident and emergency departments. For example, it is now common practice at Kerry General Hospital to discharge patients at weekends in order to free up beds. Staff are being forced to do this in order to cope with the pressure exerted, but patients who are discharged in this way often have to be readmitted. One individual who was terminally ill was discharged on a Friday, readmitted on a Sunday and died on a Monday. This is not the fault of the staff concerned who are working under enormous constraints and the problem is wider than the financial aspects. However, it is certain that closures and cuts as part of a money saving exercise are not going to provide the solution to the crisis.

The biggest problem with the accident and emergency departments at Kerry General Hospital and other locations is that the lack of beds prolongs the waiting time for treatment. As of 29 June, 29 surgical beds were closed at Kerry General Hospital. This means that patients in severe discomfort often have to spend long hours waiting before being seen. I received one

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report on a woman who had to wait almost 36 hours in the accident and emergency department before being given a bed.

The continued failure to open the much needed Tralee community hospital is also a huge issue locally. Millions of euro were spent on the construction of that hospital, but it lies idle.

Concerns have been expressed in Limerick about the future of accident and emergency services at the Mid Western Regional Hospital. It is feared that services may have to be curtailed from next week owing to a shortage of doctors. The chairperson of the hospital board has stated patients may have to be sent to Cork or Galway because the hospital may not be able to ensure full cover during night time hours.

I commend the hundreds of people from Roscommon and Portlaoise who stood outside Leinster House in the pouring rain to show their determination to prevent this from happening to them. They are prepared to fight back. People who are threatened with the removal of their rights and the closure of their accident and emergency departments need to tell the Labour Party which was so loud in opposition and its partner in government that they will not tolerate this without a fight. The Government will have to start listening to them.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): This Government's prime concern is the safety of patients. We will not stand over unsafe services. No one here would agree that an unsafe service should continue. We need the best possible service for patients in our emergency departments, inpatient services, day cases and outpatient departments. We want to achieve what is best for patients, and as quickly as possible.

While there is much analysis remaining, the picture so far shows that for stroke, cancer and heart attacks, in-hospital mortality rates vary widely. Some smaller hospitals have noticeably poorer mortality rates than larger hospitals. This supports the international evidence that smaller hospitals, with lower volumes and fewer support services, have poorer patient outcomes than larger hospitals with appropriate resources and patient volume.

The Minister has repeatedly stated that smaller hospitals should provide as wide a range of services to their local communities as possible. Smaller hospitals should be the cornerstone of local health care provision, with clear links to other services. They should provide a range of diagnostics and expanded elective day surgery and medical procedures. These should transfer from the larger hospitals, freeing these facilities up for more complex work. In addition, smaller hospitals should provide locally accessible outpatient care as well as access for GPs to services and diagnostics. That is the direction in which we are going.

We are implementing the best care model for complex and emergency cases. Highly trained ambulance personnel treat patients immediately at the scene and get them to the most appropriate — not necessarily the nearest — hospital as quickly as possible, giving a greater chance of survival. That is the key. Smaller hospitals should continue immediate and urgent treatment for less complex, non life-threatening cases, through urgent care centres which can manage most typical emergency presentations. This approach is endorsed by the Irish Association of Emergency Medicine, the medical director of the National Ambulance Service and the national programme director of the HSE's clinical programme on emergency medicine.

Our immediate problem is the world-wide NCHD shortage. The Minister intends to reintroduce temporary registration for overseas doctors, giving secure tenure for up to two years. Likewise, we will be sure they are here for two years. There are currently around 180 HSE vacancies. While some will be filled before 11 July, the HSE and hospitals are working on contingency arrangements, if required, to minimise any impact and to ensure safe delivery of

hospital services. I welcome Sinn Féin's support of the legislation that will be taken tomorrow and Friday to address that urgent matter.

It is unacceptable that some patients wait so long to be assessed and treated. This cannot be resolved in emergency departments or hospitals alone but must be done on a system-wide basis. The special delivery unit will unblock obstacles that stop patients being seen and treated quickly. It has started work already on emergency department issues and will also concentrate on inpatient and outpatient waiting times and access to diagnostics.

We intend to provide equal access to health services through a single-tier system supported by universal health insurance. Among the steps needed, the special delivery unit has already been mentioned. We must also reform primary care, with phased removal of cost barriers. We must move to integrated care in the primary and community sector. This work is under way. It has been accepted for many years that we should have the vast bulk of health care provided at primary level. This has not happened until now, and we are determined to make it happen.

If we want the best health system with the best outcomes for our patients, we must work together. We must deliver services at the right time, in the right place, to the right people. We cannot safely provide all services from all hospitals at all times. We can provide safe services across our whole system through larger and smaller hospitals, community and primary care. We are committed to driving the changes needed. Those changes are long overdue and, regrettably, they were not implemented by the previous Government. It will not be easy and not everyone will be happy, but it has to be done and this Government will see it through, because patient safety is our absolute priority.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Meath has had a hospital since 1767. For nearly 250 years, the people of Meath have been served by a local hospital. This hospital survived the 1798 rising, the disaster of the famine, two world wars, the Black and Tan war and the civil war. The hospital in Meath survived the hungry 30s and every recession since. In the 1960s, the population of Meath was about 100,000, yet the county had a fully functioning hospital. Today, the population of Meath is now 184,000, which is the highest population ever achieved in the county, yet services there are being slashed. Paediatric services have been lost, orthopaedic services have been reduced and suspended for months on end, and D-dimer blood testing is now outsourced. Interns have been removed from the hospital, surgeons have been removed and, indeed, suspended on the basis of evidence-free allegations. Training recognition has been withdrawn, leading to reductions in the number of junior doctors. Keyhole surgery has been cancelled and doctor on call services have been cut by two thirds. Psychiatric services are to go before 2012, and since September all acute surgical services have been cancelled. Nearby alternative hospitals are not funded to accept the overflow and cannot cope. The cuts have been chaotic and if, God forbid, a miner were to suffer an accident in Tara Mines, there is a good chance he would not be able to survive, given how far he is underground.

We have had a massive campaign in response to this. Fifteen thousand people have signed the Save Navan Hospital petition, 8,000 people signed up to the Facebook page, while more than 10,000 people marched in Navan last October in support of the hospital. We invited Deputy James Reilly, then Opposition spokesperson on health, to address that march, and he speedily accepted. He promised a return of surgery services and a new regional hospital to be built within five years in Navan. Surgery services have not been returned and in recent weeks senior medical professionals in Meath have stated to me that the situation in our accident and emergency department is under serious threat. If these cuts go ahead, it will be clear that the promises made four months ago by Fine Gael and Labour will have been replaced by the continuation of normal HSE strategy.

[Deputy Peadar Tóibín.]

That HSE strategy has been simple. The HSE reduces funding. This leads to the HSE making allegations of a reduction in patient safety. This in turn leads to service being closed down. If patient safety were at the heart of these decisions, this would not happen. Money is at the heart of these decisions. A recent INMO survey stated that more than 46,000 people were on trolleys in the first six months of this year. This marks a 37% increase since 2006 when it was declared a national emergency. An organisation that allows this to continue is not prioritising patient safety and is effectively prioritising the payment of private debt. If this Government accepts the straitjacket of the EU and the IMF, patients will die and people in provincial towns throughout the State will see a real reduction in their own life expectancy. Each individual Fine Gael and Labour Deputy is at a crossroads. Either they bunker down behind the EU and IMF plan and slash services, or they stand up for their local constituents and the people of Ireland, grow a backbone and support our motion.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: We have heard much about Roscommon, Sligo and Portlaoise, but I wish to talk about St. Mary's Orthopaedic Hospital which is in the heart of my constituency of Cork North-Central. I acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the other three Deputies from the constituency, Deputies Dara Murphy and Billy Kelleher and the Minister of State, Deputy Kathleen Lynch.

As many Deputies will not be too familiar with the orthopaedic hospital, I will put on record some points in regard to it. It is sited on the north side of Cork city, has one of the lowest infection rates of any hospital in this State, is located on 30 acres of land, more than half of which is green open space that can be developed, and has all the ancillary services one would expect of a local hospital. Despite all these positives, someone somewhere in the HSE came up with the bright idea that we should transfer the orthopaedic services from the hospital. As people can imagine, this proposal was met with bewilderment and outrage by the local community and, as a result, the proposal to transfer all orthopaedic services from the hospital was a very contentious election issue.

On 4 February of this year, the then Fine Gael candidate and now Fine Gael Deputy, Dara Murphy, issued a press release on the future of the orthopaedic hospital. In the statement he said Fine Gael would stop the transfer of orthopaedic services from St. Mary's hospital if it got into power the following month, that he had received a cast iron guarantee from the Fine Gael deputy leader and spokesperson on health, Deputy James Reilly, that the transfer would be stopped, that this was a commitment it would absolutely deliver on and that it was an absolute cast iron guarantee.

Naturally enough this statement raised a few eyebrows in the media in Cork so they went looking for Deputy Reilly to get his views. Subsequent quotes attributed to him in response to the press release issued by Deputy Murphy were as follows. He said he supported the call by the now Deputy Dara Murphy in regard to the retention of orthopaedic services at St. Mary's hospital and that the proposal to transfer services made no sense for four reasons. He said clinical outcomes would be better at St. Mary's owing to the low infection rate at the hospital, the move to the South Infirmarium-Victoria Hospital would reduce the number of available beds from 125 to 80, which is a 36% reduction, that the South Infirmarium-Victoria Hospital was on a cramped city centre site while St. Mary's had 30 acres of space on which to expand, and that instead of downsizing St. Mary's, child and family services, ambulance services and community health services should be there.

This statement begs the question about what has changed. When Deputy Reilly found himself in the position of Minister for Health, instead of standing over what he said before the election, he decided to change his mind and hold a review on the future of orthopaedic services at St.

Mary's. This was despite everything he said only a few weeks previously about the proposal not making any sense whatsoever. The review was conducted by officials from the Department and we now know they reported back to the Minister in the past fortnight. The contents of the review have not been published so I can only guess as to what was contained in it. However, whatever it was, it must have been damning because the Minister has now done a complete U-turn and agreed to the transfer of orthopaedic services. As a result of this U-turn, I call on the Minister to publish in full the results of the review as well as all correspondence received by his Department in regard to the orthopaedic hospital while this review was being undertaken.

This is important not only because of the obvious U-turn but because the Minister stated in this House on 28 June in response to a question tabled by Deputy Kelleher that he consulted local representatives as part of the review. I am not sure who these representatives were but I can say who they were not. They were not the elected Members for the area nor were they representatives of the staff or the patients.

The Minister might think this issue has been put to bed with the decision he announced last week but the campaign to retain the orthopaedic services at St. Mary's hospital continues and is far from finished. In fact, this Friday, campaigners will hold another rally at the hospital. We will fight tooth and nail to force the Minister to stand by his pre-election commitments. That is all we want. We are not looking for the impossible. We are not asking the Minister to fly a rocket to the moon or rush a beach head during wartime. We are just asking him to stand by what he said a few short weeks ago. What he said does not make sense.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: I applaud all the people from Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and elsewhere who are in the Visitors Gallery and who are standing in the rain outside the gates of the House. If I might use Deputy Ó Caoláin's words, they are the eyes and ears of their community and they have come here to see how Sinn Féin debates to safeguard our health services. I hope they will go back to those communities and report fully on the debate and on its outcome.

I thank all those who took part in the debate, in particular those opposite who might do the courageous and right thing and oppose the Government and Fianna Fáil amendments and support the Sinn Féin motion. This motion offers Deputies of all parties an opportunity to vote in favour of accessible, quality hospital care for our people, but it does something more than that. It also offers all of us an opportunity to demonstrate that politics can work and that politicians can be trusted.

The three most scary words in Ireland currently are "health services reform". People are scared for very good reason. They saw the Minister's predecessor, Mary Harney, in a Fianna Fáil-led government, talk about health services reform. What did she do? She dismantled a relatively good service and left us with the shambles we now have. Is it any wonder that people are scared when they hear the words "health services reform" spoken by a politician?

Tonight every Deputy has an opportunity to stand up and be counted. Some will have to decide whether they are here under false pretences and will have to deal with their consciences. Others will consider doing the honourable and honest thing and will consider voting against the Government and Fianna Fáil amendments and voting in favour of the Sinn Féin motion.

The Fianna Fáil amendment means nothing but then how could it? Its members are the very people who started this. Fianna Fáil closed the accident and emergency departments in Monaghan, Dundalk, Nenagh and Ennis and took cancer services from Sligo General Hospital. Now Roscommon County Hospital's accident and emergency department is the first of a batch of hospital accident and emergency departments to be closed under a Fine Gael-Labour Party Government.

[Deputy Michael Colreavy.]

The Minister for Health and the Taoiseach have repeated the mantra, “Big hospital safe, small hospital unsafe”. That is a mantra for taking services from small hospitals. Small hospitals is a misnomer. We are not only talking about accident and emergency services. It will start with accident and emergency services but it will move on to other services very quickly. We are talking about centralising everything in a handful of regional centres. If, as the Minister said yesterday, patient throughput is a key determinant in regard to the quality and outcome of care, how come small private hospitals can and are allowed to run cancer services? If the hospital is private, it does not matter but if it is public, we must centralise and regionalise.

Hospitals are not doctor fattening units. They are places to which ill and injured people go. How safe are the overcrowded units in our large regional hospitals? What risk assessment has the Minister or any agency done on whether the hospitals adjoining Roscommon can carry the additional burden that will be placed on them because of the closure of accident and emergency services in Roscommon?

As the Minister will know, prior to the last general election, Fine Gael and Labour Party candidates promised unconditionally that Sligo General Hospital would have full breast cancer services restored within 100 days of them taking office or they would resign their seats. The Minister knows that promise was made and there is plenty of evidence of same. It is also probable that those Deputies would not be here if they had not made that unconditional promise. Are they here under false pretences? It is now very clear that they have a choice. They can vote against the Fianna Fáil and Government amendments and in favour of the Sinn Féin motion. Otherwise, they will be voting to support their party and against the interests and wishes of those they pretend to represent. I call on them to do the right thing or resign.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 96; Níl, 47.

Tá

Bannon, James.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burton, Joan.
 Butler, Ray.
 Buttimer, Jerry.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Byrne, Eric.
 Cannon, Ciarán.
 Carey, Joe.
 Coffey, Paudie.
 Collins, Áine.
 Conaghan, Michael.
 Conlan, Seán.
 Connaughton, Paul J.
 Conway, Ciara.
 Coonan, Noel.
 Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Creed, Michael.
 Creighton, Lucinda.
 Daly, Jim.
 Deasy, John.
 Deering, Pat.
 Doherty, Regina.
 Donohoe, Paschal.
 Dowds, Robert.

Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Fitzpatrick, Peter.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Griffin, Brendan.
 Hannigan, Dominic.
 Harrington, Noel.
 Harris, Simon.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Heydon, Martin.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Humphreys, Kevin.
 Keating, Derek.
 Keaveney, Colm.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kelly, Alan.
 Kenny, Seán.
 Kyne, Seán.
 Lawlor, Anthony.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 Lyons, John.
 McCarthy, Michael.

Tá—*continued*

McEntee, Shane.
 McFadden, Nicky.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McLoughlin, Tony.
 McNamara, Michael.
 Maloney, Eamonn.
 Mathews, Peter.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.
 Mulherin, Michelle.
 Murphy, Dara.
 Nash, Gerald.
 Neville, Dan.
 Nolan, Derek.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Donovan, Patrick.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.

O'Mahony, John.
 O'Reilly, Joe.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Phelan, John Paul.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Brendan.
 Shatter, Alan.
 Sherlock, Sean.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Twomey, Liam.
 Varadkar, Leo.
 Walsh, Brian.
 White, Alex.

Níl

Adams, Gerry.
 Boyd Barrett, Richard.
 Browne, John.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Collins, Joan.
 Collins, Niall.
 Colreavy, Michael.
 Cowen, Barry.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Daly, Clare.
 Doherty, Pearse.
 Donnelly, Stephen.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Ellis, Dessie.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Luke 'Ming'.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Halligan, John.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Healy-Rae, Michael.
 Higgins, Joe.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Michael P.

Lowry, Michael.
 Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
 McConalogue, Charlie.
 McDonald, Mary Lou.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 McLellan, Sandra.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Murphy, Catherine.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Brien, Jonathan.
 Pringle, Thomas.
 Ross, Shane.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Stanley, Brian.
 Tóibín, Peadar.
 Wallace, Mick.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Seán Ó Fearghaíl.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 96; Níl, 46.

Tá

Bannon, James.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burton, Joan.

Butler, Ray.
 Buttimer, Jerry.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Byrne, Eric.
 Cannon, Ciarán.

Tá—*continued*

Carey, Joe.
 Coffey, Paudie.
 Collins, Áine.
 Conaghan, Michael.
 Conlan, Seán.
 Connaughton, Paul J.
 Conway, Ciara.
 Coonan, Noel.
 Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Creed, Michael.
 Creighton, Lucinda.
 Daly, Jim.
 Deasy, John.
 Deering, Pat.
 Doherty, Regina.
 Donohoe, Paschal.
 Dowds, Robert.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Fitzpatrick, Peter.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Griffin, Brendan.
 Hannigan, Dominic.
 Harrington, Noel.
 Harris, Simon.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Heydon, Martin.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Humphreys, Kevin.
 Keating, Derek.
 Keaveney, Colm.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kelly, Alan.
 Kenny, Seán.
 Kyne, Seán.
 Lawlor, Anthony.

Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 Lyons, John.
 McCarthy, Michael.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McFadden, Nicky.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McLoughlin, Tony.
 McNamara, Michael.
 Maloney, Eamonn.
 Mathews, Peter.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.
 Mulherin, Michelle.
 Murphy, Dara.
 Nash, Gerald.
 Neville, Dan.
 Nolan, Derek.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Donovan, Patrick.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Reilly, Joe.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Phelan, John Paul.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Brendan.
 Shatter, Alan.
 Sherlock, Sean.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Twomey, Liam.
 Varadkar, Leo.
 Walsh, Brian.
 White, Alex.

Níl

Adams, Gerry.
 Boyd Barrett, Richard.
 Browne, John.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Collins, Joan.
 Collins, Niall.
 Colreavy, Michael.
 Cowen, Barry.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Daly, Clare.
 Doherty, Pearse.
 Donnelly, Stephen.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Ellis, Dessie.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Luke 'Ming'.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Halligan, John.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Healy-Rae, Michael.
 Higgins, Joe.

Kelleher, Billy.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Lowry, Michael.
 Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
 McConalogue, Charlie.
 McDonald, Mary Lou.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 McLellan, Sandra.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Murphy, Catherine.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Brien, Jonathan.
 Pringle, Thomas.
 Ross, Shane.

Níl—*continued*

Smith, Brendan.
Stanley, Brian.
Tóibín, Peadar.

Wallace, Mick.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Seán Ó Fearghaíl.

Question declared carried.

Adjournment Debate

Special Educational Needs

Deputy James Bannon: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for affording me time to debate this important issue, namely, the need for the Minister for Education and Skills to reverse cutbacks which are impacting adversely on young adults with special needs at St. Brigid's school, Mullingar, County Westmeath. This school is suffering from changes of services, coupled with staff reductions, which have directly affected the quality of education available for students. The valuable work carried out by the teachers and pupils is being further undermined by the refusal of the Department of Education and Skills to upgrade current substandard facilities, especially in the built environment. The dreaded word in education is "cutbacks". For St. Brigid's school it is especially heartbreaking as the work they carry out with children and young adults with special needs is, by its very nature, dependent on a reasonable level of staffing and adequate resources.

It says it all that an educational establishment should tell me that it feels as though its pupils are less valued than their mainstream peers. Should pupils with special needs not be entitled to special care and provision by the Department of Education and Skills? Dedicated, extremely talented and hard working staff can only do so much, and, believe me, the personnel at St. Brigid's give above and beyond the call of duty. However, if the official backup and support is missing, it makes for an uphill struggle. At present, 80% of the pupils at St. Brigid's have not had their much-needed psychological assessments which are essential to access the appropriate response and resources needed. These reviews are sourced through the Department of Education and Skills and, owing to the lack of such assessment, the school is receiving services on a crisis basis only. This fails to meet the ever-growing and complex needs of the pupils. St. Brigid's has nine classes with nine class teachers, 12 special needs assistants, SNAs, and 81 students who need much greater provision, especially in terms of special assistance. Pupils at the school include those with mild or moderate general learning difficulties, severe behavioural difficulties, sensory impairments, both visual and hearing, physical disabilities and autism. These diverse educational needs cannot be met without enhanced support by the Department. A high level of professional frustration is felt by the staff as they struggle to meet these needs with limited resources.

St. Brigid's primarily serves students from Longford and Westmeath, with some travelling from counties Meath, Roscommon and Offaly. The school's motto is "to learn, to love, to live", with student successes celebrated by fellow students, parents, teachers, principal, staff and the board of management. If pride in achievement were the only requirement, St. Brigid's would have no problems. Unfortunately, practical resources are essential to the continued success of this school. This school is an integral part of Mullingar and the surrounding areas. Its pupils are part of the community, which gives them great support. It is time, however, that the Government matched that support and goodwill. Apparently, in the view of the Department of Education and Skills, a school cannot be both special and disadvantaged at the same time.

[Deputy James Bannon.]

However, both descriptions are equally relevant to St. Brigid's. This fails to be realised in terms of funding and resources.

The school has been told it is to lose further resources, including two more SNAs, both of whom have worked in the school for seven years, an extra quota woodwork teacher who has been with the school for two years and one resource teacher who worked in the school for five years. The reality is that if the pupils at St. Brigid's were enrolled in mainstream schools, their support needs would total in excess of 54 SNAs and 11 resource teachers, compared with an allocation, as previously mentioned, of nine class teachers and 12 SNAs.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Time up, Deputy.

Deputy James Bannon: There are currently six applications for SNA support for six existing students at the school.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Time up, Deputy.

Deputy James Bannon: There has been no reply from the National Council for Special Education, NCSE. The board of management of St. Brigid's has also applied for the redesignation of two classes to reflect more effectively the abilities and needs of the students.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Time up, Deputy.

Deputy James Bannon: One of the most pressing issues at St. Brigid's is one of space. A recent application for the replacement of classrooms at the school has been refused. The system is failing St. Brigid's school. The dedicated staff has high expectations, not only from the pupils but also from themselves.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I must ask Deputy Bannon to finish.

Deputy James Bannon: Leaving this school to cope as best it can without essential help is educationally and morally wrong. I ask the Minister to rectify the problem that is hindering the progress of this remarkable facility which gives so much to those who are so dependent on it for the life chances others take for granted. I thank the Acting Chairman for his endurance.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I am taking this matter on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Quinn. I thank Deputy Bannon for raising this issue as it gives me an opportunity to clarify the position on the matter raised by him.

I wish to clarify for the Deputy that the Department has always valued the contribution made by special schools to the continuum of provision being made for children with special educational needs. The programme for Government clearly states education will be a priority for the Government and that we will endeavour to protect and enhance the educational experience of children, young people and students. In this regard, the Department has prioritised the level of supports being provided for special schools. It has issued Circular 0042/2011 to all special schools to advise them of the staffing arrangements which will apply in special schools for the next school year. While the data available indicate that there is a surplus of teaching posts throughout the special school sector, current teaching staff levels will be retained in special schools for the 2011-12 school year at existing levels, except in the case of schools with excess teaching posts which are losing such posts through retirement. The existing level of special needs assistant, SNA, supports will be rolled over in special schools for the coming school year, other than for schools with declining enrolments, with a review to take place in the autumn of the 2011-12 school year.

9 o'clock

The school in question, St. Brigid's special school, is a designated school for children with mild general learning disability. Such schools operate at a pupil-teacher ratio of 1:11. I understand the school currently has 80 pupils enrolled and a staffing level of ten teachers, a principal and 14 special needs assistants. This results in an overall staffing to pupil ratio of 1 staff member per 4 pupils in the school. The nature of the disabilities of the children attending the school means that they have significant education and care needs. However, this is reflected in the level of staffing and SNA support allocated to the school. The NCSE has advised the Department that it considers this level of staffing to be sufficient to meet the special educational and care needs of all of pupils enrolled in the school.

I wish to clarify for the Deputy that the Department recognises that staffing levels and pupil-teacher ratios should reflect the complexity of need within individual schools and should not be solely determined by a special school's designation. As such, special schools will be staffed based on their actual current pupil profiles and the disability category of each pupil, as opposed to primarily by school designation. It is intended that school staffing schedules will be reviewed and updated each year by the NCSE.

I wish to confirm that the Department has received an application from St. Brigid's special school for improved accommodation. The application is being assessed and the school management will be notified of the outcome of the assessment in due course. The Department will continue to liaise with the school authority in this regard. I again thank the Deputy for bringing the matter before the House.

Health Services

Deputy Brendan Griffin: Recently I had the opportunity to visit the acquired brain injury rehabilitation centre in Castleisland, County Kerry, which is administered by Acquired Brain Injury Ireland. The visit was an eye-opener. I have some experience of acquired brain injury in my family, but the visit will stay with me. Many of those attending the centre have been the victims of road or various other accidents or are people who got sick as a result of various infections or viruses, etc. which resulted in acquired brain injury. The service being provided in Castleisland is fantastic. It is the proper model for dealing with people with acquired brain injury and to help them to be rehabilitated and live as independent a life as possible. The service is run by fantastic professionals who do a wonderful job in which they are supported by the HSE, Kerry County Council and other agencies.

One major issue is the great stigma attached to acquired brain injury. People to whom I spoke at the centre took the view that the stigma of disability was attached to them. Rather than being seen as people with disabilities, they would prefer to be seen as people in rehabilitation.

Sadly, not everyone who acquires a brain injury in Ireland has the opportunity to avail of rehabilitation services. That is why I raise this important issue tonight. We must change our approach to the way we deal with ABI. We must ensure everyone who suffers a brain injury is given the opportunity to be rehabilitated. Some 10,000 people acquire a brain injury in Ireland every year, but only one in four get into the National Rehabilitation Hospital. This means some 7,500 do not get into the hospital. I realise there are other forms of rehabilitation and that other services are provided for those who acquire a brain injury. However, we must adopt a more community-focused approach. That is what I seek in the lifetime of the Government.

Some of the ABI injuries which I have encountered and of which I have been made aware by the professionals working in the field could have been prevented. The need for cyclists to wear helmets has been highlighted to me. It is simple, but many of those who suffer an ABI in Ireland every year are cyclists who fall off their bicycles or are involved in road traffic collisions.

[Deputy Brendan Griffin.]

We must try to tackle this issue. It is a small simple matter but significant nonetheless and we must consider it.

The implementation of the national policy on and strategy for the provision of neuro-rehabilitation services in Ireland will make a difference, as the professionals working in the field are aware. The ABI model should be extended, where possible, but funding must also be made available. There must be understanding in the community and a focus on this model. That has not happened to date as much as we would have wished.

I would be grateful if the Minister of State gave this issue her attention during her tenure. This is an important matter and the numbers affected are considerable, some 10,000 people every year. We could start by trying to address the problem of stigma attached to ABI and proceed from there. Those who run the service are keen to help more people to help themselves, but they need support to do so. I hope the Minister of State will be in a position to deliver it.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: I am pleased to take the opportunity to outline the position on the matter raised by the Deputy which I thank him for raising.

The aim of rehabilitation is to enable the person to achieve the highest possible level of independence. Desired outcomes range from a return to full independence in social and work activities to a person requiring long-term support and care but with a higher level of independence than in the absence of rehabilitation. Current services available to persons with an acquired brain injury, ABI, include: acute hospital services; the National Rehabilitation Hospital; multi-disciplinary community services; long-term assisted living supports; and rehabilitative training services. These services are provided directly by the HSE and several non-statutory organisations.

Within disability services, the two main organisations funded to meet the needs of service users with an ABI nationally are Acquired Brain Injury Ireland and Headway Ireland. Acquired Brain Injury Ireland works in partnership with the HSE to provide a range of flexible and tailor-made services for people with an acquired brain injury in direct response to local identified needs. Services provided by Acquired Brain Injury Ireland nationwide include: 14 assisted living services; home and community rehabilitation and outreach services; day resource services; family support services, home liaison and social work; psychological services; and acquired brain injury awareness information, training and education programmes. In partnership with the HSE, Headway Ireland provides a range of services to people with an ABI. The services include day services, psychology and social work services, community integration programmes, supported employment, family support and rehabilitation training programmes.

Acquired Brain Injury Ireland received funding of €8.011 million in 2010, while Headway Ireland received funding amounting to €2.65 million in the same year. Both the Department of Health and the HSE have recognised for some time the need to develop comprehensive and integrated rehabilitation services. The Department of Health and the HSE have developed a national policy and strategy for the provision of neuro-rehabilitation services. The Department hopes to publish the strategy soon. The report recognises that given the current economic climate, the focus in the short to medium term must be on reconfiguration of services, structures and resources and the enhancement of the skills and competencies. Implementation of the neuro-rehabilitation strategy will require both an executive and a clinical lead who will work jointly at a national level to progress the implementation. To support the recommendations contained in the report, the HSE national service plan for 2011 includes a commitment to appoint a national clinical lead for rehabilitation to develop an implementation plan and an implementation structure for the provision of neuro-rehabilitation services. Implementation

will have a particular focus on the development of a range of integrated services at regional and local level and to ensure regions have the capacity to respond to local needs. As part of its development of clinical care programmes, the quality and clinical care directorate of the HSE has established a rehabilitation medicine programme. This programme will improve and standardise patient care throughout the organisation by bringing together clinical disciplines and enabling them to share innovative solutions to deliver greater benefits to all users of HSE services.

The work of the rehabilitation medicine programme will be to achieve three main objectives, namely, to improve the quality of care, to improve access to services and to improve cost effectiveness. The HSE has appointed a clinical lead who will have responsibility for both the rehabilitation medicine programme and the implementation of the neuro-rehabilitation strategy. The appointment of a single clinical lead for both interrelated programmes will help to improve service quality, effectiveness and service user access and will ensure patient care is provided in the service setting most appropriate to the individual's needs. I again thank the Deputy for raising this issue, in which I have a deep personal interest.

Hospital Services

Deputy David Stanton: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me to raise this issue this evening and I thank the Minister of State for her attendance. I am sure she has a great awareness of and a deep interest in this issue as well. At the outset, I will outline the historical background. In 2006, the HSE decided to procure a PET-CT scanner for Cork University Hospital, CUH. In 2008, planning permission was granted for a €6.85 million diagnostic and treatment facility. Construction began in 2009 and in July of that year, it was advised that the PET scanners in CUH and St. James's Hospital were near completion. As the scanner in St. James's Hospital has been in operation for some time, what is the delay in the CUH? Why is its scanner not up and running?

I have been raising this issue for quite some time and in November 2010, the HSE advised that a total of 5,551 PET scans were carried out in the eight months from January to August 2010. The Minister of State might indicate at some point how many scans were carried out altogether in 2010 and to date in 2011, how many people in the HSE south region are awaiting PET scans and how long must they wait before being scanned because they must travel to Dublin for them. By September 2010, I understand that more than €1 million had been spent by HSE south on PET scans in Dublin, which sounds like a terrible waste when a €6.85 million facility lies idle in Cork.

During an Adjournment debate in November 2010, I was informed that funding had been made available for a consultant radiologist with a special interest in PET-CT and that this post was to be considered by the HSE's consultant appointments advisory committee at its November meeting. I was further informed that the recruitment process for a number of clinical support staff would commence in January 2011. As it was intended to proceed with the PET-CT service at CUH early in 2011, I thought everything was fine. On 14 February, I was informed that a letter of approval for the post of consultant radiologist with a special interest in PET-CT was received from the consultant and that sanction had also been received to recruit a principal physicist. On 22 June, six years after the original decision, I was advised that the CUH was now working on the final phase of the commencement of the PET-CT service and that the HSE national recruitment office was arranging to advertise for the post of clinical specialist radiographer. I also was advised that it was arranging to advertise for two senior radiographer posts and that because it was planned to have the service in operation by the end of the fourth quarter of 2011, until then patients would be obliged to continue to travel to Dublin for scans.

[Deputy David Stanton.]

Why is it taking so long to get this service up and running? It is an awful shame that this service, costing €6.85 million, is lying idle while in the meantime people, many of whom are quite ill, must travel to Dublin at great cost and inconvenience. I ask the Minister of State to find out and then inform Members of the reason for the delay, what has been holding up the service and the date on which it will be in operation. Will this be done by the end of the year? I note the project's history and suggest that if this continues for much longer, the scanner will go the way of the electronic voting machines as the technology will be out of date. This makes no sense and I hope the Minister of State has some good news.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: It probably is unusual for Ministers not to read out their scripts in response to Adjournment matters but having heard what the Deputy had to say, were I to do I would be embarrassed, which he would not like. I believe the reply in the script is precisely the same as that which the Deputy has been getting all through the years. Yes, a principal physicist now has been hired but that is about it. The other posts as listed are being advertised. I will not read out the response I have to hand but having heard the Deputy's contribution, I will make further and more in-depth inquiries. I will find out what is the delay, whether the posts have been advertised and, if so, whether there has been a response and will then revert to the Deputy.

Deputy David Stanton: I thank the Minister of State.

Health Services

Deputy Ciarán Lynch: I thank the Minister of State for coming into the Chamber to debate paediatric diabetes services, which is an issue with which she has great familiarity. I am sure other Members present also have been contacted lately by constituents and parents on this matter. There are almost 4,000 children with type 1 diabetes in Ireland, which is an autoimmune condition that cannot be prevented or reversed and the incidence of which has doubled in the past 20 years. These children attend hospital an average of four to five times a year to monitor their diabetes. Monitoring children and adolescents with diabetes in hospital aims to limit damage that diabetes can cause to the eyes, kidneys, nerves and smaller blood vessels as a child grows older.

The long-term complications of type 1 diabetes like retinopathy, kidney disease, nerve and microvascular damage cost the health service millions of euro each year. The short-term complications among children with diabetes usually arise from low blood sugars and very high blood sugars and result in hundreds of children being admitted to hospital accident and emergency units nationwide each year. The fact is that 50% of children and adolescents with diabetes will have some form of serious and costly long-term diabetes complication by the time they reach 30 years of age. However, for many children with diabetes intensive treatment such as, for example, insulin pumps, can hugely reduce the development of long and short-term complications.

At present, 21 hospitals provide diabetes care to children but only three hospitals in Dublin are adequately resourced to provide intensive treatment to children who could benefit from improved control of their diabetes. The 2008 diabetes expert advisory group report admitted that "Ireland has [a] very poor paediatric diabetes care [service], with over half the patients having no access to a proper multidisciplinary team and many of the rest travelling long distances for care", such as the cases to which I refer this evening. Children with diabetes outside Dublin are at a geographical disadvantage because of a lack of local services. Those in Dublin, where there are services, are at a numerical disadvantage because so many children from outside Dublin are forced to travel here. Dublin services are being stretched at both levels, the

care for those in the Dublin area and the care of children from outside the Dublin region. Dublin services are literally inundated with referrals of children and adolescents with diabetes from the rest of Ireland.

The proposal by Diabetes Action has the full support of all the paediatricians and nurses working with children and adolescents. I am aware also that the Department, the HSE and the new national clinical lead in diabetes, plan to discuss a model of care for children with diabetes in the coming weeks. This is a welcome development.

I ask the Minister of State what measures the Department and the HSE plan to take to balance this system and to make treatments equitably available to all children with diabetes. The Minister of State will be aware that Diabetes Action is proposing the establishment of regional teams or networks of clinicians who would offer intensive treatment at the 21 hospitals where diabetes care is currently given. The reorganisation being sought seems to involve only a modest increase in staffing resources and it should be given full and proper consideration.

In my constituency of Cork South-Central, Cork University Hospital, which serves over 300 children and adolescents with diabetes, will have a new consultant who will be well placed to deliver intensive treatments for type 1 diabetes to County Cork and County Kerry but he will need more nursing and dietetic support. While the arrival of the consultant is welcome, a support team will be required. In the delay of those additional appointments being made, in Cork an unknown number estimated to be between 40 and 60 children have been referred to Dublin hospitals in an attempt to access intensive treatment for diabetes, such as insulin pump treatment, which is not available in CUH. Referrals from across the country have congested the Dublin diabetes services and have robbed CUH of the opportunity to develop the expertise to offer these services to the whole HSE south region.

The reality of the current arrangements leads to Cork children and their parents facing four to five trips to Dublin hospitals each year. This affects school attendance for children and annual leave for parents. The most unsatisfactory and potentially dangerous effect of this situation is that CUH does not have access to the child's Dublin file in the event of an emergency admission to CUH because of their diabetes or indeed any medical condition.

I ask the Minister of State what steps will be taken by her Department with regard to diabetes services in the Cork region and the southern region of Cork and Kerry.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: Currently it is estimated there are between 3,000 to 4,000 children and young adults under 16 years of age with diabetes in this country. The majority of patients have type 1 diabetes, more than 90%, but unfortunately there is an increasing number of young patients developing type 2 diabetes. The incidence of type 1 diabetes is also increasing by about 2% to 3% per year and experts anticipate that over the next ten to 15 years the incidence of type 1 diabetes will double.

Type 1 diabetes is a particularly complex condition in children and young adults and so it is recommended that their care be delivered in a multidisciplinary setting with access to a consultant paediatric endocrinologist, paediatric diabetes specialist nurse, paediatric specialist dietician, psychologist and social worker. Because of the complexity of the condition and the significant dangers of hypoglycaemia there can be a clinical advantage in having continuous subcutaneous insulin infusion therapy for children and young adults with type 1 diabetes.

The HSE has established a national clinical programme for diabetes in 2010 with the express aim of defining the way diabetic clinical services should be delivered, resourced and measured. One of the key priorities is to facilitate future organised care and screening for diabetes-related complications. There are two proposed models of care to improve the situation for paediatric diabetes care.

[Deputy Kathleen Lynch.]

The first model is from the HSE expert advisory group report, chaired by Dr. Colm Costigan, paediatric endocrinologist in Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children in Crumlin. This model proposes that care be centralised for each region in a dedicated paediatric-adolescent diabetes centre looking after at least 150 children-adolescents and ideally, the centre should be in a regional hospital that has an adult diabetes centre to facilitate transition to adulthood. The centre should be led by a paediatrician with a special interest and training in diabetes. The report also recommended amalgamation of the Dublin centres into a national tertiary centre that would act as a resource to assist the regional centralisation.

The second model comes from the recent Diabetes Federation of Ireland Diabetes Action report. This report recommends the establishment of eight to ten regional networks with the three existing Dublin centres acting as tertiary reference centres and continuing to see one third of the national paediatric-adolescent diabetes population. Within each hospital in the region from existing resources, a paediatric nurse would be identified to care for children with diabetes in that hospital. The network team would deliver care at existing centres around the country and travel to outreach clinics as required. To move this plan forward, the national clinical leads for diabetes and paediatrics are to meet in the next couple of weeks to propose the following: the establishment of a joint subgroup with representatives from the paediatric and diabetes working groups to address paediatric diabetes care; to perform a gap analysis to determine the current existing diabetes service across the country for paediatrics and young adolescents; to agree on a model of care for children and adolescents with diabetes; to standardise paediatric diabetes emergency care across the country; to standardise hospital diabetes care across the country; to develop criteria for use of continuous subcutaneous insulin infusion therapy in children and adolescents with type 1 diabetes; and to work on prevention and public health policy to prevent and to aid early detection of diabetes in young children and adolescents.

Ultimately, the function of the HSE national programme for diabetes, among others, is to consider which model is most appropriate and it is working to this end. In parallel, the Department of Health and the HSE will be meeting the Diabetes Federation of Ireland with a view to progressing the issues around the appropriate model of care for children and adolescents with diabetes.

Finally, there have been the following important developments in this area. The national diabetes programme is continuing the development of a national diabetic retinopathy screening programme. While retinopathy screening is continuing in the north-west region, the intention is that services be rolled-out nationally in 2012. This programme is significant because diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness and serious visual impairment in Ireland. A total of 90% of people with diabetes will develop retinopathy while 10% will be sight threatened if undetected and not treated. A national foot-care model has been agreed. The aim for 2011 is to establish 16 specialist multidisciplinary foot care teams across the country in line with indicative national hospital reconfiguration which will have different levels of care for patients depending on their risk of diabetic foot disease. Taken together, it is envisaged that these planned services, once operational, will enhance overall diabetes care provided for children and adolescents in Ireland.

I thank the Deputy and I hope we can at long last provide a service to these people.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.30 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 7 July 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 8, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 9 to 20, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 21 to 32, inclusive, answered orally.

Tourism Development

33. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to better support tourism in rural areas; and the percentage of the overall budget allocated to developing rural tourism. [18900/11]

35. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to support tourism in the regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18665/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 33 and 35 together.

The Government recognises that the tourism sector is very important to all the regions of Ireland. It generates an estimated employment of 170,000, spread throughout the country and much of this in rural areas.

The Government's recent Jobs Initiative has placed tourism nationally and regionally at the heart of our economic recovery, recognising its vital contribution to employment, economic activity and exports. The decision to reduce the level of VAT on a range of labour-intensive tourism services from 13.5% to 9% with effect from 1 July 2011 is a major concession, which provides an opportunity to enhance further the competitiveness of our tourism product.

The Visa Waiver Scheme will encourage visitors from emerging markets to add Ireland to a trip to the UK. The Government has also significantly reduced the cost of employing people by halving employers' PRSI for those on modest wages and also by reviewing the regulatory framework for employment in a range of sectors.

[Deputy Leo Varadkar.]

We are now beginning to see a recovery across the various overseas source markets for Ireland — with year-on-year growth of 8.6% in visit numbers in the first quarter of 2011, including growth of 12% from areas outside Europe and North America.

Operational responsibility relating to tourism promotion or development, including operational budgets for the promotion and development of rural tourism and tourism in the regions, rests with the State tourism agencies. I have no function in regard to such operational matters.

Question No. 34 answered with Question No. 32

Question No. 35 answered with Question No. 33.

Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 32.

Tourism Industry

37. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the efforts he has made to ensure that a competitive business environment is maintained in the tourism industry; the further efforts he has made to ensure that hotels under the control of the National Asset Management Agency are not operating on a below-cost basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18956/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government's recent Jobs Initiative has placed tourism at the heart of our economic recovery. The decision to reduce the VAT rate on a range of labour-intensive tourism services from 13.5% to 9% with effect from 1 July 2011 is a major concession providing an opportunity to enhance further the competitiveness of our tourism product.

The Government has also significantly reduced the cost of employing people by halving employers' PRSI for those on modest wages and also by reviewing the regulatory framework for employment in a range of sectors.

In regard to hotel-backed loans held by NAMA, under Section 66 (1) (a) of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) Act, the participating institutions were required to service loans in the same manner as a prudent lender, prior to their transfer to NAMA. All banks are also obliged by the financial regulator to lend in a prudent and sustainable manner. Where the Deputy has evidence that a bank is acting contrary to its regulatory obligations, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Financial Regulator.

My officials have raised this matter with officials in the Department of Finance and I am informed by NAMA that it has acquired loans secured by some 83 hotels located within the State, of which 78 are open for business. NAMA has informed me that it does not support any hotel operating on a below cost basis. I am further informed by NAMA that it will be developing a comprehensive strategy to deal with the hotels in its portfolio. NAMA has acknowledged that the long-term future of some hotels may not be as hotels and alternative uses will have to be found for them.

There appears however to be a perception amongst some quarters of the hotel industry that the removal of these so-called "Nama Hotels" will allow hoteliers to revert to 2007 prices. This is not realistic and would be damaging to the Irish tourist product. Any recovery in Irish tourism will be dependent — along with other factors — on being cost competitive. Significant increases in hotel prices would undermine this. Furthermore, it must be noted that a large number of hotels in financial difficulty are not in fact financed by Irish banks, but rather by foreign owned banks and as such are not within NAMA.

Sport and Recreational Development

38. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the initiatives in place to improve local sports facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18955/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Sports Capital Programme, which is administered by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, funding is allocated towards the provision of sports facilities at national, regional and local level. It is the primary vehicle for promoting the development of sports and recreational facilities in Ireland. The Programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improved facilities in virtually every village, town and city. The facilities funded range from new equipment for the smallest clubs, to regional multi-sport centres and national centres of sporting excellence.

Over 7,400 projects providing a range of essential sports facilities have now benefited from sports capital funding since 1998 bringing the total allocation in that time to over €739 million. These grants continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring the provision of modern, high quality facilities around Ireland that attract more people to participate in sporting activities. While no new round of the Programme has been advertised since 2008 the Programme is still very active with €33m provided in 2011 to fund existing allocations. I am looking at the options available to me with regard to a new Programme within the present financial constraints but no decision has been made about the timing of future rounds of the Programme.

Under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, which is administered by my Department, 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. Since 2000, 58 projects have or are being dealt with under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme of which 46 have been completed and the other 12 projects are at various stages of the Programme. The €6.65m allocated for 2011 will be sufficient to meet commitments this year under the current round of the Programme.

Sports Development

39. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his strategy to develop all-Ireland co-operation in the area of sport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18968/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Irish Sports Council and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland have an excellent working relationship and engage in a number of joint initiatives such as the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport and the biennial All Island Sports Development Conference. Coaching Ireland, which has the lead role in the development of coaching in Ireland, operates on an all island basis. Many of the National Governing Bodies of Sport are also constituted on an all-island basis. These include the governing bodies of gaelic games, rugby, boxing, cricket and golf amongst others.

While one may like to see all sporting organisations operate on an all-Ireland basis, these will — and must — be organic developments. Any political involvement in such matters, would I believe, be hugely counter-productive and would undermine any such developments.

The high level All Island Planning Group, which includes the Chairperson and Chief Executive of each Sports Council, meets on a regular basis to ensure consistency in policy and practice in sports development. There is co-operation on such issues as research, development of high

[Deputy Leo Varadkar.]

performance sport and anti-doping. The group ensures that there is no duplication of effort in planning and support for governing bodies of sport and individual athletes.

Taxi Regulations

40. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason full-time taxi drivers, one licence, one holder, are not represented on the new taxi sector review group, set up to explore all aspects of taxi regulation here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18845/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In my announcements of the 8th and 24th June respectively I have clarified the terms of reference and the membership of the Taxi Regulation Review Group, in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government. The review will enable necessary further reforms of the sector to allow consumers to have confidence in the taxi system while also ensuring that legitimate and competent operators and drivers can be rewarded fairly by operating under a regulatory framework that is adequately enforced. It will address a wide range of issues relating to the taxi sector including the current regulatory policy and practices, licensing systems, enforcement and future dialogue with the taxi sector.

I should point out to the Deputy that there are three representatives of the taxi sector on the review group working at different levels and one of these is a full-time owner-driver and single plate holder. In my view, the diverse membership of the Review Steering Group will allow an appropriate contribution from stakeholders, including dispatch operators, drivers, consumers as well as the regulatory and enforcement agencies. I should add that the consultation on the review extends to all interested parties and stakeholders through an invitation for written submission to be made before the end of July.

Stadium Projects

41. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will expand on his comments confirming that he asked the Sports Campus Authority to continue developing the National Sports Campus at Abbotstown, Dublin, on an incremental basis at a low cost. [18960/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): At its meeting on Tuesday 21 June, the Government approved my proposals for the development of the National Sports Campus at Abbotstown/Blanchardstown on an incremental basis. In particular I have asked the National Sports Campus Development Authority (NSCDA) to proceed with the development of a National Indoor Training Arena, which would include an Indoor Track. I am acutely aware of the difficulty of securing capital funding from the Exchequer because of the financial difficulties facing the Government. I have, therefore, asked the Campus Authority to explore other avenues of funding such as philanthropy and/or sale of some of the land.

I have also asked the Campus Authority to continue to pursue the policy of developing elements of the Development Control Plan in partnership with the main field sports viz. GAA, FAI, IRFU and Irish Hockey Association..

As provided for in Section 7(8) of the National Sports Campus Development Authority Act, 2006, I have asked my Department to contact the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to put arrangements in train for the transfer of the land to the NSCDA. Abbotstown House is a protected structure under the Fingal County Development Plan. I believe that Abbotstown House would benefit from having an anchor tenant and that the Irish Sports

Council would be an ideal tenant in this regard. I have asked the Campus Authority to consider this suggestion and to come back to me with proposals for the future use of Abbotstown House. In parallel with the core National Sports Campus project, the Campus Authority is also continuing its strategy of redeveloping and refurbishing existing buildings on the Abbotstown site for use by the wider sporting community, in particular the National Governing Bodies of Sport. Work is underway on the refurbishment of the former Marine Institute building as a headquarters for the NGBs.

Suicide Prevention

42. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the potential role of sport in suicide prevention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18958/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Investment in sport is based on our belief that it is an important part of our individual, community and national life. It can make a major contribution to some of our most pressing social and health issues, including mental health and suicide prevention. We all appreciate the important role that sport plays in our society in promoting healthy lifestyles, creating a sense of identity and belonging, channelling energy in rewarding activity and bringing people together.

I want to ensure that all people are encouraged and given opportunities to participate in sport and to enjoy all the benefits that sport can bring through developing a healthy lifestyle. In that context the Irish Sports Council, which is funded by my Department, has an allocation of almost €46.9 million in 2011.

Sport and Recreational Development

43. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the acquisition or ownership transfer of leisure facilities in National Asset Management Agency ownership has been considered as a means of provision to areas that experience a deficit of such facilities; if he has sought information from NAMA regarding the prospect of such acquisitions; if his attention has been drawn to the number of leisure facilities currently under NAMA ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18670/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy will be aware, the Minister for Finance has responsibility for the National Asset Management Agency and Minister Noonan has answered Parliamentary Questions on this matter in the Dáil recently. For details of NAMA's commitment to contributing to broader social and economic objectives, such as those set out in the Deputy's question, I would refer the Deputy to questions answered by the Minister for Finance on this issue on 1 and 14 June this year.

The Government's primary means for assisting in the provision of sports facilities is through the Sports Capital Programme. While the Sports Capital Programme, as currently structured, does not provide grants for the acquisition of land or premises, I would be happy for officials of my Department to meet with officials from NAMA to discuss any areas where co-operation could benefit sports organisations.

Tourism Policy

44. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the tourism renewal implementation group; the remit of this group; the progress made to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18959/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In July 2010, my predecessor established a Tourism Renewal Implementation Group, which she chaired. This group has not met since my appointment. I have no plans to reconvene the group.

The Programme for Government 2011 sets out Government's priorities for tourism policy, including commitments on access, marketing, visas and product development. The Government's Jobs Initiative delivered on a number of these key commitments, as well as supporting tourism generally, by:

- Reducing VAT for tourism-related goods and services;
- Reducing the cost of employing people by halving employers' PRSI for those on modest wages;
- A three-pronged plan to promote inbound tourism covering the travel tax, passenger charges, and co-operative marketing; and
- A visa waiver scheme to make it easier for tourists from emerging markets to visit Ireland.

In addition to this, tourism will also benefit from Internship and Work Placement programmes, and investment in non-national roads and transport infrastructure.

I am satisfied that tourism policy priorities are being effectively pursued under the Programme for Government by myself and Minister Ring supported our Department and the two tourism agencies. It is also important that the industry plays its part, in partnership with the agencies, and I welcome the establishment of an industry-led Tourism Recovery Taskforce, including Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, to complement the work of Government. As such, I feel little merit in reconvening the Tourism Renewal Implementation Group.

Public Transport

45. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of a recent report into the published accounts of Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus conducted by a company (details supplied) and published by the Coach Tourism and Transport Council, if he intends to introduce a proper tendering regime of Bus Éireann's PSO routes following claims by the CTTC that private bus and coach operators could save the Exchequer €20 million to €30 million through a proper tendering regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18906/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am of course aware of the contents of the Report mentioned. Under EU law and the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, as amended, existing public service obligation (PSO) bus services can be procured by the NTA through direct award contracts and any other new subvented services must be procured by way of open tendering. The NTA is obliged under the Public Services Contracts to ensure that the compensation payable is not in excess of the costs incurred in discharging the PSO taking account of the relevant receipts and a reasonable profit. It is also required to ensure that the costs in discharging the PSO are in keeping with those of a well-run Operator. Operators are required to maintain separate accounts in accordance with the Regulation to increase transparency and avoid cross-subsidisation. The direct award contract with Bus Éireann applies for 5 years. At the end of the 5 year period NTA has discretion to renew or modify the direct award provision of bus services following a consultation process with interested parties under which the NTA is obliged to justify its approach.

In accordance with the commitment in the Programme for Government to explore the benefit to the public transport passenger of more diverse bus service provision, I am considering the various options that are currently available as regards achieving greater diversity of bus

operators. I will be consulting with my Ministerial colleagues on the future options for procurement of PSO bus services once I have completed my examination of the options. I hope to announce the outcome of those consultations in the coming months.

Tourism Development

46. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which an overall and forensic assessment of the tourism industry has been undertaken with a view to identification of the factors deemed most likely to inhibit progress, growth and development; if he will outline the specific issues, if any, identified as being fundamental in the context of a major expansion of the industry here with the emphasis on employment creation through competitiveness and quality of service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18908/11]

177. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he has had discussions with the stakeholders in the tourism sector with a view to ensuring that the VAT reductions announced in the jobs initiative are passed on to the consumer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19208/11]

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he or his Department monitors the various elements likely to contribute to development and growth in the tourism sector with particular reference to the maximisation of job opportunities and service to the consumer; the measures taken, if any, arising from any such appraisal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19209/11]

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which costs in the tourism sector here are comparable and competitive with those in other jurisdictions throughout the EU; the extent to which it is necessary to address any issues arising; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19210/11]

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he has had any recent discussion with the various stakeholders in the tourism sector with a view to achieving maximum employment leading to economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19211/11]

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which issues have arisen in discussions he has had with stakeholders in the tourism sector which are deemed to be of a significant or fundamental nature in the development of the sector; his plans if any for initiative in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19212/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 46 and 177 to 181, inclusive, together.

I have an ongoing dialogue with major stakeholders in the tourism sector. The Jobs Initiative recognises the vital contribution of tourism to employment, economic activity and exports. The reduced VAT rate on a range of labour-intensive tourism services from 13.5% to 9% is a major concession providing an opportunity to enhance the competitiveness of Irish tourism.

I have written to the main representative bodies asking their members to pass on the benefits of the VAT reduction. There are no sanctions that the Government can take against individual businesses that do not pass on the benefits of the VAT reduction. However, consumers may

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wish to consider whether they should favour establishments that have clearly demonstrated their willingness to pass on the VAT cut.

The Government has also reduced the cost of employing people by halving employers' PRSI for those on modest wages and also by reviewing the regulatory framework for employment in a range of sectors. The new National Internship Scheme (NIS) provides an opportunity for the tourism industry to take on interns in a range of areas. The Short-stay Visa Waiver Programme will allow persons from selected countries granted leave to enter the UK as a tourist or business visitor to be able to travel to Ireland without the requirement to obtain an Irish visa. These measures should help grow and sustain employment in the sector. I hope that we are beginning to see a recovery across the various overseas source markets for Ireland — with year-on-year growth of 8.6% in visitor numbers in the first quarter of 2011, including growth of 12% from areas outside Europe and North America.

Semi-State Bodies

47. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if, in view of a recent report into the published accounts of Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus conducted by a company (details supplied) which showed that CIÉ Tours International, a wholly-owned subsidiary of CIÉ, is incorporated in the USA and separate financial accounts are not published for it, he will commit to supplying detailed up-to-date accounts for the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18905/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): CIÉ Tours International, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Córas Iompair Éireann and is registered in the United States of America. The main business of CIÉ Tours International, Inc. is to retail coach tour packages on behalf of CIÉ Tours. The accounts for CIÉ Tours International, Inc. are consolidated into the financial statements of Córas Iompair Éireann. Summary revenue and expenditure details are disclosed in the notes to the financial statements and a business commentary is included in the Chairman's Statement. I have previously requested a copy of the most recent financial accounts for CIÉ Tours International, Inc. from CIÉ and I expect to receive these shortly. It is my intention, subject to any legal considerations, to ensure a copy of such accounts is laid before each House of the Oireachtas.

Regional Airports

48. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will investigate the prolonged process and delay in initiating the required upgrading of the main gateways from Cork and Limerick into County Kerry; and if he will expedite the public service contract for Kerry County Airport to facilitate ongoing service and regular daily flights to Dublin. [18669/11]

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 planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions regarding road access to Kerry to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

As regards the public service obligation contract for the Kerry — Dublin air route, a tender process is currently underway following publication of the relevant notices in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 3 May 2011. In line with the EU guidelines, the process of renewal of a PSO takes a minimum of six months from the date the notices appear in the Official Journal. In accordance with this, my Department is working to ensure that the new PSO air service commences at the earliest opportunity in November 2011.

Semi-State Bodies

49. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the basis on which information on the activities of a publicly owned semi-State company, namely Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company, and the identity of the leaseholder for the Harbour Court Building owned by the company can be deemed confidential when a question is put by an elected representative of Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18846/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company is a State commercial port company established and operating pursuant to the Harbours Act 1996-2009. The organisational model of the sector is designed to reduce the role of government in day-to-day organisational and commercial activities, while retaining public ownership and reserving a number of specific Ministerial consent functions. The Act clearly designates certain functions to be the sole responsibility of the company and its Board. Included amongst these is any decision relating to the acquisition or disposal of land or buildings, either by sale or by lease. As I have previously indicated to the Deputy, issues regarding the commercial leasing of land or buildings may be regarded by the port companies as commercially sensitive and thus confidential.

Olympic Games

50. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the efforts he has made to ensure the Olympic torch passes through Ireland in the run up to the London Olympics in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18967/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government has given its full support to the President of the Olympic Council of Ireland in regard to the proposal to have the London 2012 Olympic Torch Relay travel to Ireland. The London Organising Committee of the Games has already approved this proposal and we now await the decision of the International Olympic Committee which we understand to be imminent.

Departmental Strategies

51. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date on which the national sports facilities strategy will be published; the process by which the strategy is being developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18963/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A five year draft National Sports Facilities Strategy was completed within my Department last year. The draft strategy is currently being updated to take account of developments since then and I expect to receive an updated version shortly for consideration. A decision on the publication of the strategy will be taken when I have fully considered the issues contained in it. The aim of the strategy is to provide high level policy direction for future investment, grant assistance at national, regional and local level and a co-ordinated approach across the various agencies and Departments involved in supporting the provision of sports and recreational facilities.

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Government Departments and other relevant bodies were consulted in the drafting of the strategy. The draft strategy identifies the wider economic, health and social argument for continued investment in sports facilities. It aims to prioritise areas for future investment and ensure continued impact in the relevant areas.

Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 30.

An Teanga Gaeilge

53. **D'fhiafraigh Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt an bhfuil plean aige comhionannas cló a chur i bhfeidhm idir ainmneacha Gaeilge agus Béarla ar chomharthaí bóthair timpeall na tíre mar atá déanta i ngach taobh eile sa stát; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [16441/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Mar Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt, tá cumhacht agam treoracha, idir treoracha ginearálta nó ar leith, a thabhairt d'údráis bóthair maidir le comharthaí tráchta.

Leagtear síos sna treoracha reatha go dtaispeánfear an téacs as Gaeilge in mion litreacha atá claonta beaganín fó dheis, agus go dtaispeánfear an téacs as Béarla i ceann litreacha Rómhánach.

'Se príomh críche an tarrachtain seo na chun cinntiú go gcabharáíonn comharthaí eolais tráchta le úsáid sabhálteach an líonra bóithre, agus soiléireacht a thabhairt d'úsáideoirí bóthair ionas nach mbeidh sábháilteacht bóthar i mbaol.

Táim sásta go léiríonn na treoracha atá ann faoi láthair an chleachtas is fearr i dtéarmaí dearaidh, agus go bhfuil siad réasúnta.

Dá bhrí sin, níl sé ar intinn agam an polasaí reatha a leasú.

As Minister, I may, under Section 95 of the Road Traffic Act, 1961, give general or particular directions to road authorities in relation to traffic signs.

Current directions provide that road signs should display Irish text in sentence case and inclined slightly to the right and should display English text in Roman capital letters. The primary purpose of this approach is to ensure that traffic information signs assist in the safe use of the road network and provide clarity for road users so as not to compromise road safety.

I am satisfied that the current directions reflect best practice in terms of sign design and are reasonable. Therefore, I have no proposals to amend current policy in that regard.

Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 30.

Road Network

55. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to fully commit the €19 million earmarked by the previous Government for the widening of the Aughnacloy to Strabane and Derry road in view of the current economic circumstances; the other schemes to which commitments have been made in Northern Ireland; if he is in discussion with his Northern Ireland counterparts regarding reducing his commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18671/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the agreement of March 2007 between the Irish and British Governments on a funding package to support the restored Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government made a commitment to provide funding of £400million / €580million in a roads investment package for Northern Ireland which

includes the upgrading of the A5 road from Aughnacloy to Derry and the A8 road from Belfast to Larne.

At the North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting on 10 June last, the Council noted the progress to date on the A5 and A8 projects and agreed to consider a further progress report at the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

Drawdown of funding is subject to the achievement of agreed project milestones. The first payment (stg£8 million) from the Irish Government's contribution was made in 2009 following achievement of the second project milestone and a further payment of stg£11million is due to be paid this year following the achievement of the third project milestone in November 2010.

The A5 and A8 projects will continue to be monitored under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council.

Economic Competitiveness

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent, if any, to which comparisons have been made between transport costs here and those in neighbouring jurisdictions with particular reference to the need to achieve competitiveness and to maximise job opportunities in this economy; if he has identified the issues most likely to prevent achievement of this objective; the degree to which he intends to take steps to address such issues in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18909/11]

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he has compared transport costs here with that pertaining in adjoining and competing jurisdictions; his intentions if any to address emerging issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19213/11]

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which any examination has been done with a view to identification of issues affecting the transport sector here with particular reference to costs; if other jurisdictions have an advantage; if it is intended to address any such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19214/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56, 182 and 183 together.

International comparative data on transport costs are not readily available from respected international statistical sources such as Eurostat and the International Transport Forum.

My Department has no direct control of transport costs in general but keeps under review costs arising from the services provided through our agencies.

Cost competitiveness is a key consideration for Ireland as an open export-oriented economy and transport is one of the many factors influencing that competitiveness. The Government's plans to improve competitiveness are set out in the Programme for Government and place a heavy emphasis on the delivery of effective transport services. I have also outlined my transport and tourism priorities to 2016 on my Department's website. In addition, the Government's Jobs Initiative includes a number of measures intended to stimulate tourism by increasing the competitiveness of access transport and our tourism product.

Standardisation of Measurements

57. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will support maintaining the current trailer height limit of 4.65 m for trailers registered here in view

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of European Commission proposals to introduce a European-wide height limit of 4 m; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18901/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Directive 96/53/EC, as amended, sets the maximum weights and dimensions for national and international traffic. Under Directive 96/53/EC Ireland has set a national height limit of 4.65 metres for national transport and this will remain in place. Also, as the UK has no height restriction for national traffic the current practice of vehicle movement between both States using higher trailers can continue.

However, I understand that there are discussions in the European Commission regarding the type-approval requirements for vehicles entering into service. *Directive 97/27/EC* sets the type-approval requirements with regard to masses and dimensions of vehicles. There are proposals for an amendment to this Directive which would add some restrictions for trailers that exceed 4.0 metres in height. Under the current wording of the proposal under consideration, the height limit can only exceed 4.0 metres if the vehicle is “intended for exceptional load transport”. The inclusion of this clause would make it more difficult for manufacturers and hauliers to bring new trailers into the national fleet that will be used for normal goods transport whilst availing of the maximum national height limit of 4.65 metres.

Due to our geographic location and our dependence on road infrastructure for the haulage of goods and to maintain the free movement of higher vehicles between Ireland and the UK, Ireland will work to ensure that any proposals which could restrict the height of new trailers entering the fleet below our national height limits are opposed. Ireland is attending the committee sub group meetings where the text of the proposal is being discussed, and we will strive to ensure the continued ability for higher trailers to be easily type approved and enter the national fleet.

Tourism Industry

58. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the potential negative impact on tourism in counties Donegal, Roscommon, Sligo and Leitrim has been or will be assessed following the granting of exploration licences in the Lough Allen basin involving the controversial fracking technique. [18969/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have no responsibility in relation to this matter which falls within the remit of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

For the Deputy’s information, I am advised by Minister Rabbitte that in February of this year, following an open competition, his Department awarded two year onshore Petroleum Licensing Options to Tamboran Resources Ltd and the Lough Allen Natural Gas Company Ltd over parts of the Lough Allen Basin.

The Licensing Options awarded are designed to allow the companies assess the natural gas and shale gas potential of the acreage. This work will be largely based on desktop studies of existing data from previous petroleum exploration activity. Exploration drilling is not allowed under these authorisations, but shallow geological sampling is permitted. Exploration activity under these authorisations is at an early stage and there is no certainty that it will lead to applications for follow-on exploration licences that would be required before exploration wells could be drilled.

In the event that hydraulic fracturing was envisaged as part of a possible future exploration or production programme, then that activity would be subject to an environmental impact assessment, including an appropriate public consultation phase.

As a prescribed body in the planning process, the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland, would have an opportunity to raise their concerns, if appropriate, at that stage of the process.

Emigration Statistics

59. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Taoiseach the way he measures emigration numbers from a given county and if he will utilise inactive PPS numbers of Irish citizens as an indicator. [19062/11]

60. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Taoiseach the number of Irish citizens that have emigrated in recent years on a county basis. [19063/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 60 together.

The principal source of information for the estimation of annual migration flows published by the Central Statistics Office, incorporating both emigration and immigration, is the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), which classifies the flows by sex, broad age group, origin and destination, and nationality. The provision of emigration data at a detailed county level is not available due to the variability associated with sample surveys of this nature.

The estimates are published on an annual basis in September of each year. The next publication in September 2011 will cover the period April 2010 to April 2011. The estimates will be subject to revision once the definitive results of the five yearly census (Census 2011) are made available in 2012.

Other sources are also monitored to supplement the primary source i.e. the QNHS, such as: the number of work visas issued to Irish citizens for the main countries of destination via the relevant embassies and agencies; and the number of Personal Public Service (PPS) numbers allocated to individuals and subsequent monitoring of activity through available administrative systems.

However these sources have significant limitations in terms of their suitability as measures of migration (e.g. inability to differentiate between short-term and long-term (1 year plus) movements, consistency of availability of PPSN across relevant sources and timeliness of the data).

Departmental Staff

61. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Taoiseach the staff in his Department specifically assigned to monitoring EU policy developments; the numbers of such staff; and if these staff are based in Ireland or Brussels. [19098/11]

Taoiseach (Deputy Enda Kenny): There are nine officials assigned to the EU and International Division of my Department. Of these, six work specifically or primarily on EU matters. All are based in Dublin.

The European and International Division support me in my role as the Head of Government of a European Union Member State and in the wider field of international relations. The Division co-ordinates and contributes to the development of Ireland's policies on issues of European and international concern. In conjunction with other Government Departments, the

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

Division monitors emerging European and international policy positions and the policy approaches from the various Government Departments and other State bodies.

New arrangements for EU co-ordination will be finalised shortly, including appointment of a Second Secretary General in my Department, who will also have responsibility for the Government Economic Management Council.

Parliamentary Questions

62. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Taoiseach when he will bring forward proposals to provide for written parliamentary questions during the summer recess; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19132/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Large numbers of Parliamentary Questions are answered in the Dáil each year: the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission's annual report for 2009, the latest available, states that over 34,000 were answered in that year.

The Government has increased the number of Dáil sitting days and intends to reduce this year's Summer recess significantly. This will increase the potential for Questions to be answered. Further steps in respect of Questions, as part of the Government's reform programme, will be brought forward in due course.

Diplomatic Representations

63. **Deputy Dara Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his position on the Israeli soldier (details supplied), who has been held hostage since 25 June 2006; if he has asked Ambassador Ajjuri of the Mission of Palestine in Ireland for his Government's position on the captivity of this person and the blocking by Hamas of access to the person by the International Red Cross; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19037/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No 58 on 29 June on this subject, which was as follows:

“This week marks five years since Sergeant Gilad Shalit was kidnapped from Israel by Palestinian militants. His continued captivity is a deplorable situation for the soldier and his family. The Red Cross has been refused access to him, his family cannot send letters to him, and they have received no confirmation that he is still alive since 2009. Ireland, along with our EU partners, has repeatedly called for his release without delay, most recently at the European Council last week, which issued a Declaration demanding his immediate release. Last week I discussed Sergeant Shalit's case with the Israeli Ambassador, and made a statement reiterating the Government's call for his immediate release.

Gilad Shalit was kidnapped by Hamas, an organisation with which the Government has no channel of communication. Hamas is listed as a terrorist organisation by the EU, and, accordingly, there is no contact at any level between Irish officials and representatives of Hamas.

There have been periodic reports that a prisoner swap deal between Israel and Hamas, conducted through third parties, would lead to the imminent release of Sergeant Shalit. Regrettably, this has not yet proved to be the case. It is my sincere hope that Gilad Shalit will soon be released and can return to his family in Israel.”

Further to that reply, I have not raised this matter separately with the Palestinian Representative, as Sgt. Shalit is being held in Gaza, which is not under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinian President Abbas has on numerous occasions expressed the hope that Sgt. Shalit could be released. While there may be some hope that the recent reconciliation agreement between the Palestinian factions might help create the conditions for his release, one should be careful of false optimism in this regard. The capture and captivity of Sgt. Shalit took place before the break between the factions, when the PA still had some partial control of Gaza.

Human Rights Issues

64. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether it was appropriate for the Irish Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (details supplied) to attend a Royal College of Surgeons Ireland awards ceremony in Bahrain on 13 June last alongside the Prime Minister of Bahrain, Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, at a time when human rights organisations and a growing number of medical professionals here are challenging the Bahraini regime on the arrest and detention of doctors, some of them fellows of the RCSI and who carried out part of their training in Irish hospitals. [19058/11]

65. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether the attendance of the Irish Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (details supplied) at a Royal College of Surgeons Ireland awards ceremony in Bahrain on 13 June last alongside the Prime Minister of Bahrain, Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, was inappropriate; and the disciplinary action taken. [19059/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 65 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to questions 60 and 71 answered on 21st June 2011, the reply of which is below. The Deputy should be aware that the Prime Minister of Bahrain did not attend the graduation ceremony.

I think that it is important to distinguish between the involvement of the Royal College of Surgeons in the training of Bahraini medical personnel, which I would regard as entirely positive, and the detention of medical personnel by the Bahraini authorities, about which I have made clear the Government's concerns.

The Irish Ambassador to Saudi Arabia attended the RCSI graduation ceremony in Bahrain on 13 June, in response to an invitation from the RCSI. He did so however in a private capacity as he is not yet formally accredited to Bahrain, pending the finalisation of bilateral accreditation procedures.

As he is not yet able to make formal representations directly to the authorities in Bahrain, Ambassador Holohan met yesterday with the Bahraini Ambassador in Riyadh to inform him of my own deep concerns, already expressed in this House on a number of occasions, and those of the Irish Government and people in relation to recent events. The Ambassador also used the occasion to urge the Bahraini Ambassador to convey immediately to his authorities that all those who are charged with nothing more than peaceful protest should be released without further delay.

The Government's clear stance on current developments in Bahrain will continue to be conveyed in the fullest terms to the Bahraini authorities on all appropriate occasions, through our Embassy in Riyadh and all other appropriate channels.

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

In relation to the RCSI, whose graduates receive degrees awarded by the NUI, I have already made clear previously that the Royal College of Surgeons' provision of educational services in Bahrain and elsewhere is primarily an operational issue for the RCSI.

The RCSI is a private third-level institution which has its own relationships in Bahrain and which decides for itself the extent to which it wishes to comment on developments there. However, it also has to be acknowledged that the RCSI has been involved on a commercial basis in Bahrain for some years now and that the medical campus and facilities which it operates represent a very substantial investment which is of direct economic relevance to this country. I would further like to say that I regard the activities of the RCSI in assisting with the training of foreign medical personnel overseas as a highly worthwhile activity through which the College makes a significant contribution to the quality of life of millions of people around the world.

By way of clarification, I would point out that Ambassador Holohan's attendance at the RCSI's ceremony in Bahrain was fully consistent with his official functions as our Ambassador designate to Bahrain. He is described as being present in a "private" capacity because he has yet to present credentials in Bahrain and to be recognised as our Ambassador by the Bahraini authorities, not because he was operating outside his official responsibilities. Ambassador Holohan's presence was intended to support the activities of the RCSI which, as the Deputy acknowledges, trained a number of those who are victims of the action taken by the Bahraini authorities.

66. Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he held any private engagements with the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland to establish the reason that organisation has not spoken out publicly to condemn the outrageous arrest and detention of doctors, some of them fellows of the RCSI and who carried out part of their training in Irish hospitals. [19060/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): My Department has had ongoing contacts with the RCSI in recent weeks in relation to the situation in Bahrain. Senior officials have met with RCSI Chief Executive, Professor Cathal Kelly, to discuss the matter and I will meet with representatives of the RCSI next week to discuss the situation further.

As I have already stated in replies to previous questions, I think it is important to distinguish between the involvement of the Royal College of Surgeons in the training of Bahraini medical personnel, which is entirely positive, and the detention of medical personnel by the Bahraini authorities, about which I have made clear the Government's concerns.

The RCSI is a private third-level institution which has its own relationships in Bahrain and which decides for itself the extent to which it wishes to comment on developments there. However, it also has to be acknowledged that the RCSI has been involved on a commercial basis in Bahrain for some years now and that the medical campus and facilities which it operates represent a very substantial investment which is of direct economic relevance to this country. I would further add that I regard the activities of the RCSI in assisting with the training of foreign medical personnel overseas as a highly worthwhile activity through which the College makes a significant contribution to the quality of life of millions of people around the world. The RCSI, as an educational provider, also has a responsibility to all of its students and ensuring they are able to complete their medical training.

I have already stated clearly on a number of occasions my serious concerns about the reports of detention, torture, intimidation and trials of medical professionals in Bahrain, some of whom

are Irish-trained, for simply meeting their professional and ethical obligation to attend to those seriously injured in the recent violent clampdown against peaceful protestors. The Government wishes to see all reported serious violations of human rights credibly investigated, the immediate release, unless charged, of detained peaceful protestors and medical professionals who assisted the injured, and access for independent observers to the ongoing legal proceedings. In that regard, I welcome the establishment of an independent international commission to investigate the allegations of human rights violations in recent months in Bahrain. I regard this as a step in the right direction that will hopefully help uncover the truth about recent events. I look forward to the independent commission being able to carry out its work freely.

The Government's clear stance on the situation in Bahrain will continue to be conveyed in the fullest terms to the Bahraini authorities on all appropriate occasions, through our Embassy in Riyadh and all other appropriate channels.

67. Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the action he has taken to inquire into allegations that the Irish aid ship, the *MV Saoirse*, has been sabotaged, risking the lives of Irish citizens at sea and preventing most of the crew from completing their mission of humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people of Gaza. [19086/11]

68. Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has been in contact with the Turkish authorities to inquire about their investigation into allegations that the Irish aid ship, the *MV Saoirse*, has been sabotaged. [19088/11]

69. Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has been in contact with his counterpart, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to demand if Israeli intelligence agents acting on behalf of the Israeli state were responsible for this alleged sabotage that endangered the lives of Irish citizens. [19090/11]

70. Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has contacted the Israeli ambassador to deal with the allegations that the Israeli state was responsible for an act of sabotage on the *MV Saoirse* that put the lives of Irish citizens at risk. [19091/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 to 70, inclusive, together.

On 30 June, the intending Irish participants in the Gaza flotilla announced that their vessel, the *MV Saoirse*, had incurred damage to its propeller shaft which would prevent it from taking part in the flotilla. They made clear their view that the boat had been subject to sabotage while in port and posted details and images of the damage on their website which they claimed substantiated this allegation.

Responding to this announcement, I stated publicly that the investigation of any complaint made by the owners or operators of the vessel was primarily a matter for investigation by the authorities in Turkey, where the boat was moored. At the same time, I also made clear that if it was found that the boat had been sabotaged, then this would be a matter of very serious concern, particularly as it was suggested that the damage sustained by the *MV Saoirse* would have put at risk the lives of those aboard had it sailed from port. This remains my position.

Officials of my Department and the Irish Embassy in Ankara have kept in touch with the flotilla organisers, the intending participants and the local Turkish authorities. I understand that a spokesman for the Turkish Foreign Ministry has indicated that the authorities, who have inspected the vessel, do not believe that sabotage took place in this instance.

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

If the situation changes and clear finding be made that sabotage did occur, I will consider what steps might be appropriate. As of now, however, no such finding has been made.

Motor Taxation

71. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a submission (details supplied) regarding vehicle registration tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[19133/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed by the Revenue Commissioners that under Section 130 of the Finance Act 1992 (as amended) a “Mechanically propelled vehicle means a vehicle that

(a) has been designed and constructed for road use

(b) is, at the time of declaration for registration, in compliance with any measures taken to give effect in the State to any act of the European Communities relating to the approximation of the laws of Member States in respect of type-approval for the type of vehicle concerned,

(c) is intended or adapted for propulsion by a mechanical means, or by electrical means or by a partly mechanical and a partly electrical means and

(d) is capable of achieving vehicle propulsion at the time of registration, to the satisfaction of the Commissioners

including a motor-cycle but not including a tramcar or other vehicle running on permanent rails (or a vehicle including a cycle with an attachment for propelling it by mechanical power not exceeding 400 kilogrammes in weight unladen adapted and used for invalids.”

If a vehicle does not meet the above conditions VRT is not payable. However, once the vehicle becomes “a mechanically propelled vehicle” VRT is chargeable.

It should be pointed out that unregistered vehicles may only be stored and sold by Authorised Traders.

In relation to the vehicle in question, and from the details given, if this vehicle was capable of vehicle propulsion at the time of entry into the State VRT is due from that date.

When the vehicle in question is presented for registration the amount of VRT due will be determined by when the vehicle entered the State.

Unregistered vehicles may not be held/stored by Non-Authorised Traders if it is capable of vehicle propulsion but not being used on the road.

All documentation in relation to the vehicle must accompany the vehicle at the time the vehicle is presented for registration. (www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/vrt-guide.html).

Tax Code

72. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance if a tax credit facility exists for a sub-contractor where they have already paid staff and tax and they have not been paid by the main contractor for whom work has been done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19010/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The position is that a tax credit facility is not available in the circumstances outlined by the Deputy. The question of payment or non-

payment between a contractor and sub-contractor for work done under a construction or other contract is entirely a matter between the contracting parties concerned.

State Borrowing

73. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Finance the interest rates paid on each drawdown from the European Financial Stability Facility and European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism; the cost to the EFSF and EFSM of raising funds for each of these drawdowns on the open market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19079/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): To date, Ireland's nominal borrowings from the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism and the European Financial Stability Facility under the EU-IMF Programme amount to €15.6 billion. Details of these loans, and the yields on the corresponding bonds issued by the EFSM and the EFSF, as supplied by the NTMA to my Department, are set out in the table:

Lender	Nominal Loan amount — € billion	Amount Disbursed — € billion	Date of Draw down	Maturity from date of receipt.	Interest Rate including all costs & Credit Enhancements ²	Yield of corresponding EFSM and EFSF Bonds
EFSM See note 1	€5.00	€4.973	12-Jan-11	4 years 11 months	5.54%	2.589% yield
	€3.40	€3.39	24-Mar-11	7 years	6.21%	3.257% yield
	€3.00	€2.986	31-May-11	10 years	6.48%	3.532% yield
EFSM — totals/weighted average	€11.4	€11.35		6.87 years	5.99%	3.04% yield
3.00% yield	€4.20 ¹	€3.592	01-Feb-11	5 years 6 months	5.90%	2.89% yield
Overall Totals / Weighted Averages	€15.60	€14.94		6.51 years	5.96%	

1. This is the loan amount. The disbursement made available to the Exchequer from the EFSF is €3.592 billion after credit enhancement measures. This credit enhancement is to ensure that the EFSF retains its top AAA credit rating and, thereby, minimizes the cost of funds it borrows. Under the only EFSF loan to Ireland to date, €0.6 billion was retained thereby reducing the cash available to Ireland to €3.592 billion. The retained amount is the present value of the margin of 247 basis points over the life of the loan.

2. This takes account of the margins for EFSF and EFSM loans, along with the cost of service fees and, in the case of the EFSF, credit enhancement measures (see Note 2 below.)

Note 1: EFSM loans are priced on the basis of the borrowing rate on the bonds sold by the European Commission plus a margin of 292.5 basis points. The total interest costs also include issuances costs incurred by the Commission.

Note 2: The interest rate on EFSF loans is calculated as the borrowing rate payable by the EFSF on the bonds it has sold, plus a margin of 247 basis points. However, in its current form, the EFSF is required to undertake a number of credit enhancement measures to ensure it maintains the highest possible rating from the credit rating agencies. These measures include a Loan Specific Cash Buffer and the prepayment of the margin due on the loan. Under the Loan Specific Cash Buffer measure, the EFSF retains and invests a portion of monies it raises from the bonds it has issued to fund a specific loan. The borrower has to pay the difference between the yield on the bond issued and the return earned by the EFSF from its investment of this money. The prepayment of the margin of 247 basis points is done on a net present value basis. Accordingly, the interest rate payable by the borrower over the term of the loan only relates to cost of funds borne by the EFSF. This structure is unwieldy and agreement has been reached to amend it, including the pricing mechanism, and this will end the requirement for a Loan Specific Cash Buffer and the prepayment of the entire margin. Legislation is being prepared for the Oireachtas to ratify these amendments.

Tax Collection

74. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a matter in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [19081/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the person in question is in receipt of a disability pension from her former employer, which is taxable. In order to bring the person's tax affairs up to date, Revenue will write to the taxpayer shortly to clarify the position.

Financial Services Regulation

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he will publish the reports by Ernst and Young and McCann Fitzgerald on corporate governance issues at Irish Nationwide Building Society. [19100/11]

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects to receive a final report from the directors of Irish Nationwide on lending practices at the society. [19119/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 78 together.

Following the State's investment of capital into Irish Nationwide Building Society, the Board of the Society was asked to identify and address the "legacy issues" of the Society and to cooperate with, where relevant, the appropriate regulatory or other authorities. To assist them in this work, the INBS Board engaged Ernst and Young and McCann Fitzgerald, and initial reports from these organizations were provided to the INBS Board in 2010. Following additional work on this matter, a further report was presented to the Board of the Society in June 2011.

Following recent discussions with the NTMA, to whom certain of my banking functions are currently delegated, the Board of the newly merged Anglo/INBS (Irish Bank Resolution Corporation) has undertaken to advance particular items raised in the recent report to the INBS Board. However, in view of the sensitive nature of the reports and their potential, if made public, to prejudice any future actions that may arise, I do not propose to publish the reports referred to at this time.

The Deputy may also wish to note that the above process is without prejudice to any investigation or action that the Central Bank, as independent regulator of credit institutions, may take on any relevant matter and that copies of the reports referred to above have also been provided to the Central Bank.

Tax Code

76. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if he is in receipt of correspondence from persons (details supplied) in County Cork regarding his policy on classifying alcohol intermediate products in line with that in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19109/11]

77. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance when a decision will be issued on an application to the Revenue Commissioner in respect of a person (details supplied) for a liquor classification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19115/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 77 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the alcohol product produced by the company in question has been determined to be subject to the rate of Alcohol Products Tax that applies to spirits.

An application from the company for Binding Tariff Information for customs purposes in respect of the product is under examination by the Revenue Commissioners and I understand that a decision on the matter will be communicated to the company shortly.

I have received correspondence concerning this matter and will respond to it in due course.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 75.

Liquor Licences

79. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the denial by the National Excise Licensing Office of a liquor licence to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19123/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the last licence held by the taxpayer expired on the 30th September 2009 and was not renewed by him during the twelve month period ending 30th September 2010. A visit by a Revenue Official on the 8th September 2010 established that there was no licence in place and the taxpayer was advised to renew his licence on or before 30th September 2010. The National Excise Licence Office did not receive either an application or monies for this licence. The licence has therefore lapsed. The National Excise Licence Office cannot issue a licence to the taxpayer until the taxpayer produces a valid Court Certificate to them. The Revenue Commissioners do not have discretion in this regard.

Tax Code

80. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Finance if the new reduced 9% VAT rate will be extended to cover the laundry and dry cleaning industry which is a main service provider to the tourism industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19136/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): VAT is charged on the supply of goods and services, and the rate applying is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. While many tourist related services were made subject to a new temporary lower reduced VAT rate of 9% from 1 July, it is not possible to extend this treatment to the goods and services that remain subject to the 13.5% rate. This arises from the fact that many of the goods and services to which Ireland applies a reduced rate of VAT, including dry cleaning and laundry services, have their basis under an EU derogation that provides that as we applied a reduced rate to these items on 1 January 1991, we are entitled to continue applying that reduced rate to those items. However, this continuation of reduced rate application is conditional on the rate being no less than 12%. These are known as ‘parked’ items, and are provided for under Article 118 of the EU VAT Directive. As laundry and dry cleaning services are such parked items, it is not possible for Ireland to apply the rate of 9% to them.

It is also for this reason that the Jobs Initiative introduced a 9% VAT rate in respect of tourist activities such as restaurant and hotel accommodation services, while other tourist activities such as tour guide services and the short-term hire of cars, boats, caravans and mobile homes remain liable to VAT at the 13.5%. However, it should be noted that in the majority of EU Member States dry cleaning and laundry services apply at their standard VAT rate of up to 25% in some cases, compared to 13.5% in Ireland.

Property Raffles

81. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance the legal restrictions and tax implications that may apply to a property owner who may wish to dispose of their home

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by public raffle through sale of individual tickets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19205/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legal restrictions that might apply to a property owner disposing of her/his home by public raffle are a matter for the Minister for Justice and Equality, who states that it would not be appropriate to offer advice or comment; the parties should instead seek their own legal advice on the matter. However, the Minister informs me that, in the event of a raffle being regarded as a lottery, then the provisions of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956, as amended, may apply. Under that Act, a lottery may take place only if granted a licence. A licence may be granted only where the lottery is in aid of a charitable or philanthropic cause. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, depending on the facts and circumstances involved, there are alternative possible tax charges on a person organizing a public raffle to dispose of his/her home.

First, a charge to capital gains tax may arise on any gain from disposing of a property by way of a lottery or raffle. The net proceeds or profits from the lottery would be regarded as the sale consideration for the property and this amount less the original cost of purchasing the property (and any allowable costs) is the amount on which capital gains tax would be charged. The rate of capital gains tax is currently 25 per cent.

If the property had been the principal private residence of the person making the disposal, then principal private residence relief may be available. Where the dwelling has always been the person's principal private residence, the entire gain is exempt from capital gains tax. Where the dwelling was not always the person's principal private residence, the amount of the gain that is exempt is calculated by reference to the ratio of the period of occupancy as a principal private residence to the full period of ownership.

Second, depending on the precise circumstances involved, the raffle may be viewed as a trading venture, in which case the profits would fall within the charge to income tax. This second treatment is more likely to apply if there are indications that the raffle generates profits in excess of what the dwelling might have been expected to sell for if sold on the open market in the usual way.

If the facts and circumstances were such as to indicate that the raffle is a trading venture, the property is treated as disposed of by the owner to the lottery and becomes trading stock of the lottery at a value equal to the market value of the residence at that time. The person disposing of the dwelling is chargeable to capital gains tax on any gain arising. If the dwelling is the person's principal private residence, he or she may be entitled to principal private residence relief as set out above. However any profits from the lottery, after expenses, above the market value of the house at the time it became trading stock, will be chargeable to income tax at the organiser's marginal income tax rate. There is an exemption from Income Tax in respect of the income element of the lottery profits, but only if the lottery has a licence under Part IV of the Gaming and Lotteries Act, 1956 (section 216 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997).

Tax Reliefs

82. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the cost of mortgage interest relief for the financial year 2010; the projected cost for 2011; the cost to his Department to date in 2011; if he will provide a regional breakdown of the figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19222/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume that Deputy is referring to mortgage interest relief in respect of principal private residences. On that basis, I am informed by

the Revenue Commissioners that the cost to the Exchequer of mortgage interest relief by way of tax relief at source (TRS) in 2010 was €375 million and in the six months to the end of June 2011 is €178 million. The cost for the full year of 2011 is provisionally estimated at €400 million.

A regional breakdown of tax relief provided at source could not be identified without carrying out a significant development of the Revenue Commissioners' TRS computer system.

83. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the cost of rent relief for the financial year 2010; the projected cost for 2011; the cost to his Department to date in 2011; if he will provide a regional breakdown of the figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19223/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 473 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 provides tax relief at the standard rate to individuals who pay for private rented accommodation that is used as their sole or main residence. The level of rent qualifying for rent relief depends on an individual's marital status and age. In Budget 2011, it was announced that rent relief was being withdrawn on a phased basis. No new claimants are allowed from 7 December 2010 and existing claimants will continue to receive the relief on a reducing basis, with a complete cessation of the relief from 2018. The maximum tax credit available under the scheme in 2011 is €1,280/€640 per annum for a married couple/individual over 55 years of age and €640/€320 for a married couple/individual under 55 years of age.

The most recent year for which the necessary detailed information is available regarding the cost of rent relief is the income tax year 2008, in which the cost to the Exchequer is estimated at approximately €93 million for those claimants under 55 years of age and €4 million for those claimants over 55 years of age.

An estimated breakdown of the figures on a geographical basis is available on the basis of "bailiwick", meaning, in this case, the jurisdiction or boundaries within which Revenue Sheriffs, County Registrars or their officers operate for the purposes of enforcement of tax debt and which equates geographically with "county".

On this basis the estimated cost of rent relief for those claimants under 55 years of age and for those claimants over 55 years of age are as set out in the following tables.

The figures for the total costs of rent relief mentioned in this reply are higher than the total amounts of tax credits indicated in the tables being provided with this reply. This is due to the fact that the figures now being provided in the table represent about 95 per cent of all income tax returns expected for 2008, while the cost figures supplied above were, in accordance with normal practice, grossed-up at aggregate level to adjust for this 5% incompleteness.

A basis for providing a projected costs in 2011 and 2011 is not available at this time.

Income Tax year 2008

Rent relief credit for aged over 55

Bailiwick	Number of Cases	Amount €
Carlow	26	18,661
Cavan	28	18,186
Clare	61	44,868
Donegal	38	27,972
Galway	218	158,966
Kerry	137	93,625
Kildare	152	130,791

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Bailiwick	Number of Cases	Amount €
Kilkenny	73	51,401
Laois	17	13,706
Leitrim	34	21,737
Limerick	138	99,559
Longford	19	13,724
Louth	69	51,131
Mayo	48	33,538
Meath	86	65,979
Monaghan	27	18,638
Offaly	133	92,143
Roscommon	17	13,465
Sligo	40	29,662
Tipperary	73	60,649
Waterford	68	51,821
Westmeath	195	142,095
Wexford	83	62,022
Wicklow	108	96,824
Dublin City	1,699	1,322,422
Dublin County	699	606,204
Cork City	218	164,304
Cork County	205	179,011
Other	79	71,516
All	4,788	3,754,621

Income Tax year 2008

Rent relief credit for aged under 55

Bailiwick	Number of Cases	Amount €
Carlow	1,276	558,482
Cavan	1,592	682,532
Clare	3,039	1,247,557
Donegal	1,295	515,239
Galway	11,112	4,538,852
Kerry	5,067	2,060,364
Kildare	6,679	2,979,713
Kilkenny	2,796	1,231,030
Laois	781	342,125
Leitrim	1,108	503,898
Limerick	5,590	2,364,633
Longford	865	383,923
Louth	2,200	956,368
Mayo	2,421	964,576
Meath	3,605	1,640,950
Monaghan	829	360,655
Offaly	1,940	884,156

Bailiwick	Number of Cases	Amount €
Roscommon	710	287,200
Sligo	2,018	819,471
Tipperary	2,576	1,113,523
Waterford	2,773	1,139,221
Westmeath	7,007	2,794,341
Wexford	2,671	1,149,962
Wicklow	3,393	1,507,734
Dublin City	79,794	33,758,684
Dublin County	33,582	14,716,932
Cork City	9,546	4,074,676
Cork County	8,916	3,858,108
Other	2,398	1,033,208
All	207,579	88,468,113

School Transport

84. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a family (details supplied) in County Mayo have to pay €200 per child for school transport when children getting on at the same pickup point have to pay only €50 per child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19014/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The changes to school transport services relating to the Closed School Rule were announced in the 2011 Budget by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government and derive from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the scheme.

One of the changes, which will be implemented from September 2011, involves the uniform application of the distance eligibility criterion to all pupils travelling under the Primary School Transport Scheme. This means that children residing less than 3.2 kilometres from their school of attendance will be deemed ineligible for school transport.

This change to school transport provision means that the distance eligibility criterion of 3.2 kilometres will be applied uniformly and equitably on a national basis.

Children who are not eligible, under the terms of the scheme, may apply for concessionary transport subject to a number of conditions including the payment of a charge which is currently set at €200 per annum. There is no exemption from this charge.

Schools Building Projects

85. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school extension (details supplied) will proceed to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19016/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers applied to my Department for large scale capital funding for an extension/refurbishment including a GP Room, toilets and ancillary accommodation.

In accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects, the project for this school has been assigned a Band 3 rating. Information in respect of the current school building programme along with all assessed applications for major capital works, including this project, is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie.

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The progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design through to construction phase will be considered in the context of my Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. However, in light of current competing demands on the capital budget of my Department, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of the project at this time.

In the interim, my Department sanctioned devolved funding earlier this year to facilitate the building of a permanent additional mainstream classroom and learning support/resource room. I understand that building works will commence on site later this month. My Department has also recently approved funding for the replacement of a boiler at the school.

School Transport

86. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath has been refused transport costs to take them to school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19046/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Under the terms of my Department's School Transport scheme, children with special educational needs are eligible for free school transport if they are attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class / special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs under Department of Education and Skills criteria.

The child, referred to by the Deputy, is not attending the nearest mainstream school, special class/special school or unit that is, or can be resourced to meet the child's special educational needs under my Department's criteria.

Therefore, this child is not eligible for school transport under the terms of the scheme.

Teachers' Remuneration

87. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a special needs teacher (details supplied) in County Carlow will be paid the special needs allowance. [19047/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): This allowance is payable to teachers with specified qualifications working in designated special needs positions. An application from the teacher concerned for payment of this allowance has not been received by my Department. An application form may be obtained by contacting the Teacher/SNA Terms and Conditions Section of my Department.

School Services Staff

88. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of chaplains employed by him in schools; if he will provide a county breakdown of the locations at which they are employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19048/11]

93. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school chaplains employed by him; and the cost of same on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19106/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 93 together.

Chaplain posts are allocated in respect of Community and Comprehensive Schools and designated Community Colleges. The breakdown requested on a county basis is set out below.

There are currently 147 whole time equivalent posts allocated in respect of chaplaincy services at a cost of almost €9 million for the 2010/2011 school year.

County	No. of Chaplains
Carlow	1
Cavan	2
Clare	6
Cork	22
Donegal	12
Dublin	37
Galway	7
Kerry	6
Kildare	6
Kilkenny	2
Laois	3
Leitrim	3
Limerick	10
Longford	2
Louth	1
Mayo	3
Meath	7
Monaghan	1
Offaly	3
Roscommon	2
Sligo	1
Tipperary	3
Waterford	3
Westmeath	1
Wexford	2
Wicklow	1

Higher Education Grants

89. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he considers it fair that 700 students in County Donegal and thousands across the State are facing a cut in their student support income due to the fact that the non-adjacent rate of grant was increased from 24 km to 45 km in the last budget; and if he will reverse this cut. [19066/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I regret that the economic circumstances of the country are such that I am not in a position to reverse or alter any of the changes to the student grant measures announced in Budget 2011 by the previous Fianna Fáil — Green Party Government. These changes included an increase in the qualifying distance criterion for the non-adjacent rate of grant.

I understand the concerns of students with regard to the changes to the student grant schemes for the 2011/12 academic year 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.

Special Educational Needs

90. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in County Louth and east County Meath which have been affected by cutbacks in the provision of special needs assistants; if he will list those schools; the number of SNAs those schools had in 2009, 2010 and 2011 and the number they will have from September. [19070/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to inform the Deputy that 10,575 whole time equivalent (WTE) posts are being provided for SNA support for the coming school year. This is a significant number of posts and unlike other areas of the public sector vacancies are being filled up to this number.

It is considered that with equitable and careful management and distribution of these resources that there should be sufficient posts to provide access to SNA support for all children who require such care support to attend school, in accordance with Departmental criteria.

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 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. 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 them by 18th March, 2011 and are currently in the process of informing schools of their annual SNA allocation for the coming school year. As this process is ongoing, it is not possible to provide details of the level of allocation of SNAs in any given area. The information requested by the Deputy regarding the breakdown of posts in particular areas, for previous school years, is not readily available within my Department.

School Staffing

91. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the staffing requirements of a primary school (details supplied) in Dublin 24 will be given further detailed and urgent consideration in view of the concerns of the board of management and the principal in relation to the proposed reduction in staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19084/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has been in correspondence with the schools referred to by the Deputy regarding the staffing requirements for 2011/12. I understand the concerns raised by the board of management and the principal have now been addressed.

National Framework of Qualifications

92. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he recognises any qualification provided by an institute (details supplied); if so, when he began to recognise these qualifications; if he recognises such qualifications as being equivalent to any level of the national framework of qualifications; if he does not now recognise any qualification provided by the institute has he previously recognised any qualifications provided by this institute; in view of the fact that in material previously published by the institute it stated that the gradu-

ateship of the institute is recognised by his Department as being the professional equivalent of a primary degree, the contact or correspondence that there has been between him and the institute in relation to this statement which would justify the institute making such a claim. [19097/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Awards made by the provider referred to by the Deputy are not recognised by my Department, whether as equivalent to a particular level of the National Framework of Qualifications or otherwise, and never have been recognised by my Department. Furthermore I am not aware of any contact or correspondence between my Department and the provider concerned regarding the equivalence of their awards.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) is the body with statutory responsibility for the National Framework of Qualifications, and in order to have their awards included in, or aligned with, the Framework the provider concerned would have to make an application to the NQAI. Their awards are not currently included in, or aligned with, the Framework and they have not been in contact with the NQAI in this regard.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 88.

School Transport

94. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the consideration that has been given to the concerns of the Church of Ireland community in regard to the school transportation review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19127/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I take it that the Deputy is referring to the changes to the Primary School Transport Scheme announced in the 2011 Budget by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government which derive from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the scheme.

Under the terms of my Department's Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for school transport if they reside 3.2 kilometres or more from and are attending their nearest national school, as determined by my Department, having regard to ethos and language.

The decisions announced in the Budget cover the uniform application of the distance requirement, cessation of the Closed/Central School Rule (CSR), the minimum number of eligible children required to establish and retain services and the introduction of charges for eligible primary pupils. As is currently the position, families of eligible pupils, for whom there is no school transport service available, may apply for the remote area grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

It is essential to stress that the wider context within which all these changes are taking place, is a situation of the most serious financial difficulties. Under the four year recovery plan, there is a requirement to deliver savings of €17 million on the school transport budget and these measures are an integral part of this.

95. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will clarify the standing of the school transport agreements signed on the amalgamation of national schools, in view of recently announced changes in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19138/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Changes to school transport services relating to the Closed School Rule were announced in the

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2011 Budget by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government and derive from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the scheme.

I wish to inform the Deputy that school transport arrangements under the Closed School Rule originated from the last major amalgamation of schools in the late 1960's. Under the Closed School Rule, transport is generally provided to the school of amalgamation for pupils who reside in a closed school area.

However, over the course of the last forty two years, many parts of Ireland have experienced changes in population, the number of schools in an area may have increased and private transport is more widely available.

My Department must always seek to ensure that every service that is funded by the public is operated in a manner that delivers for pupils, parents and taxpayers alike.

Vocational Education Committees

96. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of additional places for mature students and post-leaving certificate students that are being made available for this coming academic year in the vocational education committee colleges; if he will list the colleges in tabular form; if he will indicate the courses that will have extra places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19194/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): As part of the Government's Jobs Initiative, an additional 1,000 Further Education Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and 3,000 Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) places were announced, to be prioritised for the unemployed. These additional places will be available from September.

The PLC and BTEI programmes are open to all adults over 16 years of age.

The breakdown of these allocations is in the tables below. Further distribution of these places to their schools/colleges is a matter for individual VECs. The operation of particular courses is also a matter for VECs and the schools and Colleges under their remit.

Allocations of additional PLC Places

Co. Carlow VEC	20
Co. Cavan VEC	60
Co. Clare VEC	10
City of Cork VEC	20
Co. Cork VEC	30
City of Dublin VEC	60
Co. Dublin VEC	30
Dún Laoghaire VEC	55
City of Galway VEC	60
Co. Galway VEC	20
Co. Kerry VEC	60
Co. Kilkenny VEC	30
City of Limerick VEC	30
Co. Limerick VEC	20
Co. Louth VEC	60
Co. Mayo VEC	60
Co. Meath VEC	60
Co. Monaghan VEC	60

 Allocations of additional PLC Places

Co. Offaly VEC	20
Co. Sligo VEC	60
Co. Tipperary NR VEC	30
Co. Tipperary SR VEC	20
City of Waterford VEC	20
Co. Westmeath VEC	30
Co. Wicklow VEC	60
Jesus and Mary Secondary School, Enniscrone	15

 Allocations of additional BTEI Places

CARLOW	42
CAVAN	53
CLARE	90
CORK CITY	72
CORK COUNTY	81
DONEGAL	100
DUBLIN CITY	419
DÚN LAOGHAIRE	38
DUBLIN COUNTY	300
GALWAY CITY	67
GALWAY COUNTY	121
KERRY	115
KILDARE	69
KILKENNY	99
LAOIS	54
LEITRIM	40
LIMERICK CITY	48
LIMERICK COUNTY	93
LONGFORD	48
LOUTH	42
MAYO	111
MEATH	195
MONAGHAN	58
OFFALY	62
ROSCOMMON	27
SLIGO	45
TIPPERARY NORTH	52
TIPPERARY SOUTH	100
WATERFORD CITY	73
WATERFORD COUNTY	75
WESTMEATH	49
WEXFORD	90
WICKLOW	72

State Examinations

97. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills, further to Parliamentary Question No. 75 of 23 June 2011, if he will provide details of the colleges that provide a second chance entrance examination for students wishing to study science and engineering and who have failed higher level mathematics; if he will provide details of the colleges which formerly offered such an option but have now ceased this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19198/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Academic matters including the admissions criteria for entry to higher education institutions are legally a matter for the institutions themselves. However, I have been informed that the following universities and Institutes of Technology operate a second chance examination aimed at students who do not fulfil the matriculation requirements in Mathematics through their Leaving Certificate results:—

- NUI Maynooth (for engineering courses)
- University of Limerick (for science and engineering courses)
- NUI Galway (for engineering courses)
- Cork Institute of Technology for engineering
- Dublin Institute of Technology for engineering.

I have also been informed that Waterford Institute of Technology has proposals to operate a second chance exam in 2011 for first time.

Higher education institutions have academic autonomy on matters of course provision and admission criteria.

Departmental Staff

98. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase the number of arts education organisers around the country; his further plans to improve this crucial service in view of the amalgamation of vocational education committees. [16607/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The post of Arts Education Officer is comprehended by the public sector staffing moratorium and there are no plans to expand the programme. The Arts Education Programme is available in a number of VECs and funds educational initiatives for adults, particularly those participating in Further Education, to encourage and develop an appreciation of the arts.

Flood Relief

99. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the person who has responsibility for a matter in the national grid areas (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19093/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Brian Hayes): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the matter of the embankments at Killadysert and Ballynacally, which were formerly maintained by the Land Commission. Following the abolition of that body, the Public Trustee, an official in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, administers a fund that was intended to provide for maintenance of the former Land Commission embankments. In practice, however, there is little, if any, funds remaining for maintenance of any of these structures. Maintenance works have in some places been carried out on these embankments by the relevant landowners.

Following representations on behalf of property owners, the Office of Public Works (OPW) undertook a study in relation to the feasibility of upgrading the former Land Commission embankments in these areas, and having the control and management for same transferred to the OPW. The study report of March, 2009 concluded that it would not be economically feasible for the OPW to upgrade these embankments to the required standard and take any in charge, having regard to demands on OPW for priority flood mitigation works at other locations. I have arranged for a copy of the report to be sent to the Deputy.

In 2009, the OPW introduced the Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Studies Scheme to provide funding to Local Authorities to address localised flood problems where a solution had been identified or could be readily identified. The Scheme has been continued for 2010 and 2011. In 2010, Clare County Council submitted a funding application under the scheme to repair 130m of the embankment at Ballycorrick, Ballynacally and €46,800 was subsequently allocated to the Council for this project. It is open to the Council to submit further applications for works to the embankments at the locations concerned. If further applications are received, they will be considered in light of the scheme criteria and having regard to the overall availability of resources for flood risk management.

Work Permits

100. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding a work permit in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19044/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department processes applications in respect of the different types of employment permits — Green Cards Permits, Work Permits, Spousal/Dependant Permits and Intra-company Transfer Permits. Applications are processed in date of receipt order by Permit Type and in line with the Employment Permits Act 2006. I wish to advise the Deputy that the Employment Permits Section is currently processing this specific application and was in contact with the employer on the 4th July 2011 requesting some additional information in relation to this case. On receipt of that information a decision will be made on this application.

Question No. 101 withdrawn.

Job Creation

102. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps each of the State agencies under his aegis are doing to promote job creation in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19199/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Job creation is central to our economic recovery and the Programme for Government has job creation at its core. The role of my Department is to ensure that we have the right policies in place that will support and grow our enterprise base in order to facilitate job creation. The Jobs Initiative announced in May focuses our limited resources on measures that offer the greatest potential for expansion and employment creation in the domestic economy. Additionally, it has a significant focus on tourism, and the reduction in the VAT Rate, along with the abolition of the travel tax will provide an important stimulus to tourism businesses in Co. Meath and around the Country.

The programmes supported by my Department and its agencies will be critical in achieving economic growth through promoting the export potential of enterprise in Ireland and driving our Smart Economy. The allocation of €508 million in funding for 2011 will ensure that the core programmes of the enterprise agencies are sustained and targeted as well as driving invest-

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ment in research and development. This investment in the Enterprise Development agencies will drive recovery in the economy by facilitating the winning of foreign direct investments, the growth of indigenous exports and the creation of sustainable jobs.

The primary role of IDA Ireland is the attraction of high quality Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Ireland. An integral and fundamental element of this role is the agency's mandate to promote sustainable and balanced regional development. In this context, IDA Ireland will continue to target Greenfield and expansion projects in Financial Services and International Services and ICT for the Meath area. The agency will also work with its existing client base in the County to expand their presence.

An availability of premises is one of the important attractions in encouraging FDI to Ireland. In Meath, IDA Ireland has 28 hectares (70 acres) of serviced industrial lands available at IDA Navan Business Park where six projects are located. Additionally there is a new 24 hectares (60 acre) Business Park at Donore, Drogheda, which is actually located in Co. Meath. The financial services company — 'International Fund Services' employs 210 people at this location. In addition, Generali which is one of the world's largest insurance companies, have developed three business functions in Navan which today employ over 250 staff. Generali announced a 30 job expansion plan in 2010 which is linked with a major new investment involving the construction of a new 23,000 sq.ft. office facility. This will open in Autumn 2011.

Enterprise Ireland will continue to support job creation through a number of interventions, such as supporting the establishment and growth of high potential start-up companies and supporting companies to target new opportunities in overseas markets. Enterprise Ireland has 175 client companies in Meath employing 4,109 people on a full time basis and 689 on a contract or part-time basis. Since 2008 Enterprise Ireland has made payments of approximately €9.5m to its clients in the County. This funding has helped companies to retain and create employment, to explore new markets for innovative products and services and build innovation capacity.

In 2010, sixteen innovation vouchers were awarded to companies in Meath to the value of €80,000. These vouchers allow small Irish companies to access innovative solutions provided by third level colleges. Enterprise Ireland co-ordinates business start up workshops on a nationwide basis, called EnterpriseSTART. It is delivered for potential entrepreneurs with a desire to start technology or knowledge intensive businesses with good export potential. A workshop will be held in Ashbourne towards the end of July.

The Meath County Enterprise Board (CEB) provides support for small businesses with 10 employees or fewer in the start-up and expansion phases, to promote and develop indigenous micro-enterprise potential and to stimulate economic activity and entrepreneurship at local level, with priority being given to manufacturing and internationally traded services. CEBs recognise that business growth and job creation are inherent considerations in their activities. While their primary function is to promote enterprise, CEBs can support individuals, firms and community groups provided they have the capacity to achieve commercial viability which is vital to job creation.

In 2010, Meath CEB provided €230,515 in financial assistance to 32 projects and provided training to 366 participants. In addition, there were 883 jobs existing in CEB assisted enterprises at the end of 2010. During 2011, Meath CEB will continue to be actively involved in the area of economic development and will ensure that available funds are targeted to maximise entrepreneurial development.

Industrial Development

103. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the

number of jobs in companies currently in County Meath that are being supported by Industrial Development Authority grants; the companies involved and their location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19200/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): At present there are 15 IDA Ireland supported companies in Meath employing approximately 735 staff in permanent positions and an additional 116 staff in other positions. This data is broken down by town, in the tabular statement.

Note

The above figures exclude the 210 staff employed by International Fund Services at Donore, Drogheda — though located in Co. Meath, these have been recorded by the Forfas Annual Labour Survey in the Co. Louth returns. Additionally, a management buy-out of IDA client company De Royal in Kells in 2009 saw the jobs reclassified in Enterprise Ireland rather than IDA job figures. The company currently employs close to 300 staff in Kells.

Company	Location	Sector	Nationality
Doosan Infracore Co Ltd	Slane	Metals and Engineering	UK
Europ Assistance Holdings Ltd	Navan	Insurance Call Centre	UK
International Paper/SIACA	Ashbourne	Paper and Printing	US
Irish Industrial Explosives Ltd	Enfield	Explosives	France
Welch-Allyn Ltd	Navan	Medical Devices	US
Alltech Biotechnologies	Dunboyne	Biotechnology	US
Generali International Ltd	Navan	Investment Fund Management	US
PNC International	Navan	Financial Services	US
Generali Pan Europe	Navan	Fund Management	Italy
Trimfold Envelopes	Trim	Stationery	United Kingdom
Pickerings Lifts Limited	Dunboyne	Lift Components	UK
Wetzel	Ashbourne	Metals and Engineering	Germany
Franklin Pharmaceuticals Limited	Trim	Pharmaceuticals	Netherlands
Nivalis Limited	Ashbourne	CD Packaging	China
Kum	Trim	Plastics	Germany

IDA's Strategy for County Meath is as follows:

- To progress the development of a knowledge economy in order that the county can compete both nationally and internationally for foreign direct investment.
- To continue to target Greenfield and Expansion projects in Financial Services and International Services and ICT for the Meath area.
- To encourage increased cooperation between foreign direct investment companies and the third level institutions, for example, University College Maynooth.
- To work with the existing client base in the county and to expand their presence there.
- To work with Local Authorities and relevant infrastructure providers to influence the delivery of appropriate infrastructure to the county.
- To utilize resources of institutions both within and outside the county in presenting the advantages of Navan and Co. Meath as a location, for example, NUI Maynooth, Navan Chamber of Commerce, Meath County Council/Economic Development Manager, Eircom/Enet and so forth.

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- The marketing of landbanks (IDA Navan and Donore Business Parks), Office and Industrial facilities.

This very active programme has already yielded results. Companies such as Lir Chocolates have relocated to the IDA business park in Navan and PNC, a leading financial services company, employs approximately 55 at a facility in Navan Town Centre.

104. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the plans he has to develop innovation hubs in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19201/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Sean Sherlock): I have been informed by Enterprise Ireland that the agency has 175 client companies in Meath employing 4,109 people on a full time basis and 689 on a contract/part-time basis. Since 2008 Enterprise Ireland has made payments of approximately €9.5m to clients in the county. This funding has helped companies to retain and create employment, to explore new markets for innovative products and services and build innovation capacity.

In 2010, 80 Innovation Vouchers were awarded to companies in Meath to the value of €400,000. These Vouchers allow small Irish companies to access innovative solutions provided by Third Level Colleges. The Voucher gives small companies the financial support to embark on a process of continuous innovation.

Enterprise Ireland co-ordinates business start up workshops on a nationwide basis called EnterpriseSTART. In the Dublin — Mid East region it is delivered over two afternoons for potential entrepreneurs with a desire to start technology or knowledge intensive businesses with good export potential. It provides them with an overview of what is required to start a business and tests their business idea. A workshop will be held in Ashbourne, Co Meath towards the end of July this year. It is anticipated that about 20 potential entrepreneurs will participate.

Employment in Enterprise Ireland supported companies in Meath

Meath	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number Of Plants	175	178	177	175
Full Time Jobs	4,899	4,630	4,183	4,109
Gains	642	323	340	192
Losses	-1,058	-592	-787	-266
Net Change	-416	-269	-447	-74
Contract/Part Time Jobs	395	483	559	689

Forfas Employment Figs 2010

The position in relation to IDA activities in County Meath is set out in a separate reply today to Deputy Hannigan.

School Meals Programme

105. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review the school lunch programme to which every child here is entitled; if she will consider allowing each school to make its own arrangements for the management and purchase of school lunches; her views that there could be considerable savings to the State and less waste in the schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19197/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The school meals programme provides funding towards provision of food services for disadvantaged school children through two schemes. No scheme exists which provides school lunches for all pupils in the State. The first scheme is the statutory urban school meals scheme for primary schools which is operated by local authorities and part-financed by this Department. The role of this Department is confined to reimbursing local authorities and approving participation in the scheme. The second scheme is the non-statutory school meals local projects scheme which provides funding directly from this Department to primary schools, secondary schools and local groups and voluntary organisations which operate their own school meals projects.

Projects must be targeted at areas of disadvantage or at children with special needs. Priority for funding is currently given to schools which are part of the Department of Education & Skills' initiative for disadvantaged schools, 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS). However, there is no automatic entitlement to funding and all applications are considered in light of the available budget for the Scheme.

Funding under this scheme is for food only, which must be of suitable quality and nutritional value, and prepared and consumed in an appropriate environment. Funding is provided for a range of meal types, including breakfasts, snacks, lunches and dinners. Maximum rates of payments apply for each meal type. The type and range of meals provided, as well as the method and logistics of supplying the meals, are decided by the individual local groups and schools that operate the projects. Schools and projects are obliged to ensure that wastage is minimised and that food is not purchased for absentee children.

Social Welfare Benefits

106. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for back-to-school and communion and confirmation grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19045/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The administrative arrangements for the 2011 back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme differ from those that applied in previous years. For this year, the majority of back to school clothing and footwear allowance entitlements were fully automated with no application form required from customers. As the person in question was not one of the customers who received an automated payment they are required to complete an application form which is available for download from *www.welfare.ie* or by texting "Form BTSCFA", followed by their name and address to 51909. The completed application form should be returned to Department of Social Protection, PO Box 131, Letterkenny, Co Donegal where a decision will be made in relation to their entitlement.

Under the supplementary 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 person concerned was refused an exceptional needs payment in respect of confirmation costs on 7 March 2011. She subsequently appealed the decision to the relevant appeals office in the HSE. The decision to refuse the exceptional needs payment was upheld by appeals officer.

Social Welfare Code

107. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Social Protection the safeguards in place

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to ensure that retained firefighters are not discriminated against due to their need to be in employment that is in close proximity to the fire station they are based in and her views that a failure to ensure such safeguards are in place will lead to a serious diminution in the quality and the availability of retained fire fighters. [19071/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Issues relating to the Irish Fire Services are a matter for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in the first instance. Part-time fire-fighters are entitled to the full range of social welfare benefits and allowances once they satisfy the statutory conditions of the scheme concerned. e.g. age, means, PRSI contributions, etc. Part-time fire-fighters are entitled to a jobseeker's payment in respect of days on which they are engaged in fire-fighting or training. They are, however, required to satisfy the statutory conditions for the receipt of a jobseeker's payment of being available for and genuinely seeking work.

Social Welfare Benefits

108. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the length of time it is currently taking to process family income supplement reviews; her views that in the future it would be beneficial to have review forms issued earlier so that persons would not be left without payment for months; her plans to alleviate the current backlog with regard to family income supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19076/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible. The average waiting time for family income supplement (FIS) renewals at the end of May is approximately 15 weeks. At the end of May, there were approximately **6,289** renewal applications awaiting approval. The volume of FIS renewals on hands and the delays in processing are a consequence of continued strong claim intake.

At present application forms for renewals are issued one month in advance of the expiry of the current payment. Applications for renewal of FIS are then processed in order of the date of expiry of the current payment and not by date of receipt of a completed renewal form. Earlier issue of the renewal application would not facilitate the collection of the most up to date customer information to ensure the fairest calculation of entitlement for the next 52 week payment period of FIS.

The Department has introduced a number of measures to address the efficiency of claim processing for FIS in light of the current waiting times:

- Existing processes and procedures are reviewed on an ongoing basis with the explicit objective of reducing delays in claim processing;
- The ongoing staffing requirement is being kept under review in light of the increased volumes of claims;
- Additional temporary staff are being recruited to help reduce the backlog;
- Overtime working is being judiciously applied;
- Priority is being given to renewal claims to ensure restoration of payment as promptly as possible following review at renewal stage. These measures will, over time, lead to more efficient processing and reduce the number of claims on hand. The position is being closely monitored and kept under review by the Department.

Employment Support Services

109. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Limerick who has been seeking work for two years but, due to a means test, does not qualify for benefits or allowance, is eligible for the national internship scheme. [19102/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In order to be eligible to participate in JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme, an individual must:

- currently be in receipt of a Jobseeker's Allowance/Jobseeker's Benefit or signing for credits on the Live Register, and
- have been so for a total of 3 months or more in the last 6 months.

An individual who does not receive a Jobseeker's Allowance/Benefit payment may therefore be eligible to participate in the scheme provided that they are currently signing onto the Live Register for Social Insurance contribution credits and have been for at least three of the last 6 months.

Social Welfare Benefits

110. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Social Protection if rent allowance will be reinstated as soon as possible in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19122/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that a formal decision has not yet been made on their application for rent supplement. The HSE further advised that the persons concerned have been requested to renegotiate the rent being charged by the landlord as it currently exceeds the maximum rent limit for their family size.

111. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry satisfies criteria to qualify for a position as a Tús worker in a company (details further supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19128/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of Tús 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. Persons already in employment or engaged in community employment are not eligible for these positions. Eligible persons will 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.

This person (details supplied) does not meet the eligibility criteria at present. The operation of the scheme, including eligibility criteria, will be kept under review and will inform the evaluation process in due course.

112. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of one parent family payment; if she will provide a breakdown of the educational and

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or professional standards of these recipients; the average size of these families and the average age of children of such families. [19129/11]

113. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of one parent family payment that have recently commenced or completed educational schemes such as the back to education scheme and the springboard programme; if these schemes have been full-time or part-time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19130/11]

114. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of one parent family payment that have recently commenced or completed existing back to work schemes such as the work placement programme; if these schemes have been full time or part time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19131/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 112 to 114, inclusive, together.

The number of claimants receiving the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) stood at 93,166 on 31 May, 2011. Some 98% of claimants are women. Recipients receive payments in respect of 154,172 child dependants.

Some 57% of OFP recipients have 1 child, 28% have 2 children, 10% have 3 children and 5% have 4 children or more. Some 90% of recipients have a youngest child aged 14 years or under, 80% have a youngest child aged 11 years or under, 61% have a youngest child aged 7 years or under and 33% have a youngest child aged 3 years or under.

Lone parents generally have significantly lower levels of education than married or cohabiting parents — 13% of them have no formal qualifications compared to just 6% of other parents and a further 27% of them have only lower secondary level qualifications compared to 15% of married or cohabiting parents. Lone parents are also a lot less likely to have a third-level qualification — only 18% fall into this category compared to 34% of other parents. 58% (or almost two-thirds) of lone parents only ever attain secondary level education and no higher.

Section 12 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2011 extends existing provisions requiring that new claimants for all social welfare payments, including OFP, can be obliged to provide a range of information for profiling and activation purposes to the existing stock of social welfare recipients. Such profiling of OFP recipients, when introduced, will provide information on the educational, skills and employment background of individual claimants and can be used to better target supports to help people to return to work, education or training. Additionally, the collation of information on an individual level and on a county-by-county basis to better identify the requirements of the different cohorts within the OFP population will enable the identification of supports that are available across the service provider network.

With regard to participation in employment, it is currently estimated that some 50% of OFP recipients are in employment. Some 6,500 recipients (or 7% of the current total number of claimants) are involved in Community Employment (CE) schemes.

The total number of participants on the Back-to-Education Allowance (BTEA) scheme during the 2010/2011 academic year was 25,032 — of which 2,589 were previously in receipt of the OFP. Of these, 1,207 were on the second level option and 1,382 were on the third level option.

The Springboard Programme is a Department of Education and Skills initiative. The application process for it is still open. Information will become available from that Department in due course.

The total number of participants on the Back-to-Work Allowance (BTWA) scheme as of 24 June, 2011, stood at 11,310 — of which 357 were previously in receipt of the OFP. Of these, 96 were employees and 261 were self-employed.

As of 4 July, 2011, there were a total of 42 participants on the Work Placement Programme who are in receipt of the OFP. Since the inception of this Programme in 2009, a total of 38 individuals, who were in receipt of the OFP, have successfully secured a work placement. Placements on the Work Placement Programme must span a minimum of 25 hours or a maximum of 40 hours per week.

Arts Plan

115. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will consider engaging with Allied Irish Banks in an effort to encourage wider public access to their extensive and significant collection of art with a view to placing pieces on permanent display in public institutions including municipal galleries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19118/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Allied Irish Banks Plc has gathered a considerable collection of art. The Bank is actively engaged with my Department to review its lending policy and to explore other means by which the public might have greater access to the collection. My Department will continue with that process.

Tourism Promotion

116. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the steps he, his Department and agencies under his aegis are taking to promote County Meath as a cultural and heritage tourist destination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19191/11]

117. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the groups in County Meath that his Department or agencies under his aegis are supporting both through financial help and mentoring help; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19192/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 117 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, heritage and cultural tourism is acknowledged as a growing element of the tourism sector and is an area that could help to stimulate economic growth. Indeed, heritage and culture are key areas in attracting tourism to all of the counties in Ireland. In relation to the Deputy's specific query, my Department has been involved in a number of initiatives reflected below to promote Co. Meath as a cultural and heritage tourist destination. My Department has also supported the Irish language and Gaeltacht communities in Co. Meath.

In the area of arts and culture, my Department continues to work with Meath County Council in relation to the promotion of arts and culture in Co. Meath. The Deputy will of course be aware that the Arts Council, which is funded from my Department's Vote Group, is the State agency primarily charged with the promotion and funding of the arts at all levels throughout the country. Full details of the recipients in Co. Meath of financial supports provided by the Arts Council are available on that agency's website www.artscouncil.ie. It should be noted that funding of approximately €712,000 was provided by the Arts Council to a number of groups in Co. Meath during 2010.

[Deputy Jimmy Deenihan.]

In terms of promoting and developing the built and natural heritage in Co. Meath, I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department liaises with Meath County Council, Meath Tourism and Coillte on heritage matters on a regular basis. The Deputy will of course be aware of my Department's role recently in the development of the Girley Bog Loop Walk, which is approximately 5 km south-west of Kells.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Heritage Council, which is funded from my Department's Vote Group, has assisted a number of projects in Co. Meath. In 2011, the Heritage Council provided funding in the order of €188,600 to Trim Town Council, Meath County Council, Julianstown District Community Association and also to a number of archaeologists in the county.

I can also confirm to the Deputy that my Department continues to promote knowledge and understanding of the county's archaeological heritage. The Trim Castle Monograph will be published this year and will confirm Trim Castle as one of the major sites of its type in Ireland. I should also say that a Steering Committee has been established to oversee the drafting of a new Management Plan for the Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site and I have invited local people and other interested parties to make submissions on the preparation of the new management plan.

The Deputy will also be aware that tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners under Section 482 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, subject to certain conditions, to the owner/occupier of an approved building (including surrounding garden) or an approved garden existing independently in respect of expenditure incurred on the repair, maintenance or restoration of the approved building or garden. A prerequisite of a successful application to the Revenue Commissioners is the issuing by me, as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, of a determination that the building and / or garden is / are intrinsically of significant scientific, historical, architectural, aesthetic or horticultural interest. Currently, there are 12 houses and 1 garden in County Meath, from a nationwide total of 242 properties, availing of Section 482 tax relief. Finally, the Deputy will of course be aware that the tourism industry is very important to the Gaeltacht economy. In this regard, my Department, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge continue to provide supports to the Gaeltacht areas in Co. Meath. Comharchumann Ráth Chairn is the main community-based organisation in County Meath in receipt of financial support from Údarás na Gaeltachta.

The Gaeltacht areas of Rath Cairn and Baile Ghib also receive supports from my Department and from Údarás na Gaeltachta with regard to the use of the Irish language in these areas. Assistance is given to Naíonra Ráth Chairn and Naíonra Bhaile Ghib through Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta Teo. Support is also given to Club Óige Ráth Chairn through Óige na Gaeltachta Teo. Funding of €40,000 was paid to Glór na nGael in 2011 by my Department under Scéimeanna Tacaíochta Gaeilge (Irish Language Support Schemes). This voluntary Irish Language organisation is based in Ráth Cairn, Co Meath and has also been approved grant assistance of €548,861 by Foras na Gaeilge for 2011. An Foras has also approved grant assistance of €488,840 to Cumann na bhFiann, Baile an Uairnigh, for the current year. Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge, which has its headquarters in Rath Cairn, is also supported by Foras na Gaeilge.

Departmental Expenditure

118. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the total cost to the State of the Fergus Cahill-Frontier Economics Limited report completed at the beginning of 2011 but as yet unpublished. [19003/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The independent analysis in relation to the electricity transmission assets was carried out by Frontier Economics Limited, which was appointed to carry out the analysis following a public procurement process.

The cost of the analysis was €178,500, excluding VAT. The cost was shared equally by the ESB and EirGrid and was not funded by my Department.

Proposed Legislation

119. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if legislation will be required to carry out a flood risk report in the preparation of the city and county development plans of local authorities; the date on which this will happen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19019/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): My Department's Guidelines to Planning Authorities on the Planning System and Flood Risk Management, which were published on 30 November 2009, are aimed at ensuring a more consistent, rigorous and systematic approach to flood risk assessment and management in the planning system. The Guidelines were issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) which requires planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála to have regard to them in the performance of their functions. These measures have been further embedded in legislation through the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010.

As part of my statutory observation role in respect of development plans and local area plans, my Department is monitoring implementation of the Guidelines in conjunction with the relevant legislative provisions in the planning code, to determine, inter alia, whether the existing provisions continue to provide a sound basis for planning authorities to identify, assess and take appropriate steps to manage flood risk in a sustainable manner within their area.

120. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to amend the 2010 Planning and Development Act to allow for public submissions on zoning and to re-balance power towards elected representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19020/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): It remains open to the public to make detailed submissions on zoning for consideration by the planning authority in respect of draft development plans and draft variations to such plans under sections 12 and 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), with similar provisions applying in the case of draft local area plans under section 20 of the Act.

Notwithstanding these provisions, under section 11 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended by section 8 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010), the manager's report, summarising issues raised in submissions or observations made to the planning authority in respect of its notice to review the existing development plan and prepare a new plan, is precluded from referring to any submission relating to a request or proposal for zoning of particular land for any purpose. This is to ensure that the manager's report is focused on strategic considerations and policies at this early stage of the development plan review process rather than on specific zoning proposals which can be made during the consultation period when the draft plan has been published.

[Deputy Willie Penrose.]

In delivering on the specific commitments in the Programme for Government, I intend to keep the planning code under regular review to ensure that there continues to be adequate access and participation both by the public and by public representatives in decision-making and policy formulation.

Nuclear Safety

121. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that the Sellafield nuclear plant will be subject to EU-wide stress tests organised at a European level in view of the concern he has expressed on this issue and not subject solely to a domestic stress test organised at a British domestic level. [19024/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): When I discussed nuclear safety matters with UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, at a bilateral meeting earlier this year, I reiterated the Government's concerns about Sellafield and sought assurance that the nuclear safety stress tests, which were at that time being developed at EU level in response to the serious accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan in March, would be applied not only to the UK's power plants, but also to the Sellafield plant. The Secretary of State confirmed that this was his intention.

With the subsequent agreement of the stress test methodology at EU level in May, the UK Government again confirmed that the stress test will be applied not only to power plants, but to facilities in the nuclear fuel cycle, and that this includes Sellafield.

The European Commission and the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG) developed the "stress tests" following a request from the European Council on 25 March 2011 in response to the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan. The "stress tests" will be conducted initially by the licensees of the facilities, who have the prime responsibility for safety. The national regulators of the fourteen EU Member States who currently operate nuclear power plants, and those neighbouring countries who also agreed to be part of the process, will then independently review the safety assessments for facilities within their own States. These national level reports will then be peer reviewed by teams comprised of representatives of other EU nuclear safety regulators. This peer review stage is in part intended to ensure the appropriate level of robustness and objectivity is applied to the "stress test" process.

Ireland is represented on ENSREG by the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland, which has contributed to the development of the "stress tests". It is intended that the stress test reports will be made public in accordance with national legislation and international obligations, provided that this does not jeopardise other interests (such as security). In the same way, it is also intended that the peer review results will be made public.

The current "stress tests" offer an opportunity to learn from what occurred at Fukushima, and to enhance nuclear safety provisions at national and international levels where necessary. In this context, we support the rigorous application of the stress tests at all nuclear facilities, transparency with regard to the results, and prompt follow-up actions where such are required to improve nuclear safety.

My Department, together with the RPII, will continue to monitor the implementation of the stress tests, including at Sellafield, and will carefully consider their outcomes as they become available. The accident at Fukushima serves to remind us that nuclear safety is a matter for nuclear and non-nuclear States alike. It is imperative that, where a State chooses to develop a nuclear power industry, this is done according to the highest international standards with respect to safety and environmental protection.

Building Regulations

122. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has been briefed by Dublin City Council on its investigation into alleged breaches of the Building Control Acts at a premises (details supplied) in Dublin 13; if he has been briefed on DCC's private investigation into safety breaches at the premises; if he will provide a full report on both of those investigations; his views on the fact that local residents have received no updates from DCC on the findings of the investigations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19038/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Building Regulations set out the legal requirements for the design and construction of new buildings, including houses, extensions and material alterations and certain changes of use of existing buildings. The related Technical Guidance Documents provide technical guidance on how to comply with the Regulations. Compliance with the Regulations is the responsibility of the owner or builder of a building. Enforcement of the Regulations is the responsibility of the 37 local building control authorities and, in the case of Priory Hall, responsibility rests with Dublin City Council who are empowered to carry out inspections and initiate enforcement proceedings, where considered necessary. I understand from Dublin City Council that investigations under the Building Control Acts are currently on-going in this case. Where building defects occur, their remediation is a matter for the parties concerned, namely the building owner, the relevant developer and the builder's insurers, in line with any contractual arrangements agreed between the parties.

As the Deputy will be aware, Dublin City Council has initiated legal proceedings in relation to compliance with planning permission and fire safety regulations; the enforcement proceedings are still before the courts. In addition, the Council, as a property owner in Priory Hall, commissioned a building survey in conjunction with other property owners in the complex who agreed to participate in the survey. The report has recently been submitted to the Council and copies forwarded to those owners who participated in the survey. The report is currently being considered by the Council.

Since taking up office I have prioritised the formulation of policy proposals that will enhance compliance with, and enforcement of, the building regulations. I am currently considering proposals to reform the building control system to include the introduction of mandatory certificates of compliance by builders and designers of buildings demonstrating that the statutory requirements of the Building Regulations have been met.

Local Authority Charges

123. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding proposals to introduce water and property charges for persons who have built houses for themselves on acquired sites and installed at considerable cost, a sewerage purafLOW system, a well and pump or pumphouse (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19101/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland under its fiscal consolidation measures commits to the introduction of a property tax for 2012 and to an increase in the property tax for 2013. The Programme reflects the need, in the context of the State's overall financial position, to put the funding of locally delivered services on a sound financial footing, improve accountability and better align the cost of providing services with the demand for such services.

[Deputy Phil Hogan.]

In light of the complex issues involved, a property tax, requiring a comprehensive property valuation system, would take time to introduce and accordingly, to meet the revenue measure in the EU/IMF Programme, I have already indicated my intention to introduce a household charge in 2012.

I will be bringing proposals to Government in the near future on the legislative and administrative requirements necessary to implement the household charge. The level at which the charge will be set and the applicability of exemptions to the charge will be considered by Government at that time and will be announced in due course. It is my intention that the revenues from the charge will support the provision of locally based services.

The Programme for Government provides for the introduction of a fair funding model to deliver clean and reliable water. The objective is to install water meters in households on public water supplies and move to a charging system based on usage above a free allowance. My Department is currently preparing a strategy to implement these proposals and further details will be made available when the Government has considered the proposals.

Constituency Boundaries

124. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if, in the context of the new Constituency Commission to establish new Dáil constituency boundaries the Commission's remit, will allow them to consider the creation of large multi-seat constituencies electing six or more Deputies. [19103/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The terms of reference of a Constituency Commission are set out in section 6 of the Electoral Act 1997. In relation to Dáil constituencies, section 6(2)(b) provides that each constituency shall return three, four or five members. I have no proposals to amend this element of the terms of reference.

Local Authority Grants

125. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to regulations applied by local authorities requiring small, community based organisations to register for tax as a voluntary non-profit making organisation if they are to be in a position to benefit from small support grants known as the councillors allocation in certain local authorities (details supplied); his views that this requirement should be reassessed in view of its restrictive and overly bureaucratic nature; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19116/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Local authorities are required by regulations under Section 891(b) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 to provide details of relevant third party payments to the Revenue Commissioners on an annual basis. Compliance with the regulations is a matter for each individual local authority.

Proposed Legislation

126. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the High Hedges Act 2011 which was recently enacted in Northern Ireland; his views that similar legislation would be of benefit here; his plans to enact similar legislation here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19121/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): I have no plans at present to introduce specific legislation to regulate the permitted heights of hedges and trees in privately owned gardens. Planning legislation does not place restrictions on the height of hedges or trees nor does it make any particular provision for recognition of a right to light or remedy from any other nuisance which may be caused by trees in an urban residential area.

Complaints relating to matters such as trees or shrubs overhanging a property are normally addressed, where necessary, under civil law between the parties concerned.

Social and Affordable Housing

127. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to change the Part 5 provisions relating to social and affordable housing or if the schemes will continue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19206/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): On 16 June I launched the Government's new housing policy statement which will serve as a framework for a sequence of legislative and policy initiatives in the short to medium term. Based on a number of fundamental principles and goals that will form the foundation of a substantial reform programme, the new framework for housing policy responds to current and emerging conditions in the housing sector, taking account of the dramatic cycle of rapid growth and sudden collapse in the residential property market. The centre-piece of the approach is to chart a way forward for housing policy in Ireland by placing greater emphasis on: choice; equity across housing tenures; and delivering quality outcomes for the resources invested.

The policy statement also announces the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including shared ownership, in the context of a full review of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. Affordable housing schemes were introduced to bridge the affordability gap that emerged during the boom years, preventing middle income households from realising their ownership aspirations. However, affordable housing did nothing to address the underlying problem — market overheating with an unsustainable gap between prices and incomes. Affordable housing was therefore a symptom of a market failure and not a solution to it.

In addition, affordability has eased to such an extent that there is little or no demand for affordable housing. Indeed, in recent years the challenge has been to deploy existing affordable stock productively rather than deliver new affordable housing. While there may be localised affordability challenges in the future, particularly in areas where supply is short and demand is likely to return relatively quickly, any such affordable housing scheme as may be necessary in the future will have a broader tenure focus than in the past.

The Government is committed to supporting access to home ownership for lower income households and a range of paths to home ownership will remain in place in that regard. These include the incremental purchase scheme, the availability of loan finance from local authorities for house purchase, including open market purchase, and the tenant purchase scheme.

Waste Management

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the full extent of the progress made to date in the remediation programme for the Kerdiffstown landfill site, County Kildare; the degree to which all unacceptable materials have been removed or are likely to be completed; the total expenditure to date; the

[Deputy Bernard J. Durkan.]

further expenditure required if any; when the site will be restored in accordance with best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19207/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Following the completion of the fire fighting activity at the Kedrifestown facility on 25 February 2011, the fire services passed control of the site to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA is now using powers under the Waste Management Acts to remediate the site and to put in place appropriate aftercare measures.

Remedial works are continuing at the site as part of a process that will take a number of years to complete. The next phase of the work involves a detailed site investigation which is being advanced over the period to end 2011, followed by detailed design of the full remediation works programme.

The EPA has established a Community Liaison Group, comprising the Agency itself, local residents (including members of the Clean Air Naas group), business representatives and Kildare County Council. The first meeting of the group was held on July, 2011 and included a site visit for group members and elected representatives from the area. A range of relevant information is available on the dedicated project website, *www.kedrifestowncleanup.ie*, established by the EPA. Further information and updates will be posted to this site as the remedial project continues with a view to keeping the public fully informed on progress in a timely manner.

Payments totaling €2,262,389 have been made by my Department to date to support the work of Kildare County Council and the EPA at the Kedrifestown facility. While further significant expenditure will arise, it is not possible to quantify this precisely as the costs involved will depend on a range of factors, including the quantities of waste, the approach to remediation required and the results of tendering processes.

Scéimeanna Uisce

129. **D'fhiafraigh Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Comhshaoil, Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil cén uair a cheadófar do Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe duine a fhostú in Inis Meáin, Árainn, le faireachán a dhéanamh ar an scéim uisce ar an oileán i bhfianaise na práinne atá ann go mbeidh an scéim uisce sin ag feidhmiú go sásúil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [19092/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Tá an post, luaite sa chéist, ceadaithe cheana féin.

EU Funding

130. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has applied for or received any moneys or grants for the period 2007-2013 under the drug prevention and information programme of the European Parliament and European Council, which aims to build on the EU drugs strategy and action plans, the ultimate aim of which is to significantly reduce the social harm and health damage caused by the use of, and trade in, illicit drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19069/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has neither applied for, nor received, any funding under the Drug Prevention and Information Programme of the European Parliament and European Council, DPIIP, for the period 2007-2013.

131. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has applied for any Daphne I, II, or III grants from the EU Commission, which aim to contribute to the protection of children, young persons and women against all forms of violence and to attain a high level of health protection, well-being and social cohesion; if his attention has been drawn to any Irish application which may have sought his backing since the fund was established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19077/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Daphne Programme is a European Commission funding programme under the Commission's General Programme 'Fundamental Rights and Justice'. The first Daphne Programme ran from 2000 to 2003 and was followed by Daphne II from 2004 to 2008. Daphne III is the latest programme, running from 2007 to 2013.

The specific objective of Daphne III is to contribute to the prevention of, and the fight against, all forms of violence occurring in the public or the private domain against children, young people and women, including sexual exploitation and trafficking in human beings, by taking preventive measures and by providing support and protection for victims and groups at risk.

The programme provides for three funding streams. One stream provides for the Commission's own initiatives, while a second stream provides for operating grants for non-governmental organisations operating in at least 12 member states in the sector covered by the grants. The third stream is the one which is most relevant to Irish organisations. This stream provides for action grants to non-state organisations for specific projects to be carried out in a one- or two-year period involving organisations in at least two member states.

Applications for funding are made by non-state organisations directly to the EU Commission. Government Departments are not eligible to apply for funding under the Daphne Programmes.

My Department has had involvement in a small number of projects. One such project was the establishment and operation of the Irish Observatory for Violence against Women which received co-funding from my Department during the first Daphne Programme. The Anti-Human Trafficking Unit in my Department and the Human Trafficking Investigation and Coordination Unit of the Garda National Immigration Bureau participated as associated partners in an application for funding from Daphne III by the Dignity Project in April 2008. The Dignity Project was a two-year research project into international best practice for services to women victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, which concluded on 7 February 2011. The Dignity Project was coordinated by the Dublin Employment Pact and the Immigration Council of Ireland with international partners from Klaipeda in Lithuania, Glasgow in Scotland and Madrid in Spain.

More recently, Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, an Executive Office within my Department, agreed to provide information for a project involving Women's Aid and the Immigrant Council of Ireland. This project seeks to build the knowledge base regarding experiences of migrant women and intimate partner violence in the European Union and to build the capacity of law enforcement and law centres to improve their services to migrant women. The project is on a reserve list of projects for funding under the 2009 and 2010 call for proposals.

Witness Protection Programme

132. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the budget allocated to the Garda witness protection programme for each of the years 2008, 2009 and 2010, and to date in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19083/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The budget allocated to the Witness Security Programme is set out in the table below.

Year	Estimate Provision
2008	€0.900 Million
2009	€0.498 Million
2010	€1.198 Million
2011	€1.198 Million

The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment in any way on the Witness Security Programme other than to say that it is a vital part of the Garda response to tackling gangland crime and terrorism and has been important in securing convictions in a number of cases.

Garda Deployment

133. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí, other than those involved in immigration control, based at Cork, Dublin and Shannon Airports. [19099/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that Cork, Dublin and Shannon Airports are policed by gardaí attached to the stations listed hereunder. The personnel strength of these Garda stations as at the latest date for which figures are readily available is also listed.

Airport	Garda Station	Strength
Cork	Togher	59
Dublin	Dublin Airport	25
Shannon	Shannon	61

Garda Vetting of Personnel

134. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive Garda vetting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19009/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that a vetting application in respect of the person to whom the Deputy refers was received by the Garda Central Vetting Unit and is in the course of being processed. A response will issue to the registered organisation involved in due course.

Questions Nos. 135 and 136 withdrawn.

Aquaculture Licences

137. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a management agreement for the licensing of aquaculture on Lough Foyle, County Donegal, to be operated by the Loughs Agency, will be concluded. [19061/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are a number of complex policy issues associated with the proposed management agreement which are under

active examination by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and other Government Departments. This process is ongoing and every effort is being made to bring it to a conclusion as soon as possible.

Grant Payments

138. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will accommodate farmers who are successful under the dairy equipment scheme by allowing for a later date for completion and payment of these works than the proposed date of end of 2011 to allow for difficult planning, financial and construction processes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19104/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the terms of the Dairy Equipment Scheme, successful applicants will have two years from the date of issue of approval to complete the investment works concerned.

The Deputy will be aware that it is a standard condition of all on-farm investment schemes that work must not have commenced prior to the issue of written approval by my Department.

Food Exports

139. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of County Meath food companies that Bord Bia is promoting through its events in overseas markets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19202/11]

141. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline each of the individual initiatives he and the State agencies under his aegis are using to promote County Meath-based producers abroad and at home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19204/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 141 together.

As Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I am committed to promoting quality Irish food. Ireland now exports food, drink and horticulture products to over 170 countries and Bord Bia, which is under my remit, has developed activities and services for companies focusing on the following strategic priorities:

- Promoting Ireland — the Sustainable Food Island
- Delivering business development initiatives to broaden export reach
- Enhancing the position of Irish food, drink and horticulture on the Irish market
- Driving consumer-focused innovation through market knowledge
- Pursuing a repositioning and differentiation strategy for Irish meat
- Supporting a dynamic and growth oriented small business sector.

It would not be effective to develop promotional services abroad based on differentiation by county. Companies from all counties participate in Bord Bia services. In most cases, market outlets in a county provide the most usual starting point for a food business. Over 350 small companies alone are clients of Bord Bia's Vantage programme, www.bordbiavantage.ie. My Department and Bord Bia have developed a code of good practice for farmers' markets and I am pleased that Navan Town Centre Market was awarded the Banner in April.

In June I launched the first of a series of Regional Food Showcases to promote regional business to business trade in the food sector. The first, the South East Showcase, was held in

[Deputy Simon Coveney.]

Kilkenny, where 49 small companies showcased their food and drink products. Further events are being planned and will involve producers, buyers from the retail and food service sectors, a mapping of regional food opportunities and the launch of a regional directory of food companies. Regional and county food strengths were also on show at events such as BLOOM 2011, which was organised by Bord Bia and attracted 89,000 visitors to the show gardens, horticulture and artisan food village. The visit by Queen Elizabeth II was also used by my Department and Bord Bia to showcase the best of Irish food produce and the Deputy will be aware that Meath strawberries featured on the menu for the State dinner in Dublin Castle. This media coverage gives Irish food producers publicity and opportunities for business.

I can advise the Deputy that further information on all Bord Bia activities can be found on their website *www.bordbia.ie*.

Food Industry

140. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline each of the individual initiatives both he and State agencies under his aegis are using to promote Irish local produce abroad and at home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19203/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am fully committed to promoting quality Irish food at every opportunity both at home and abroad through actions of my Department and those of the State Bodies which come under my remit. The Deputy will be aware of the constraints that are applicable under EU rules, in that public funds may not be used to advertise primarily on the basis of origin.

In terms of developing new outlets, I am anxious to ensure that Irish producers have access to as many global markets as possible. In this regard, on-going efforts are being made by my Department, with the assistance of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to negotiate access for Irish produce to additional third country markets, and by Bord Bia working with industry to promote Irish produce and develop new market opportunities within Ireland, the EU and third countries.

The mission of Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, is to grow the success of a world class Irish food and horticulture industry by providing strategic market development, promotion and information services both at home and abroad for the sectors for which it has responsibility — Meat, Seafood and Horticulture. In order to deliver on its mission, Bord Bia's programmes and activities focus on the following strategic priorities:

- Promoting Ireland — the Sustainable Food Island
- Delivering business development initiatives to broaden export reach
- Enhancing the position of Irish food, drink and horticulture on the Irish market
- Driving consumer focused innovation through market knowledge
- Pursuing a repositioning and differentiation strategy for Irish meat
- Supporting a dynamic and growth oriented small business sector.

Bord Bia acts as a link between the Irish Food, Drink & Horticulture suppliers and existing and potential customers throughout the world. It is headquartered in Dublin, and has nine offices abroad which are focused on market intelligence, business development and promotion. They provide detailed information on the Irish food and drink industry to potential importers.

As an example of recent Home Market activities, in early June my Department and Bord Bia held the first in a series of Regional Food Showcases as part of an initiative to support a

cross section of small and medium food producers in the South East Region, representing a wide range of food and drink products at various stages of development. This inaugural event took place in Kilkenny. Buyers from both the retail and food service sectors were present to view products, meet producers and hear findings of research into the South East food economy. A regional food directory of food companies in the South East counties was also launched at the event.

One of the principal routes to market for the artisan producer is the local Farmers' market. Between April and June, I awarded the Good Practice Standard Award to 37 Farmers' Markets. The Good Practice Standard is awarded jointly by my Department and Bord Bia. Farmers' Markets displaying the Good Practice Standard undertake to hold markets regularly, to stock a substantial proportion, ideally at least 50%, of local produce from the county or neighbouring counties and accommodate seasonal and local garden/allotment produce. This represents nearly a third of all the Farmers Markets currently in operation.

The visit by Queen Elizabeth II and President Barack Obama to Ireland in May this year was also used by my Department and Bord Bia to showcase the best of Irish food produce. This media coverage generated by both these events has now firmly placed Irish food producers on the global map, which has led to an explosion in export inquiries for artisan food.

Bloom 2011, held in early June, represented a further marketing opportunity for the promotion of Irish food. This year, the event featured an enhanced Food Village which saw a greater than ever display of Irish artisan food and niche products. By any standards, this was an excellent display in promoting local food at national level. I can advise the Deputy that further information on all Bord Bia activities can be found on their website: www.bordbia.ie.

Teagasc, another State Body under my Department's remit, contributes to the promotion of local food production by promoting to farmers the potential for them of adding another income stream and also the possibilities of creating extra jobs by adding value to their primary product and also by keeping more money circulating in the local community by encouraging producers to sell direct to the consumer via Farmers markets, Country markets, farm shops, box schemes and On line.

In recent years Teagasc has used the Options Programme to target diversification supports to farmers where there is a need and an interest.

This Teagasc programme takes the form of the delivery of:

- Direct Selling of Farm Produced Local Products courses and modules.
- Skills training courses on meat and dairy products for people starting up a micro food business
- Food centres at Ashtown and Moorepark have food business courses for SME funded by the IDA, which involves start-up, design, packaging and a trouble shooting consultancy and mentoring service for small food companies that are aiming to eventually export their products.
- Teagasc promotes and highlights their activities via national and local events both their own and others.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 139.

Departmental Programmes

142. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost to her Department for the school completion programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19196/11]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The School Completion Programme which encompasses both primary and post-primary levels, entails targeting individual children and young people of school-going age, both in and out of school, and arranging supports to address inequalities in education access, participation and outcomes. It is based on the project model with an integrated approach involving primary and post primary schools, parents and relevant statutory, voluntary and community agencies.

The School Completion Programme and Home School Community Liaison is now integrated under the National Education Welfare Board, responsibility for which transferred to my Department from the Department of Education and Skills. The full budget for the School Completion Programme transferred to my Department with effect from 2 June 2011.

The funding allocation for the School Completion Programme in 2011 is €30.256m, which supports 124 projects across 26 counties, involving 224 second level and 473 primary schools, specifically targeting 38,000 children and young people at risk of early school leaving.

Proposed Legislation

143. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health his plans to bring the Bill to allow for means-testing for home care packages and measures to assess eligibility for community services before Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19004/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Department of Health, in consultation with the HSE, is currently preparing proposals to ensure that access to community services is provided on a nationally consistent and equitable basis having regard to each person's care needs and means. Various options are being considered at present, therefore, it is not possible to provide any further detail at the present time.

The Department is progressing the issue as quickly as possible, however, there are complex legal issues involved.

Cancer Screening Programme

144. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if the two-room colonoscopy suite, fully staffed, will proceed at Bantry General Hospital, County Cork, under the national cancer strategy programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19011/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Bantry General Hospital was not selected as one of the candidate colonoscopy screening units under the National Cancer Screening Service's National Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme, which will commence in 2012. Bantry General, however, similar to the other 21 hospitals not selected for that Programme, will continue to provide colonoscopies for patients.

Medical Cards

145. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have a decision on their medical card application. [19013/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (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 Drugs Strategy

146. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider funding the supply of a premises in the west Cork area to an established successful organisation for the purpose

of opening an addiction treatment clinic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19017/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): In furtherance of the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016, the Department of Health administers a Premises Initiative Fund which provides capital funding to assist community based drug projects with their accommodation needs. In relation to the West Cork area, applications for funding capital projects should be made through the Southern Regional Drugs Task Force which is responsible for co-ordinating the regional drugs strategy. A total of €1m was available for capital projects this year, but it is fully committed. Consequently, there is no further funding available for other capital projects this year.

Medical Cards

147. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the decision of the Health Service Executive to refuse the application of a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19022/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (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

148. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if the eye unit in Limerick Regional Hospital is due to close on 11 July 2011; and if so the location at which a person (details supplied) will have their appointment [19036/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have instructed the HSE not to withdraw any services from acute hospitals unless and until I receive a full briefing on the details of what is proposed, the alternative arrangements to be put in place, and the overall implications for patients.

The scheduling of patients for hospital treatment is a matter for the consultant concerned in each case and is determined on the basis of clinical need. Should the patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he/she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant involved. As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services

149. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health the reason an allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford for travel to a monthly appointment with a consultant, has been cut from €50 to €25; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19043/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Staff

150. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health when the Health Service Executive will agree to the management of Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal, recruiting two consultant anaesthetists. [19055/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

151. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive will work with the management of Letterkenny General Hospital, County Donegal, to facilitate an application to the prospective funding programme to ensure that those in great pain who are awaiting joint replacement operations will not be not waiting for long periods for their operations. [19056/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Parliamentary Questions

152. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable for a Deputy to wait more than two months for a response from the Health Service Executive to a written question sent to him and passed on to them. [19057/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The operation of the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the HSE (PAD) allows for the centralised receipt, assignment and tracking of Parliamentary Questions within the HSE's extensive network of operations. More generally, PAD monitors overall performance in relation to the timely issue of replies and provides a central contact for all requests from Oireachtas members for information relating to matters within the statutory remit of the Executive. It reports on a regular basis to the Chief Executive Officer and his management team.

The Executive is very conscious of the need for prompt replies to Parliamentary Questions and there is regular liaison between my Department and the Executive in this regard. While the Executive attempts to answer all questions referred to it as quickly as possible, many of the questions submitted by Deputies request large and detailed amounts of statistical data on a variety of subjects which require input and coordination from all areas of the Executive.

Up to the end of June this year 1072 Parliamentary Questions were referred to the HSE for Direct Reply. Of those 595 (55.5%) were answered on target within 15 days. Within a further 5 days 68 (6.3%) additional Questions were answered and a total of 750 (70%) were answered within 25 days. Some 70 (6.5%) Questions were unanswered after 31 days. Recently, the HSE has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve response times to Parliamentary Questions and to deal with other queries from members of the Oireachtas.

The Programme for Government contains a number of proposals to improve the handling of Parliamentary Questions, Adjournment Debates etc. It is expected that these initiatives will be progressed across all Government Departments in due course. Since taking office I have decided that Parliamentary Questions relating to operational issues of a national / regional scale or importance as well as high profile individual issues will now be answered by myself or the relevant Minister of State instead of being referred to the HSE. Whenever possible these questions will be answered on the relevant Dáil sitting day. Where this is not possible because the information is not readily available, a reply will be issued as soon as possible thereafter. Questions concerning individual patients and operational matters relating to local issues will continue to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to Deputies.

While my Department has ultimate accountability for the health services, it is my belief that a balance has to be struck between responsibility for local issues, which rests with local area

service managers, and the ultimate accountability of Ministers. If the Deputy provides me with details of the Parliamentary Question he is referring to I will follow it up with the HSE.

Pharmacy Services

153. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will reverse cuts relating to pharmacists in respect of refrigerated items in view of the cost of dispensing these medicines and in light of the fact that these products do not attract discounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19075/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): My colleague, the Minister for Health, has signed the Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Community Pharmacy Contractors) Regulations 2011. These regulations reduce certain payments made by the HSE to community pharmacy contractors with effect from 20 June 2011 and include a reduction in the wholesale mark-up on fridge items from 17.66% to 12%.

In making the regulations the Minister had regard to submissions made and views expressed during consultations; the nature of the services rendered by pharmacists and the general nature of expenses and commitments of pharmacists and the impact on the State's ability to continue to provide health services at existing levels if reductions were not made. The Minister for Health considers these rates of payment to be fair and reasonable. The Minister will carry out a review of the operation, effectiveness and impact of the new rates before the end of the year and all relevant stakeholders will be consulted as part of the review process.

Health Services

154. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the advice and support available to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [19080/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (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 Service Staff

155. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health the date from which there has been no dedicated elder abuse officer in the southern region; when a dedicated elder abuse officer will be in place in the southern region; and, in the absence of a dedicated elder abuse officer, the person who will be responsible for monitoring and investigating reported elder abuse in the southern region. [19094/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Dedicated Elder Abuse Officer (DEAO) post in the Health Service Executive (HSE) Southern Region became vacant in December 2010 when the former incumbent retired. The HSE has commenced the process of filling the position with the intention of filling the vacancy by the end of the year. Responsibility for the assessment and investigation of suspected cases of elder abuse rests with Senior Case Workers (Social Workers) in the HSE. Monitoring of referrals is carried out by the Senior Case Workers in association with their line managers, which is usually the General Manager for the Local Health Office.

Health Services

156. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health the number of reported cases of

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elder abuse in the southern region in each quarter for the past five years, categorised by county and abuse type. [19095/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Accurate data on the number of elder abuse referrals to the Health Service Executive (HSE) is only available from 2008. The data for 2008 and subsequent years is contained in the HSE's annual Elder Abuse Services Reports which are published on the HSE's website. Each Report provides preliminary statistics on the referrals for that year, together with validated data for the previous year. A breakdown of the total number of referrals for the year by HSE Region and abuse type, is provided in the 2009 and 2010 Reports. In the case of the 2008 Report, due to the small number of referrals, information is not provided by abuse type at regional level. Data on referrals is not provided at county level, in any of the annual Reports, so as to protect the identity of the individuals at the centre of the allegation.

The HSE Reports and data can be found as follows:

2008 Report is available at

<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/services/Older/OpenYourEyesServiceDevelopments2008.pdf>

Data on the referrals for the HSE South can be found at para 5.3.1 page 27.

2009 Report is available at

<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/services/Older/openyoureyes.pdf>

Data on the referrals for the HSE South by abuse type can be found at on page 39, fig 3.

2010 Report is available at

<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find—a—Service/Older—People—Services/Elder—Abuse/Resources1/elderabluse%20report2010.pdf>

Data on the referrals for the HSE South by abuse type can be found on page 36, fig 3.

Commencing in December 2010, the HSE provides information on Performance and Tivity Indicators on elder abuse to the Department on a quarterly basis, through its Supplementary Reports. These Reports provide preliminary data on referrals for the previous quarter, broken down by HSE Area by the four most common forms of abuse. These are psychological abuse, financial abuse, neglect and physical abuse. HSE Supplementary Reports are published on the HSE's Website on an on-going basis and can be found as follows:—

October to December 2010 referrals

<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/corporate/performance/December—2010—Supplementary—Report.pdf>

Data on the referrals for the HSE South by abuse type can be found on Page 23. January to March 2011 referrals *<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/corporate/performance/April—2011—Supplementary—Report.pdf>*

Data on the referrals for the HSE South by abuse type can be found on Page 38.

157. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Health if he will furnish for each quarter in the past four years details of the number of persons, categorised by level of dependency, in receipt of long-stay care in both State-run and privately-operated facilities and the average cost to the State per patient categorised by level of dependency for providing such care in both State-run and privately-operated facilities. [19096/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Unfortunately, the level of detail requested by the Deputy is not available. The Department of Health carries out a survey of long-stay units each year. The aim of the survey is to provide statistics on the number of beds available for long-term care, how these beds are used and the types of residents who occupy these beds. The results of the surveys are used to prepare the Long-Stay Activity Statistics Reports which are published on the Department's website.

The Long-Stay Activity Statistics for 2005-2008 (the most recent years available) provide the following information in respect of the Percentage Distribution of Patients Resident by Level of Dependency in long-term care as at the 31st December each year.

2005 — Response rate of 80%

Table B6 — Long-Stay Units by Category: Percentage Distribution of Patients Resident by Level of Dependency

Region	Low Dependency	Medium Dependency	High Dependency	Maximum Dependency	Total
HSE Extended Care Unit	5.7	14.4	31.9	48.1	100%
HSE Welfare Home	12.3	18	27.4	42.3	100%
Voluntary Home	9.8	16.6	28.1	45.5	100%
Voluntary Welfare Home	30.9	26.8	19.2	23.1	100%
Private Nursing Home	8.6	18.5	32.9	40	100%
Total	8.9%	17.3%	31.2%	42.6%	100%

2006 — Response rate of 80.1%

Table B6 — Long-Stay Units by Category: Percentage Distribution of Patients Resident by Level of Dependency

Region	Low Dependency	Medium Dependency	High Dependency	Maximum Dependency	Total
HSE Extended Care Unit	4.7	14.5	33.2	47.6	100%
HSE Welfare Home	14.2	18.5	27	40.3	100%
Voluntary Home	10	19.3	26.7	43.9	100%
Voluntary Welfare Home	40.6	24.8	25.2	9.4	100%
Private Nursing Home	8.1	20.9	31.6	39.4	100%
Total	8.3%	19.1%	31.3%	41.4%	100%

2007 — Response rate of 78.2%

Table B6 — Long-Stay Units by Category: Percentage Distribution of Patients Resident by Level of Dependency

Region	Low Dependency	Medium Dependency	High Dependency	Maximum Dependency	Total
HSE Extended Care Unit	3.7	14.6	30.2	51.5	100%
HSE Welfare Home	13.4	19.5	24.1	43	100%
Voluntary Home	11.5	18.8	34.9	34.9	100%
Voluntary Welfare Home	45.2	29.7	16.1	9	100%
Private Nursing Home	9.5	23.7	34	32.8	100%
Total	8.8%	20.9%	32.3%	38%	100%

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2008 — Response rate of 81.6%

Table B6 — Long-Stay Units by Category: Percentage Distribution of Patients Resident by Level of Dependency

Region	Low Dependency	Medium Dependency	High Dependency	Maximum Dependency	Total
HSE Extended Care Unit	4.3	14.3	29.1	52.3	100%
HSE Welfare Home	12.9	26.7	22.9	37.5	100%
Voluntary Home	10.1	16.5	37	36.4	100%
Voluntary Welfare Home	23.9	28.9	25.8	21.4	100%
Private Nursing Home	10.9	24.6	31.9	32.5	100%
Total	9.6%	21.7%	31.2%	37.5%	100%

The cost of care for each nursing home that is participating in the Nursing Homes Support Scheme is published on the HSE's website at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find—a—Service/Older—People—Services/nhss/>. At present, the weighted average cost of care is approximately €1,275 in a public nursing home and €900 in a private nursing home.

Hospital Services

158. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health his views on issues in respect of Nenagh General Hospital, County Tipperary; the effect that the lack of non-consultant hospital doctors will have on the hospital, most notably on the intensive care and accident and emergency units (details supplied); if he will give assurances regarding the security of these units; the effect that the lack of non-consultant hospital doctors will have on Limerick Regional Hospital, most notably on the accident and emergency department; if he will give assurances regarding the security of such into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19105/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I am committed to ensuring that acute hospital services at national, regional and local level are provided in a clinically appropriate and efficient manner. In particular I want to ensure that as many services as possible can be provided safely in smaller, local hospitals. I have also made it clear that patient safety must be the overriding priority. I want patients to be treated at the lowest level of complexity that is safe, timely, and efficient and as near to home as possible. However, ongoing reform of the system will require some changes in how care is delivered in some locations across our health system.

I am conscious of the Deputy's concern in relation to the retention of services at the hospitals in the Mid West Region that he refers to in advance of the next rotation of Non-Consultant Hospitals Doctors (NCHDs). The position is, however, that the shortage of suitable NCHDs is an issue in many European countries. In this context I am working with the HSE and other stakeholders to ensure the filling of as many as possible of some 475 NCHD posts which are due to be filled from 11th July 2011. The HSE conducted an extensive recruitment drive in India and Pakistan in recent months and succeeded in identifying 439 potential candidates for NCHD positions in Ireland. I have held meetings involving my Department, the Medical Council, medical training bodies and the HSE with a view to identifying measures to facilitate the appointment of suitably-qualified doctors from abroad. Drafting of a Bill to amend the Medical Practitioners Act, 2007, to enable the Medical Council to register doctors in supervised posts for a defined period, is being finalised.

The HSE is focusing on addressing particular staffing issues in a number of hospitals including in the Mid West Region particularly Limerick Regional given that it provides the regional 24 hour seven day week ED service. The HSE has assured me that this service will continue

to be provided. Notwithstanding this, it is unlikely that all NCHD vacancies nationally can be filled by 11th July. Hospital management are working with Clinical Directors in a planned way to devise contingency arrangements which can be implemented, if required, to ensure that any resulting impact on services is minimised and that safe delivery of hospital services is assured.

Departmental Funding

159. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with the cross-party Oireachtas group established to support the work of the organisation assisting the alleged victims of a struck-off medical practitioner (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19107/11]

160. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will issue in respect of a funding application made by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19110/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 and 160 together.

Due to scheduling constraints I am not in a position to meet with the Cross-Party group at the current time. I intend, however, to consider a meeting at a later date.

I understand that the issue of funding for Dignity 4 Patients has been of particular concern to the Cross-Party group and I am pleased to be in a position to state that this week I have approved a grant, on a once-off basis, of €69,000 from my Department's allocation of National Lottery funds to Dignity 4 Patients. The funding is to go towards the cost of providing an office, a website, a helpline and office administration for the organisation. Dignity 4 Patients also received a grant in 2010 of almost €172,000 from my Department's National Lottery funds. This was given towards the cost of providing information and support to victims of abuse wishing to attend the Drogheda Review which completed its work last year.

Hospital Services

161. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the provision of services at the Louth County Hospital, Dundalk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19112/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I am committed to ensuring that acute hospital services at national, regional and local level are provided in a clinically appropriate and efficient manner. In particular I want to ensure that as many services as possible can be provided safely in smaller, local hospitals. I have also made it clear that patient safety must be the overriding priority. I want patients to be treated at the lowest level of complexity that is safe, timely, and efficient and as near to home as possible.

Smaller hospitals should be a key part of an integrated hospital service in their regions, providing as wide a range of services as possible, close to the local community. They should be the corner stone of local provision, with clear links to other services. They should provide a range of diagnostics and expanded elective day surgery and medical procedures. These should transfer from the larger hospitals, freeing these facilities up for more complex work.

There is particular focus on diagnostic and day service provision in Louth County Hospital, with a number of services currently provided in the hospital including an elderly day assessment service which is receiving nine new referrals weekly, elective endoscopy, medical, surgical, orthopaedic and antenatal outpatient clinics. The services also include radiology, laboratory and gynaecology day services and colposcopy screening. The local emergency department sees 88% of patients under 35 minutes and the average length of stay is less than 1 hour. Daily attendances average at between 25-30 patients. Within Louth County Hospital there are cur-

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rently also eight stroke rehabilitation beds operational. In-patients in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda with a diagnosis of stroke are currently referred to this unit for ongoing rehabilitation. Refurbishment of this facility commenced in March 2011 and on completion will include a dedicated allied health professional rehabilitation facility and an independent living area. The phased opening of the remaining beds, 11 in total, is planned in the context of the Acute Medicine Programme which forms part of the Clinical Strategy and Programmes 2011.

Project teams have been established to progress with the development of plans for both the orthopaedic rehabilitation and medical palliative in-patient beds. A phased opening of ten palliative care beds is due later this year. These initiatives are closely linked to the development of the Community Response Team, Louth who have an agenda for hospital admission avoidance and early discharge. This Team was established in February 2011 and currently they are in receipt of six referrals daily from ward areas.

162. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when the required surgery will take place at Waterford Regional Hospital in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [19113/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Procedures

163. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health in view of a number of reports commissioned into services in Our Lady's Hospital Navan, County Meath, among them the Peyton Report, if the reports are complete; if he has read these reports; the findings of these reports; when these reports will be published; and the decision that will be made on the back of these reports [19117/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A review, commissioned by the HSE, is currently underway into four surgical laparoscopic cases with poor outcomes at Our Lady's Hospital, Navan. The review is chaired by Mr. Rodney Peyton and is nearing completion.

Since 2005, on foot of concerns regarding patient safety, the HSE has also commissioned four other reviews into the Department of Surgery in Navan. The HSE has accepted all of the recommendations of these reviews and in line with these recommendations a series of steps were taken to limit potential surgical risk. I have been advised by the HSE that two of the reports have not been published as the findings have been disputed and are subject to High Court proceedings. I have asked the HSE if the other two reports can be made available to the Deputy.

These reports identified those services that can be safely delivered in Our Lady's Hospital, Navan and the need for the surgical services at Navan to be integrated into a larger department of surgery. Many of the recommendations from these reports have already been implemented as follows:

- (i) transfer of ambulance borne trauma,
- (ii) increased clinical supervision in the Emergency Department and
- (iii) no major surgical procedures have been undertaken in the hospital since 2005 (minor and intermediate surgery only carried out at the Hospital).

The establishment is currently underway of an overall Louth/Meath joint Department of Surgery with unified governance arrangements from each Hospital site.

The HSE must always take appropriate measures in light of all review reports recommendations. This is particularly important with HIQA reports and I would highlight the recent Ennis and Mallow reports as being very significant.

Hospital Services

164. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be given an appointment at the orthopaedic unit at Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19126/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The scheduling of patients for hospital treatment is a matter for the consultant concerned in each case and is determined on the basis of clinical need. Should the patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he/she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant involved. As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

165. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the reason a complaints procedure cannot be concluded and the position of the application for a health procedure of this person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19134/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services

166. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the advice and assistance available in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3. [19193/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter the question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Water Fluoridation

167. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Health the procedure followed for the fluoridation of public water supplies; if it is carried out by a commercial entity; if so, the tender process followed; the value and duration of the contract. [19195/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): The Health Service Executive (HSE) is the body charged with the fluoridation of public water supplies, as provided for in the Health (Fluoridation of Water Supplies) Act 1960. Local authorities undertake fluoridation on an agency basis for the HSE. The current supplier of hydrofluosilicic acid, the chemical used for fluoridating water, was selected following a formal EU tendering process. The contract began on 1 November 2009 for a minimum period of 36 months with the option to extend by a further 24 months. In 2010 the HSE spent approximately €4.78 million on fluoridation, of which approximately €1.36 million was spent on hydrofluosilicic acid.

Sports Capital Programme

168. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his proposals regarding the sports capital programme and for the funding that was provided to his Department under Budget 2011. [18899/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Sports Capital Programme, which is administered by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, funding is allocated towards the provision of sports facilities at national, regional and local level. It is the primary vehicle for promoting the development of sports and recreational facilities in Ireland. The Programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improved

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facilities in virtually every village, town and city. The facilities funded range from new equipment for the smallest clubs, to regional multi-sport centres and national centres of sporting excellence.

Over 7,400 projects providing a range of essential sports facilities have now benefited from sports capital funding since 1998 bringing the total allocation in that time to over €739 million. These grants continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring the provision of modern, high quality facilities around Ireland that attract more people to participate in sporting activities. While no new round of the Programme has been advertised since 2008 the Programme is still very active with €33m provided in 2011 to fund existing allocations.

The Programme for Government provides that “In future sports funding should prioritise projects which further greater participation in sport on a local and national level.” This will be a central focus of any new round of the Programme. I am looking at the options available to me with regard to a new Programme within the present financial constraints, but no decision has been made about the timing of future rounds of the Programme.

Taxi Regulations

169. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason there is no representative of self-employed, full-time taxi drivers on the new Taxi Review Body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19000/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In my announcements of the 8th and 24th June respectively I have clarified the terms of reference of the Taxi Regulation Review and the membership of the review Steering Group.

In line with the commitment in the Programme for Government, the review will enable the necessary further reforms of the sector to allow consumers to have confidence in the taxi system while also ensuring that legitimate and competent operators and drivers can be rewarded fairly by operating under a regulatory framework that is adequately enforced. The review will address a wide range of issues relating to the taxi sector including the current regulatory policy and practices, licensing systems, enforcement and future dialogue with the taxi sector.

In my view, the wide ranging membership of the Review Steering Group will allow an appropriate contribution from stakeholders, including dispatch operators, taxi drivers, consumers as well as the regulatory and enforcement agencies. I should add that the consultation on the review extends to all interested parties and stakeholders through an invitation for written submission to be made before the end of July.

Road Traffic Offences

170. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a European Commission draft directive on facilitating the cross border exchange of information on road safety related traffic offences that is due to be voted on 6 July 2011; if he is considering opting out of this directive; the reasons Ireland will not adopt this proposed life-saving directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19041/11]

171. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if, in the context of the proposed European Commission draft directive on facilitating the cross border exchange of information on road safety related traffic offences, if he has compiled any information on the percentage of Irish licence holders abroad and foreign licence holders here who have been involved in serious and fatal collisions, been convicted of a dangerous driving offence, escaped prosecution or penalty points because they held a licence from outside the jurisdiction from where the offence took place; if he and his colleagues across the EU are

considering any measures apart from the draft directive on the exchange of information to address this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19042/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Question Nos. 170 and 171 together.

Ireland acknowledges the considerable achievement by all concerned in moving this dossier forward, through detailed examination of the text and engagement in developing and putting forward compromise proposals. While the statistics referred to by the Deputy are not available, we believe that, besides facilitating the administration of penalties, the measure should also induce more cautious driving behaviour by raising awareness among drivers of the rules applied in other Member States and the consequences of breaking those rules.

The proposed Directive is to be made under Title V of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) — Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Measures adopted under this Title are subject to Protocol (No. 21) on the position of Ireland and the UK, in respect of the area of Freedom, Security and Justice, which exempts Ireland from their application.

Ireland was not in a position to opt into the proposed Directive, under the terms of Protocol (No. 21), prior to the expiry of the three month deadline pursuant to Title V, due to the dissolution of the last Dáil and the General Election. The terms of the Directive were agreed in December last and approval of both Houses of the Oireachtas is required for opting-in within the three month period.

I will, however, give careful consideration to opting into the completed measure subsequent to its adoption. A decision to opt in at that time will be referred for approval to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Road Network

172. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has received an application to fund a new bridge at Cockhill outside of Bunrana, County Donegal. [19064/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads, including bridges, 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 and bridges are funded from local authorities own resources and are supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

A total of €439.676 million is being provided to local authorities this year in regional and local road grants. This funding includes the additional allocation of €60 million provided in May this year by the Government under the jobs initiative. From this allocation, Donegal County Council has been allocated a total of €27,257,928.

In August last year, the National Roads Authority invited applications from local authorities for funding under the Specific Improvement Grants Scheme. Donegal County Council submitted 15 projects for consideration for funding in 2011 under this grant category. However a proposal for Cockhill Bridge was not among the applications submitted.

Donegal County Council did make a subsequent separate proposal to my Department for funding for the Cockhill Bridge earlier this year. However, at that stage all the 2011 Specific Improvement Grant moneys had been fully allocated. It is open to Donegal County Council to prioritise this project and to submit it among its proposals for funding in 2012 under the Specific Improvement Grants Scheme, when applications are sought in due course.

Sports Funding

173. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the sports inclusion disability officer positions under the sports partnerships scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19111/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The matter raised is an operational one for the Irish Sports Council. 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.

Road Network

174. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a submission (details supplied); the actions taken to address this matter; if compensation will be paid to the applicant for the problems that the new road-way has created for them in regards to flooding and the reduction in value of their land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19135/11]

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 planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rail Services

175. **Deputy Liam Twomey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ascertain from CIE whether the journey time for the train between Rosslare, County Wexford and Dublin can be reduced if the standing time at railway stations was reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18711/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród 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.

176. **Deputy Liam Twomey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has had discussions with CIE on the savings that have been achieved by having no ticket checkers on trains; the steps that have been taken to reduce fare evasion because of this policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18712/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród 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.

Questions Nos. 177 to 181, inclusive, answered with Question No. 46.

Questions Nos. 182 and 183 answered with Question No. 56.

Regional Airports

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the

various State supports for each of the airports throughout the country can be reviewed collectively with a view to an endeavour to retain a reasonable quality of service throughout; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19215/11]

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport notwithstanding the current economic situation, the degree to which an economic evaluation has been done into the running costs and or requirements in respect of the various regional airports throughout the country; if he will enter into discussions with the relevant authorities with a view to maintaining sufficient services to ensure that the various regions are not unnecessarily disadvantaged in the current economic crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19216/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 and 185 together.

A Value for Money (VFM) Review on Exchequer Support for the Regional Airports Programme has already been completed and was published by the previous Government last January. Its purpose was to evaluate past Exchequer expenditure against the Regional Airports Programme objectives and to examine the scope for achieving those objectives more efficiently and effectively in the future. The Review assessed all the regional airports throughout the country. It recommended that funding for the PSO air services between Dublin and the regional airports at Sligo, Ireland West (Knock), Galway, Kerry and Derry be discontinued when current contracts end in July 2011 and that operational and capital expenditure funding be discontinued for Sligo and Galway airports.

These recommendations took into account changes in EU legislation, airport performances, the substantial investment in surface transport, overlapping catchment areas, the requirement to make best use of scarce Exchequer resources, and the implications for the regional tourism and business sectors.

In the circumstances, I have no plans to have further cost benefit assessments carried out in relation to the regional airports. Moreover, the recent decision taken by this Government on funding for the regional airports is broadly in line with the Review's recommendations.

In that regard, I have secured Government approval for additional funding to be made available to all six regional airports in 2011, including Galway and Sligo, reversing the cut in funding made by the last Government. However, I will not be able to provide operational or capital funding to Galway or Sligo airports from 2012 onwards.

This decision is necessary to make best use of scarce Exchequer resources and to ensure the efficient use of taxpayers' money. The Government is aware of the implications for both Galway and Sligo Airports in making this decision. Clearly, in the current economic difficulties, it is not business as usual and unpopular decisions must be made. I believe that in continuing to support the other four regional airports beyond 2011, we will ensure that Ireland has a sufficient network of regional airports, while taking into account significant improvement in the road network, short journey times by road and rail and the reduction in passengers flying domestically. The combination of improved surface transport, together with a more consolidated air service network to the regional airports and the three State airports, provides the necessary transport access to underpin Ireland's economic recovery and sustainable development into the future.

I would urge Galway and Sligo Airports, as privately owned entities, to use the opportunity provided by the additional funding in 2011 to engage with various parties, including business interests, investors and local authorities, to secure their ongoing viability in some form. My Department will work with those airports over the coming months to ensure the close out of Exchequer support in an orderly way.

National Lottery Funding

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total number of applications received by county for grant aid from the proceeds of the National Lottery or similar funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19217/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to applications under the Sports Capital Programme, which is part funded from the proceeds of the National Lottery.

As the Deputy will be aware there have been no new calls for applications under the Sports Capital Programme since 2008 when 1,453 applications were received. The table sets out the breakdown of the 2008 applications by county.

County	Applications
Carlow	19
Cavan	22
Clare	61
Cork	163
Donegal	63
Dublin	196
Galway	112
Kerry	82
Kildare	44
Kilkenny	36
Laois	30
Leitrim	25
Limerick	77
Longford	27
Louth	39
Mayo	59
Meath	45
Monaghan	32
Offaly	25
Roscommon	33
Sligo	23
Tipperary	64
Waterford	41
Westmeath	31
Wexford	65
Wicklow	39

Departmental Funding

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will set out the various allocations of funding made by him directly or arising from recommendations to or through his Department to statutory or voluntary bodies, groups or agencies on a county basis in each of the past four months to date in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19218/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Exchequer funding provided under Vote 32 to my Department is in large part paid over to a range of agencies

which are instrumental in achieving the objectives of my Department. The agencies avail of the funding to meet their direct administration requirements but also, in most cases to assign funds, to other bodies or projects.

Information in relation to the individual Subheads and the amounts provided can be found in the Revised Estimates Volume for Public Services published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department's financial management system does not cater for comprehensive reporting of expenditure on a county basis.

Ministerial Meetings

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he has had discussions with boards, directors or executives of the various bodies, groups or agencies subordinate to his Department with a view to compliance with Government policy directives; the degree to which agreement has been reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19219/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Since my appointment as Minister, I have met with the vast majority of the agencies under the aegis of my Department and I will meet with the remaining ones over the coming months. In addition I met collectively with the Chairs and Chief Executives in Dublin Castle on 8 April 2011 at which I set out Government policy on a range of issues. In doing so, I set out my expectation that such policies are adhered to by all of the agencies.

Taxi Regulations

189. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the purpose of the new roof ID for taxis being brought on stream in August; and the way it will achieve this aim. [19224/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The regulation of the taxi industry, including the system for taxi identification, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the Public Transport Regulation Act, 2009.

I understand that roof sign stickers which identify the county in which small public service vehicle (SPSV) operators are licensed to operate are being introduced as a response to consultation with industry representative groups, the Taxi Advisory Committee and the Gardaí. The purpose of the introduction of this new requirement is to make it easier for both consumers and enforcement officers to check that the driver of a vehicle is licensed to operate in a particular area.

I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my Office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

However, I would just like to add that the future of enforcement and matters such as roof and car IDs will be looked at by the taxi review group and it will be making future recommendations on this matter.

190. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the plans for the convening of the taxi review steering group. [19225/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The first meeting of the Taxi Regulation Review Steering Group was held yesterday. I also refer the Deputy to my announcements of the 8th and 24th June respectively which set out the

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terms of reference of the review and the membership of the Steering Group. Both announcements are available on my Department's website (www.dttas.ie).

Public Transport

191. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions he has had with his Northern counterpart and the relevant service providers to address the fact that cross-Border bus tickets cannot be purchased online; his views on this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19226/11]

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.

Rural Transport Services

192. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he is undertaking to fulfil the programme for Government commitment to retaining and expanding the rural transport network system. [19227/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There is a recognition within the Programme for Government of the importance of the Rural Transport Programme. My Department is currently exploring efficiencies that can be made by bringing together aspects of the HSE transport arrangements, schools transport, the Rural Transport Programme and other transport services. A pilot scheme study has been carried out, which I will publish shortly.

A Value for Money and Policy Review of the Rural Transport Programme has now been completed. I have received a copy of this report, which I also intend to publish later this year following consideration by Government. I will be incorporating the findings of both the Value for Money review and of the pilot scheme into the plans for the future of the rural transport programme.

Public Transport

193. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the decision-making process in respect of metro north, BXD, DART underground and the DART extension. [19228/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy is aware, the Government recently announced a comprehensive review of capital spending which is now underway. The review will examine capital proposals across all sectors of the economy to establish a set of priority projects and programmes that will support economic recovery and provide new employment opportunities. The results will form the basis of a new National Development Plan.

My Department is reviewing all existing transport projects and programmes as part of this process. A major priority will be to ensure funding to protect and maintain investment made to date and to ensure continued high safety standards. This will of necessity restrict the funding for new projects with only those offering the highest return having any prospect of being prioritised.

As part of the review process all agencies funded by my Department were requested to make submissions supporting their programmes and setting priorities in a scenario of reduced allocations. Submissions have been received from the National Transport Authority, Railway Procurement Agency and Iarnród Éireann in relation to public transport projects. These submissions are being examined by my officials and they will inform my Department's conclusions on the capital review. The outcome of the review on major projects should be available in September.

194. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to make rail and bus travel more attractive to commuters in view of the obvious benefits of reducing road congestion. [19229/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The last decade has seen substantial levels of capital investment in transport infrastructure to improve our public transport network throughout the country. It will clearly not be possible to maintain this level of investment in the period ahead, given the difficult budgetary and economic challenges we now face. That is not to say however that progress cannot be made in encouraging people to make the switch from the private car to public transport. Despite the reduced sums available for capital and current expenditure, this Government will, continue to prioritise the role of public transport. More targeted but less expenditure intensive measures can make a real difference.

The introduction of real time passenger information project (RTPI) and the development of a National Integrated Journey Planner will improve the experience of users of bus public transport. In addition to these measures, the Integrated Ticketing project will soon be delivered making it easier for commuters to switch easily between bus, rail and luas on one ticket. Work on quality bus corridors and green routes throughout the country will continue as a priority in the period ahead in order to allow the bus to compete strongly on journey times when compared with the private car. We will also continue to invest in the improvement of rail stations and bus stops to make commuting a more pleasant experience.

The above are value for money measures that support the use of the overall public transport system and enhance the accessibility, convenience, and attractiveness of the public transport offering.

Appointments to State Boards

195. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans regarding the reappointment of the board of the Dublin Airport Authority when this matter arises. [19230/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I appoint directors to the board of the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the State Airports Act 2004 and Section 22 of the Air Navigation and Transport (Amendment) Act 1998, as amended by paragraph 9 of the Schedule to the Act of 2004, as the need arises. There are thirteen director positions on the board of the DAA, four of whom are Worker Directors. Currently the position of Chairperson is vacant and six director posts fall due to be filled before the end of the year. I will be appointing a new Chairperson in the near future and will make the other appointments as the vacancies arise.

Public Transport

196. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase the State subvention for Dublin Bus. [19231/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In 2011 Dublin Bus will receive, through the National Transport Authority, an estimated €72.4 million in Exchequer subvention. In the current fiscal environment increased Exchequer funding is not realistic, rather there will be reductions. I support a continuation of the efforts by the company to improve its efficiency and reduce the costs of providing Public Service Obligation services is required.

Air Services

197. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made in developing new routes to Irish airports. [19232/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The market for air services in the European Union is fully liberalised so it is a matter for the airlines themselves to decide what routes they will serve based on their own commercial judgements. The Government is encouraging the airlines to deliver more tourists to Ireland. The quid pro quo for this will be the suspension of the travel tax and my officials and I have been in discussions with the airlines and the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) about this initiative over recent weeks.

The DAA and regional airports actively pursue airlines to open new routes. In addition, the DAA offer discounts on airport charges for new routes in some case for 5 years. Tourism Ireland supports airports and airlines in meeting a portion of the cost for marketing new routes. I regularly meet airline executives to encourage them to open new routes and increase capacity. I was pleased to launch the new Dublin to Charlotte route recently.

Some proposals for additional capacity and new routes have been put forward and these proposals are being examined by my Department and by external consultants to assess their potential and impact. I will consider the outcome of that assessment before making a recommendation to my Cabinet colleagues on whether or not to suspend the tax. The recent enactment of the Finance (No.2) Act, 2011 has provided the legislative basis for the suspension of the air travel tax if we decide to do so.

Cycle Facilities

198. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the development of a city bicycles scheme for Galway and other cities. [19233/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): I have sought the views of the National Transport Authority on potential mechanisms to expand the current Dublin Bikes scheme and to facilitate the introduction of similar public bike schemes to other cities. I look forward to considering the Authority's views as an input to formulating my approach to this matter.

State Airports

199. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the latest figures available on a monthly basis for the numbers of US troops landing at Shannon Airport. [13736/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The subject matter of this particular question, i.e. the number of the numbers of US troops that land at Shannon Airport, is the responsibility of the Dublin Airport Authority, and I have referred the question to that body for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten days.