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DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*

(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

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Déardaoin, 22 *Meán Fómhair* 2011.
Thursday, 22 *September* 2011.

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

———

Paidir.

Prayer.

———

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: As the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is aware, a resolution on the question of Palestine's nationhood is being debated at the United Nations General Assembly. When the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade was appointed, he said he would lead the charge in recognising Palestine's full statehood. When the late Brian Lenihan was Minister for Foreign Affairs, he supported the request of the Palestinian people for statehood on behalf of the Irish people. It is disappointing that the United States has apparently decided to veto the Palestinian bid. It is even more disappointing that the Tánaiste appears to be supporting President Obama's stance on the issue. He is saying there should be re-engagement between Palestine and Israel. I ask the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, to outline clearly why the Tánaiste has changed his thinking.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: It is like the change in the thinking of the Deputy and his party leader.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: What is the Government's position on this matter?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Government's position has been stated. It supports an independent, sovereign Palestinian state. That view was reiterated by the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in the United States as recently as yesterday. The Tánaiste is due to address the United Nations General Assembly on Monday when he will set out a comprehensive statement on Ireland's position on this and other matters, including international peace and the Irish initiative on hunger. Negotiations are ongoing on foot of Palestine's application for recognition. As I said, Ireland supports the position that there should be a Palestinian state. We are working in concert with our European colleagues to try to find unanimity in achieving this objective.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Will we be voting in favour of recognising a Palestinian state at the United Nations General Assembly? It seems it would be inconsistent, in the light of this country's history, if we were to fail to do so.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Hear, hear.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: When we were seeking international recognition of the Republic, certain people refused to recognise it. I remind the Minister of the strong words of his party's presidential candidate, my former constituency colleague, Mr. Michael D. Higgins, on this matter.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: At least the Labour Party has a candidate.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I do not doubt that Mr. Higgins would be able to advise his party colleagues on the need to take a strong and independent stance on the issue.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: He loves you, too.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I seek clarification on whether Ireland will vote in favour of the United Nations General Assembly resolution that the statehood of Palestine be recognised. A "Yes" or a "No" would be a helpful response.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I join the Deputy in supporting Michael D. Higgins who has——

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I thought the Labour Party had cut him adrift.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: ——a principled position on this and many other issues.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: That is unusual for the Labour Party.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Mr. Higgins has a long-standing tradition in the areas of human rights and international policy. He has informed my party's opinion on these matters for many years. It is from a related position that the Tánaiste, representing Ireland, is at the forefront in seeking to have agreement across all nations on the long-awaited international recognition of an independent and sovereign state of Palestine. It is too early to say what the outcome of that process will be. I understand from New York that there is an expectation that a position acceptable to all will emerge. I hope that will happen in the next day or two.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: It seems the Government does not have a position.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Last night Government Deputies voted down Sinn Féin's motion which defended the ESB as a key strategic company in public ownership. Not once but twice Labour Party Deputies in this House voted for the partial privatisation of this vital State asset. That is absolutely the case. How can the Labour Party reconcile its voting position and its stated intent in the coming months, given its clear pre-election promise, as set out in its manifesto in February this year? The manifesto stated:

> Labour is committed to the concept of public enterprise, and is determined to ensure that semi-state companies play a full role in the recovery of the Irish economy. Labour is opposed to short-termist privatisation of key state assets, such as Coillte or the energy networks.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: The Sinn Féin Party is privatising in the North.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: There should be no doubt that by privatising the ESB, the Government is implementing the IMF-EU-ECB deal.

Deputy Ann Phelan: You voted for it.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Labour Party denounced that deal prior to and during the course of the general election campaign in February.

Deputy Colm Keaveney: You voted for it.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I am sure the Minister is well able to answer this question himself. Perhaps he might ask the cacophony in the background to leave off.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: That is a new word.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Labour then pledged, let there be no mistake about it, to renegotiate the IMF-EU deal to refocus on growth——

Deputy John Lyons: I thank Deputy Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——and on job creation.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Another broken promise.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: How can the sale of the ESB be anything other than the short termism that Labour has already condemned? In the debate on Tuesday last, the Minister, Deputy Howlin, stated——

An Ceann Comhairle: A question, please.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——that he accepted the sale of State assets——

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: A right-wing party.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——was not a traditional Labour policy and that "In normal times we would probably not be proposing the sale of State assets".

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Labour is a right-wing party.

Deputy Colm Keaveney: The Deputy is speaking out of both sides of his mouth.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Can the Minister, Deputy Howlin——

Deputy Michael McCarthy: The Irish Tories.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ó Caoláin is out of time.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——explain the position that he put forward to the electorate in February?

Deputy Michael McCarthy: The Irish Tories.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: He stated he could not support the Sinn Féin motion because we are not living in normal times.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Ó Caoláin.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Who is the Minister codding? What normal times applied in February when the Labour Party presented its manifesto commitment to the Irish electorate?

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Ó Caoláin.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: What has changed over the six months since in which he has been in office?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I want to address full square the number of questions Deputy Ó Caoláin has posed. Let me start with the last one: what has changed in the past six months. Fundamental things have changed.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Labour's manifesto has changed.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: A new Government has been elected and we have moved away from the abyss that faced the two parties on entering Government.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: On the pledge we made, we have begun the renegotiation. I and other Ministers have stated repeatedly that the renegotiation of the bad deal that was struck by our predecessors in Government was not an event, but a process. We have engaged relentlessly since entering Government to renegotiate that deal, with, quite frankly, remarkable success.

Deputy Thomas P. Broughan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: They were long burning bondholders.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: In the first renegotiation——

Deputy Dara Calleary: Is it Frankfurt's way?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: They do not want to hear.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Stick to Palestine, lads; it is safer.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister, without interruption.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It suits some people for the country not to make progress but the Government is determined to make progress.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Brendan Howlin: In the first renegotiation, we provided €500 million for a jobs initiative that is bearing fruit in the tourism sector.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We allowed an additional year, from 2014 to 2015, to reach our fiscal target of 3% debt to GDP ratio. We have begun the negotiations to ensure that any resources that might be leveraged from the sale of State assets can be used for productive purposes, which was implacably opposed by the troika in the beginning and signed off by the previous Administration that it could only be used to retire debt. In the second round of renegotiations, it was agreed with the troika that it would look on a case-by-case basis for reinvestment of any deleveraged funds from the sale of State assets to create the next generation of State jobs. To answer Deputy Ó Caoláin's second question about whether we are still in favour of using the State as a resource for job creation, the answer is "Yes". That is what we will do.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: By selling them off; by selling them out.

A Deputy: Deputy Ó Caoláin sold out on the night of the guarantee.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It is the economic policy of Deputy Ó Caoláin's party to bankrupt the country, to renege on the sovereign deal done——

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Reds under the bed. The Minister used to be a red.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: ——and to imagine that of the €18 billion deficit this year made up of €15 billion on current expenditure and €3 billion related to bank recovery, the €15 billion that we need to pay gardaí, teachers, nurses and doctors throughout the country can be generated by magic out of some place. The people are not fools, however, and they understand the fantasy of that.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Regarding the ESB, we did make a reluctant decision in terms of privatisation because that was the commitment in the memorandum of understanding, which goes well beyond the quantum agreed in the programme for Government.

Deputy Barry Cowen: They should have said it before the election.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We are seeking to have the agreement of the troika to use that for productive purposes so that it will be yet another vehicle available to us to bring the country from ruin where we found it to prosperity where we intend to leave it.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: All that has changed is the names of the parties in coalition and the faces in the ministerial offices. Nothing else has changed a whit since the general election and those in power prior to it.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: That is rhetoric.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Minister has already admitted, has he not, that the IMF, the EU and the ECB want the proceeds of the sale of ESB to go into the black hole of the banking debt. He has already admitted, certainly, that the Government's alleged plan to use the proceeds to aid job creation cannot proceed without the approval of that troika.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: That is correct.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Not only is the Government selling off a chunk of the ESB, it is doing so without any guarantee that the process can be put to real and productive use in terms of job creation.

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

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Is it not time to admit that, once again, as has been the case historically, the Labour Party in coalition has become the limp tail of a rabid dog and that it is Fine Gael which is dictating the pace and going forward with its particular agenda——

(Interruptions).

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——and the Labour Party, once again, are absolute failures in trying to put any break on Fine Gael's intent?

Deputy Michael McCarthy: Tory.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Will the Labour Party admit that to the people or will it get the backbone to stand up and support the manifesto and the commitments it made six months ago to the electorate?

Deputy James Reilly: Deputy Ó Caoláin would be more familiar with the pedigree of the rabid dog.

An Ceann Comhairle: Would Members give the Minister one minute to reply in quietness?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I continue to be impressed, as always, by Deputy Ó Caoláin's rhetoric, but it is completely empty.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The only thing empty were Labour's policies.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: One should not treat either this House or the people as fools.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Minister is the one who needs to look in the mirror when he makes that statement.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: They know, fundamentally.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Brendan Howlin: They do not want to hear.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please allow a reply.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The problem is that we have to pay an extraordinary debt, sovereign debt brought to this nation by the previous Government and voted in this House solemnly and supported by Deputy Ó Caoláin's party.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: No, not at all.

A Deputy: The bank guarantee.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: Hear, hear.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Brass neck Labour.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Sinn Féin voted on the night to guarantee the banks.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: No. We voted to protect ordinary citizens' savings, something that Labour was quite prepared to put at risk. Those are the facts.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Fine Gael supported it as well.

A Deputy: They are in denial.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we have a bit of order, please?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Deputy Ó Caoláin does not want to hear the truth. He cannot bear the truth.

An Ceann Comhairle: Would Deputy Ó Caoláin mind his blood pressure?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Deputy Ó Caoláin cannot bear the truth but the truth is inescapable. He voted for that debt. He placed that burden on our backs.

Deputy Michael McGrath: So did the Minister's colleagues.

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Minister is the one implementing it.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The current finance spokesperson in Deputy Ó Caoláin's voted for it in the other House and stated, in doing so, he was donning the green jersey.

We are faced with the reality. We are determined to hold strategic State assets in majority State ownership. We want to deleverage money that we cannot manufacture from thin air to create new jobs and bring hope to people.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Anglo Irish Bank.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We are not caught in blind ideology but we are determined, as I say, to bring economic prosperity——

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Deputy Howlin has no ideology whatsoever. He has flushed it down the toilet. That is exactly what he has done.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: ——so that when we leave office we will be on an upward trajectory, not a doom trajectory.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could I have a bit of order for Deputy Finian McGrath?

Deputy Finian McGrath: I remind the Minister, Deputy Howlin, that his colleagues in Government also supported the bank guarantee.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Is Deputy Finian McGrath going to switch again?

Deputy Barry Cowen: Who is Deputy Finian McGrath with this week?

Deputy Finian McGrath: I am always with the people.

Deputy Dara Calleary: What way is the wind?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Finian McGrath is eating into his valuable time.

Deputy Finian McGrath: The people are sovereign. I will always respect the wishes of the people.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Senator Norris is on the phone. He wants to know will Deputy Finian McGrath switch back.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I want to raise a sad and serious case of the death, on 2 February 2002, of Shane Tuohey from Derrycooley, Clara, Tullamore, County Offally. Shane was a young turfcutter. He was 23 years old when he went missing after a night out, and was last seen at 4.20 a.m. The Garda investigation quickly concluded that foul play was not suspected and also the inquest found that he had drowned by immersion in cold water. The reason I raise

[Deputy Finian McGrath.]

this is that other evidence and major concerns have emerged about Shane Tuohey's death. The family have asked me to raise this case with the Minister. They have asked the Government, the Minister in particular, some questions and whether they will support a full investigation and inquiry of this case. Is the Minister familiar with this case and does he have any information on the background to the case? I call on the State and the Government to examine all the new evidence, especially the wealth of new evidence that has given rise to a suspicion of foul play. Shane Tuohey was verbally and physically abused by a group of men in the months before his death. Will the Minister or any new investigation find out if, as witnesses have said, the abuse continued on the night of the death and whether this is correct? Is the Minister also aware that the initial Garda report could have been more professional and that it failed to follow standard procedures in several respects? Why do they still hold on to the conclusion that Shane Tuohey's death was accidental or suicidal when there is now genuine evidence that Shane Tuohey was struck by someone or by a car door? Will the Government support a call by the family for a proper, full investigation which will include this new evidence?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I am aware of the case. The family contacted me some years ago about this matter when I was justice spokesperson of my party. They also contacted the then leader of the Labour Party and we sent a letter jointly to the Garda ombudsman calling for an investigation and outlining some of the matters the Deputy has put. It is a worrying issue and on foot of the Deputy raising it I will ask my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, to review the papers.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I wish to put on the record of the House my deepest appreciation to the Minister for his response and I know the family will be happy about that, although it is a sad case. With regard to the investigation, in that little town there is a remarkably high number of sophisticated closed circuit television, CCTV, cameras dotted throughout the town. Will the investigation find out why these tapes disappeared and where they are now? Will any investigation examine the new evidence of Gregory Davis, an American forensic pathologist, who has stated the case should remain open with the manner of death undetermined and with a strong likelihood of suicide? The Minister, Deputy Howlin, has stated he will support the family's request. I appreciate that and I hope the family will be satisfied with it.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Clearly, I am in no position to judge any of the facts and I have no wish to pre-empt any of the issues the Deputy has brought to the attention of the House. On behalf of the Government I have committed to ask my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, to review the papers and determine the next appropriate step to take.

Order of Business

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin) (Deputy Brendan Howlin): It is proposed to take No. *a*1, Twenty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Judges' Remuneration) Bill 2011 — amendments from the Seanad; No. *b*11, motion re Statement for Information of Voters in relation to the Twenty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Judges' Remuneration) Bill 2011; and No. 5, National Tourism Development Authority (Amendment) Bill 2011 — Order for Second Stage and Second Stage. It is proposed notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders that the proceedings on No. *a*1 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after one hour and any amendments from the Seanad not disposed of shall be decided by one question which shall be put from the Chair and which shall, in respect of amendments to the Seanad amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Justice and Equality; and that No. *b*11 shall be taken immediately upon the conclusion of No. *a*1 and shall be decided without debate.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are two proposals to be put to the House.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Normally we have reservations about guillotines but in this case we believe it is reasonable and take the view we would waste more time debating or voting on this issue than we would by simply getting on with the job today.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with No. *a*1 agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. *b*11, without debate, agreed? Agreed. Does Deputy Ó Cuív wish to raise something on the Order of Business?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will need the Ceann Comhairle's guidance on whether this is promised legislation because I cannot find it on the list of promised legislation. One of the greatest crises facing the country at the moment is the issue of people in mortgage arrears and assistance for them. There were proposals in the Cooney report to amend the Social Welfare Acts and to change the rules on mortgage interest supplement. I cannot find any reference to that in any proposed legislation. Will the Minister confirm whether there is proposed legislation and when it will be taken? This is a matter of great urgency. It was ready to be done and should have been done in the spring. Amendments should have been made to that scheme to make it easier for people to access help when they need it.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is there promised legislation?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: As the Deputy will know, the area of mortgage arrears has been a major focus of Government in recent months.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Government is not doing anything about it.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: An expert group is due to report to Government within the next two weeks.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Another one?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Deputy knows about the expert group. We have discussed it. It will discover a number of potential tranches of legislation, including the matter to which the Deputy has referred but also issues such as personal insolvency and so on. I imagine that within the next two weeks we will be in a position to have a clearer view of the range of activities required to address the real issue of debt insolvency. There will be no one single measure.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Many simple steps could have been taken immediately which were outside the Cooney report but which would have made a great difference to the people dependent on mortgage interest supplement.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot debate the issue now.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: They include the so-called 30 hour rules and other rules. I am appalled that something that could have been done in the spring is now being put back for another fortnight for further consideration.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is completely abusing the Order of Business.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Will we see the necessary amendments before Christmas on foot of the report the Government will receive in a fortnight's time?

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On several occasions I have endeavoured to draw the Cabinet's attention to the deteriorating situation on promised legislation from the Department of Health and the Minister for Health. I wish to highlight this deteriorating situation. The health information Bill was committed to in the last term for publication in late 2011. Now it is indicated that publication is expected in mid 2012. Publication was expected for the health (miscellaneous provisions) Bill in 2011 but now it is expected in 2012. Publication was expected for the health (pricing and supply of medicines) Bill in 2011 before the summer recess but now publication is expected in 2012. Publication was expected for the public health (sunbeds) Bill in 2011 and now it is expected in 2012. Most worrying is the mental health (amendment) Bill. Publication was expected in 2011. Not only is it not now promised for 2012, the Government has stated that it is not now possible to indicate when it will be published. I have raised this matter repeatedly in recent weeks. Will the Minister please take on board these concerns? This is a serious and deteriorating situation that merits address by the Minister for Health and his Department. Will the Minister, Deputy Howlin, so intervene?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Deputy will be aware that this is a productive Government producing a raft of new legislation. Much of it is prioritised because of commitments that are binding within the EU-IMF deal. In truth, some of the urgent legislation — some of which falls within my area of operation — is dislodging other legislation because the physical capacity of the Parliamentary Counsel to do all that must be done is strained. There will be two tranches of health legislation in this session, however: the health (provision of general practitioners services) Bill and the health insurance (miscellaneous provisions) Bill. Both of these will be progressed in this session.

11 o'clock

Deputy Noel Grealish: Will the Minister indicate if any legislation is proposed regarding a situation that is beginning to arise throughout the country, that is to say, liquidation sales taking place every Saturday and Sunday? This weekend alone three will take place in Galway.

I know of one company, in particular, which is having its eighth liquidation sale this weekend. I have contacted Revenue which has told me the companies are not paying tax or PRSI, and the local authority which has told me they are not paying rates. I have met the representatives of the furniture industry who have told me there will be a mass closure of companies unless this stops.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot debate the issue now.

Deputy Noel Grealish: Will the Government bring forward legislation or some proposals to close this loophole which will cost us a lot of jobs?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: There is no new legislation promised to deal with the matter raised by the Deputy. If there are breaches of taxation law, that is a matter for Revenue. If there are breaches of planning regulations, there is robust legislation in place.

Deputy Noel Grealish: They have told me it takes six to eight months to get them into court.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: If there is a planning issue, the Deputy might pursue the matter with the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, or the Minister for Finance on a Revenue matter.

Deputy Noel Grealish: We have done that.

An Ceann Comhairle: I suggest the Deputy table a parliamentary question or put down an item for discussion in the topical issues debate.

Deputy Noel Grealish: I will do so.

Deputy Dara Calleary: When is a publication date expected for the legal services Bill and is there agreement at Cabinet level on the contents of the Bill? I notice in today's Questions Paper that a Deputy has tabled a question to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, about the awarding of a lottery licence in his constituency. The Deputy concerned was elected on a political reform ticket, but obviously that issue has been left behind. Is Deputy Howlin the Minister in charge of the national lottery?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Again, the legal services Bill is the subject of a commitment in the EU-IMF deal. We are committed to having the legislation published in this session. I know the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter, has worked very hard on this voluminous legislation which is being crafted and should be brought before the House in this session.

As far as ministerial oversight is concerned, while the national lottery is within the remit of my Department, the allocation of individual lotto terminals has nothing to do with the Minister.

Deputy Dara Calleary: Hard luck, Peter.

Deputy Michael P. Kitt: I am disappointed by the Minister's answer as I thought every village in Ireland might have a lotto machine.

With regard to the housing Bill and the residential tenancies (amendment) Bill, I have previously raised the issue of homeless persons, particularly young homeless persons. The legislation was to be brought before the House early next year, but there is now no date for the publication of the housing Bill. I hope this urgent issue can be dealt with quickly by the Government.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: They are both very important Bills dealing wtih complicated issues. They are expected to be brought before the House next year.

Deputy Michael McGrath: On the Government's plans to set up the NewERA authority and create the promised 100,000 jobs, is it still the intention that it will be set up as a statutory body by primary legislation? According to some media reports, it may be a non-statutory body under the NTMA. Has a Government decision been made and is legislation pending?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: As the Deputy knows, there is a commitment in the programme for Government to establish a holding company called NewERA to get the best value from State assets. There is a parallel commitment to establish a strategic investment fund to ensure we can use some of the proceeds from the sale of State assets to invest in a new generation of jobs. Both matters are being progressed. The NTMA has been asked, given its expertise, to examine, for example, the value that might be placed on some State assets in order to facilitate future decision making if the Government was to determine there should be further use of State assets. There will be a holding company, probably under the auspices of the NTMA, which will be called NewERA. No decisions on its statutory structure have yet been taken by the Government.

An Bille um an Naoú Leasú is Fiche ar an mBunreacht (Luach Saothair Breithiúna) 2011: Leasuithe ón Seanad

Twenty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Judges' Remuneration) Bill 2011: Amendments from the Seanad

Chuaigh an Dáil i gCoiste chun leasuithe ón Seanad a mheas.

The Dáil went into Committee to consider amendments from the Seanad.

Leasú a 1 ón Seanad:

AN SCEIDEAL: I gCuid 1, leathanach 7, líne 8, "ina dhlí" a scriosadh,

agusI gCuid 2, leathanach 7, líne 21, "into law" a scriosadh.

Seanad amendment No. 1:

SCHEDULE: In Part 1, page 6, line 8, to delete "ina dhlí",

and

In Part 2, page 6, line 21, to delete "into law".

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The amendment approved by Seanad Éireann relates to the draft wording of Article 35.3. This is a technical amendment which removes a superfluous expression, namely, "into law", from the first line of the section in order that it now reads "the enactment of this section". The change preserves the norms generally adhered to in the text of the Constitution.

The shorter phrase is considered more appropriate to describe the coming into operation of the proposed amendment if the referendum is approved by the people. It takes account of the procedures for the making of amendments to the Constitution by way of the enactment of a Bill. If one likes, this is the legislative phase of a constitutional enactment provided for in Article 46. The procedures relating to the submission of a proposal to amend the Constitution by decision of the people in a subsequent referendum are provided for in Article 47.

The Attorney General has advised the Minister for Justice and Equality that the phrase "into law" is tautological and, therefore, not necessary. This deletion was approved yesterday by the Seanad.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Ní chuirfidh mé i gcoinne an mholta atá os ár gcomhair ach an fhadhb atá agam ná cosúil le gach rud a dhéantar a scríobh nó a phlé sa Teach seo faoi dheifir, nuair atá an reachtaíocht déanta, bíonn dabht i gcónaí ann nach bhfuil sí foirfe. Leasú simplí é seo nach bhfuil conspóideach ach tá an fhadhb sin againn.

The amendment is not contentious and I am not arguing against it. However, I make the point that this is another example of rushed legislation and that this problem should have been picked up previously. Given the time available to produce this change, that is a pity and calls into question whether there are other problems with the wording. We did not have enough time to prepare fully because of the rushed nature of the legislation. I hope there are no problems because this will be useful legislation and the change should allow us to ensure what is intended will happen.

There is probably much in the Constitution that is superfluous. Perhaps when the constitutional forum is held, we might examine the Constitution and write it in plain English and Irish in order that it will not be seen as complicated, archaic, negative or convoluted, which would make no sense to many.

I will not press the point but express this concern. I hope there are no other problems with the existing wording, given that this is the last Stage of the Bill which will soon be put to the people who I hope will accept it.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: I thank the Deputy for his contribution. He is of the view that this legislation has been somewhat rushed, but it has been carefully considered for a very long period. This is a simple enough amendment to make. The deletion of the phrase is not viewed by the law officers as being damaging to the amendment; it is a better phrasing.

When I was crafting the legislation to establish my Department, there was a requirement to look at legislation from the 1920s. Stylistically, the drafting of legislation has changed remarkably; we would not say things in the same way today if we were redrafting some of the legal enactments from the 1920s and 1930s. However, the best advice is that this is a technical amendment which improves the text because it makes it tighter and removes a superfluous phrase. I thank the Deputy for his support.

Aontaíodh an leasú ón Seanad.

Seanad amendment agreed to.

Tuairiscíodh leasú ón Seanad.

Seanad amendment reported.

An Ceann Comhairle: Agreement to Seanad amendment is reported to the House and a message will be sent to Seanad Éireann acquainting it accordingly.

Ráiteas faoi Eolas do Vótálaithe: Tairiscint.

Statement for Information of Voters: Motion.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Tairgim:

GO ndéanfar leis seo, d'ainneoin aon ní sna Buan-Orduithe, Rún an 14 Meán Fómhair 2011 ón Dáil i dtaobh Ráitis mar Fhaisnéis do Vótálaithe i ndáil leis an mBille um an Naoú Leasú is Fiche ar an mBunreacht (Luach Saothair Breithiúna), 2011 a chealú agus go ndéanfar an ráiteas a leagtar amach sa Sceideal a ghabhann leis an Rún seo a fhorordú mar fhaisnéis do vótálaithe de bhun alt 23 d'Acht an Reifrinn, 1994 (Uimh. 12 de 1994), i ndáil leis an togra chun Airteagal 35 den Bhunreacht a leasú, ar togra é atá sa Bhille um an Naoú Leasú is Fiche ar an mBunreacht (Luach Saothair Breithiúna), 2011 agus atá ina ábhar do reifreann bunreachta.

An Sceideal

Reifreann a bhaineann le Luach Saothair Breithiúna

Is é atá beartaithe leis an mBille um an Naoú Leasú is Fiche ar an mBunreacht (Luach Saothair Breithiúna), 2011 alt 5 d'Airteagal 35 den Bhunreacht, lena ndéantar socrú nach cead laghdú a dhéanamh ar thuarastal breithimh an fad is bheidh an breitheamh in oifig, a scriosadh agus an t-alt seo a leanas a chur ina ionad:

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‘5 1° Ní cead laghdú a dhéanamh ar luach saothair breithiúna an fad is a bheidh siad in oifig ach amháin de réir an ailt seo.

2° Tá luach saothair breithiúna faoi réir gearradh cánacha, tobhach nó muirear eile a ghearrtar le dlí ar dhaoine i gcoitinne nó ar dhaoine a bhaineann le haicme áirithe.

3° Más rud é, roimh an alt seo a achtú nó dá éis sin, go ndearnadh nó go ndéantar laghduithe le dlí ar luach saothair daoine a bhaineann le haicmí daoine a n-íoctar a luach saothair as airgead poiblí agus go luaitear sa dlí sin gur ar mhaithe le leas an phobail na laghduithe sin, féadfar socrú a dhéanamh freisin le dlí chun laghduithe comhréireacha a dhéanamh ar luach saothair breithiúna.’.

MÁ THOILÍONN TÚ leis an togra, cuir X os coinne an fhocail TÁ ar an bpáipéar ballóide.

MURA dTOILÍONN TÚ leis an togra, cuir X os coinne an fhocail NÍL ar an bpáipéar ballóide.

Is féidir cóip den Bhille a iniúchadh nó a fháil saor in aisce in aon Phost-Oifig.

I move:

THAT, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, the Resolution of the Dáil of 14th September, 2011 in respect of a Statement for Information of Voters in relation to the Twenty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Judges’ Remuneration) Bill 2011 be hereby rescinded and that the statement set out in the Schedule to this Resolution be prescribed for the information of voters pursuant to section 23 of the Referendum Act 1994 (No. 12 of 1994), in relation to the proposal to amend Article 35 of the Constitution which is contained in the Twenty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Judges’ Remuneration) Bill 2011 and is the subject of a constitutional referendum.

Schedule

Referendum relating to Judges’ Remuneration

The Twenty-Ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Judges’ Remuneration) Bill 2011 proposes to delete section 5 of Article 35 of the Constitution which provides that the remuneration of a judge shall not be reduced during the continuance in office of the judge and to substitute the section here following:

‘5 1° The remuneration of judges shall not be reduced during their continuance in office save in accordance with this section.

2° The remuneration of judges is subject to the imposition of taxes, levies or other charges that are imposed by law on persons generally or persons belonging to a particular class.

3° Where, before or after the enactment of this section, reductions have been or are made by law to the remuneration of persons belonging to classes of persons whose remuneration is paid out of public money and such law states that those reductions are in

the public interest, provision may also be made by law to make proportionate reductions to the remuneration of judges.'.

IF YOU APPROVE of the proposal, mark X opposite the word YES on the ballot paper.

IF YOU DO NOT APPROVE of the proposal, mark X opposite the word NO on the ballot paper.

A copy of the Bill can be inspected or obtained free of charge at any Post Office.

Cuireadh agus aontaíodh an cheist.

Question put and agreed to.

National Tourism Development Authority (Amendment) Bill 2011: Order for Second Stage

Bill entitled an Act to amend the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003 and to provide for related matters.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I move: "That Second Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

National Tourism Development Authority (Amendment) Bill 2011: Second Stage

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The National Tourism Development (Amendment) Bill 2011 provides for an increase in the level of capital funding that can be voted to the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland, for the purpose of supporting tourism product development. Before moving on to the detail of the Bill, I wish to outline to the House the importance of the tourism sector. Even after the decline of recent years, the tourism and hospitality sector continues to be a major economic force in the economy, providing an estimated 180,000 jobs. It brings revenues into every part of the country and provides job opportunities for people across a range of skill levels.

The estimate for expenditure in 2010 by overseas visitors, including carrier receipts, is approximately €3.4 billion. In addition, estimated spending on domestic tourism in 2010 was €1.3 billion, making the total expenditure on tourism in the national economy in the region of €4.7 billion. As for tourism performance, after a number of very successful years of growth, Ireland saw a reduction in overseas visitors in the second half of 2008 that continued into 2009 and 2010. Ireland was not unique in this regard as travel worldwide was affected by the global economic slowdown. Fortunately, 2011 has seen a welcome return to growth and I am confident this upward momentum will be maintained. In the first six months of this year, visits from North America increased by 15% and from Great Britain by 8% compared with the first half of 2010. Notably, visits from other long-haul markets and mainland European countries increased by more than 17%. In addition, people appear to be holidaying at home in greater numbers this year and I commend them on their support for the domestic tourism industry.

Comparisons with the first half of 2010 are distorted by the impact of severe weather in the early part of the year and the volcanic ash on travel between March and May last year. That being so, the increase in overseas travel to Ireland is not solely due to the recovery of business

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lost due to the volcanic ash and weather issues of 2010. Numbers from North America and from other long-haul markets are almost back to 2008 levels. Indications of recovery are supported by evidence from the trade and data from private sector surveys showing Dublin hotel occupancy rates up almost ten percentage points. Ireland has retained its title as least expensive destination in western Europe according to the latest *www.hotels.com* hotel price index published last week.

While the recent figures are encouraging, one cannot afford to be complacent. I am confident however, that with all those engaged with Irish tourism working together with the relevant agencies, Ministers and Government, we can ensure the quality and competitiveness of the Irish tourist offering will be continually improved and the industry will generate increased earnings and more jobs as part of our economic recovery. The Government is playing its part through measures such as the VAT cut, reduced employers' PRSI, and the visa waiver scheme to support competitiveness, as well as key investments to upgrade our tourism products and attractions. This Bill is a technical adjustment to existing legislation but is important in facilitating the continued support for capital investment in tourism product.

The decision of the Minister for Finance to reduce to 9% the level of VAT that applies to a range of labour-intensive tourism services provides a much-needed support to this sector of the economy. It improves still further the competitiveness of our services for tourists, particularly accommodation and restaurants. The VAT reduction was introduced for an 18-month period and its implementation will be monitored. I am pleased to note the strong encouragement given by the Restaurants Association of Ireland and the Irish Hotels Federation to their members to pass on the VAT cut to their customers. The Government is also helping businesses to enhance their position in the international tourism marketplace by reducing significantly the cost of employing people by halving employers' PRSI for those on modest wages. It should be remembered that the total cost of employment from the employer's perspective not only includes wages but also the employer's share of PRSI. This reduction lowers the cost of employment for the employer without affecting employees' earnings. The visa waiver scheme, which is perhaps the most radical change in Irish immigration policy or practice since the coming of the Single Market, shows the Government is serious about doing everything it can to support the tourism sector.

While the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, confirmed recently that the Government has decided to retain the €3 travel tax pending a further review next spring, a significant proportion of the revenues taken in from that tax will be used to support inbound tourism. This support will see significant additional funding being used for co-operative marketing with airlines, airports, ferry companies and tour operators on inbound routes into Ireland over the coming months. We will focus in particular on opportunities to enhance access from the British regions, the United States, Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Tourism Ireland will lead the marketing campaign to promote inbound travel into Ireland in co-operation with airlines, ferry companies, tour operators and airports. Those participating in the programme will be expected to make a contribution to the cost, thus leveraging a final investment in excess of the Government contribution.

In the domestic market, I recently launched Fáilte Ireland's latest Discover Ireland autumn breaks brochure. The brochure will be available online and in Discover Ireland tourist offices until the end of November. The range of special offers in our autumn brochure and online is a reflection of the determination of tourism businesses to fight for every potential inch of business in the market. The brochure features 200 special offers from throughout Ireland, with offers from hotels, guesthouses, bed and breakfasts and self-catering holiday homes. The bro-

chure highlights some great holiday ideas, including top autumn festivals and includes a special focus on the Dublin festival season.

The Government's support programme for capital investment in tourism product is provided through Fáilte Ireland's tourism capital investment programme. The programme has operated on the basis of three broad strands. The first is the development of new attractions and the upgrade of existing visitor attractions. The second strand concerns the development of tourism infrastructure, primarily through supporting local authorities to develop appropriate facilities for tourists, including walking and cycling routes, jetties and moorings, angling stands, access routes to areas of scenic interest, as well as signposting and orientation facilities in heritage and historic towns. The third strand relates to the development of outdoor and other active pursuits such as water sports, boat rental, equestrian and horse riding facilities, and so on. The aim of the investment programme is to provide the necessary public infrastructure to help develop tourism as well as providing sustainable visitor attractions that match the expectations of the international visitor.

Naturally, as with most funding schemes, there are many more applicants than there is capital funding available. Under the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003, responsibility for the management of tourism related funding programmes has been devolved to Fáilte Ireland, which considers applications for funding based on the tourism benefits that each proposal will provide. To achieve the best use of public funding, it is crucial that the limited funding is put towards the projects that will have the most effective impact on tourism both in terms of increased visitor numbers and the enhancement of the visitor experience. In this regard, the Fáilte Ireland executive will undertake a full appraisal process, including financial evaluations, legal and other due diligence of all applications made under the programme. When it has been completed, the Fáilte Ireland executive will bring the application before a capital investment appraisal group, which has been established to examine the proposals and make recommendations on funding. It includes external experts with particular expertise in financial appraisal and economics, together with Fáilte Ireland's chief executive and a representative of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Final approval of the appraisal group's recommendation is made by the board of Fáilte Ireland.

In the initial years of the programme, 2007-08, Fáilte Ireland targeted infrastructure provision by local authorities, such as walking and cycling routes, beach management works, access to angling waters and so on. It also supported the historic towns initiative for walking routes in designated towns of historic merit. A total of €23 million was allocated to Fáilte Ireland in those years for such projects.

In the following years, the focus expanded to include the provision of support for re-investment in major tourist visitor attractions and the development of facilities for visitor activities. Notable projects allocated or approved for grant aid to date include Dublinia, Waterford Viking Triangle, Sliabh Liag Cliffs in Donegal, Athlone Castle, Mizen Head Bridge in west Cork, Mayo Greenway and King John's Castle in Limerick.

From 2009 to date, 45 projects have been approved for funding of just under €76 million. The level of outstanding commitments under the programme means the current legislative limit on the funds advanced to Fáilte Ireland will no longer be sufficient. This gives rise to the need for the Bill before the House which I will outline in more detail.

The National Tourism Development Authority Act was passed in 2003 to dissolve Bord Fáilte Éireann and CERT limited and establish the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland. Section 24(1) of the Act gives the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, the power to advance, out of money provided by the Oireachtas, such sums as the Minister may determine. Section 24(2) limits the amount of

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money that can be advanced by the Minister to Fáilte Ireland as capital expenditure on projects or enterprises to €65 million.

Since its establishment in 2003 to the end of 2010, a total of €44.411 million has been advanced to Fáilte Ireland for capital expenditure on projects or enterprises. This leaves a total of just €20 million available to be advanced to Fáilte Ireland before amending legislation is required. It is anticipated that expenditure in 2011 and 2012 is likely to exceed the existing cap and this necessitates an increase in the limit. My Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have agreed a new legislative cap of €150 million, based on this year's allocation and possible future allocations. I am bringing forward this Bill to make the necessary legislative change and commend it to the House.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I welcome the Bill and thank the Minister for the work he has done to date on this issue. I recognise the Bill, as the Minister said, is technical in nature and is removing a cap. There is no change in terms of the policy platform of the Government. I have been supportive of the actions and initiatives the Minister has taken since coming into office and will continue to be so if they are in the best interests of the tourism sector and the country.

We all know there are a couple of bedrocks in the economy which we perhaps lost sight of in better times. One is agriculture, with which the Minister is very familiar because of his constituency, and the other is tourism. There is a lot of talk about foreign direct investment and the need to attract it, in terms of high technology companies, ICT, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and other industries. We often fail to recognise that one of the best aspects of foreign direct investment can be derived from the tourism sector. It is effectively money from America and can be of immense benefit to reignite our domestic economy.

We are all aware of the lack of confidence in our economy and the impact it is having at local level. It is often very difficult to stimulate the industry from macroeconomic policy decisions that are taken, but if activity can be ignited in the service industry, in hotels, bars and restaurants, a buoyant economy will be created in every local community. Tourism has a phenomenal capacity to deliver on that.

I welcome the initiative, which will allow the State to facilitate Fáilte Ireland in providing assistance through its current programme and the facilities it has identified and approved but are awaiting funding. I wish the Minister well in his endeavours with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Minister for Finance in attempting to ensure that a greater level of funding is set aside to support this vital industry.

The Minister is well aware of the number of jobs the sector provides. They are exceptionally important jobs. Some of them, by nature, are part time and assist young people in college and young mothers with families who need to work part time. The impact it has on our economy is often underestimated. I support the Minister in his efforts to ensure a greater level of funding is set aside this year and over the next number of years. Such funding has to be viewed in the context of rebuilding our economy.

We share a common view, with the exception of the Minister's colleague, on the necessity to recapitalise the banks to create a level of activity in the domestic economy. In parallel with that, funding for the tourism sector will have an equal benefit in terms of motivating and renewing activity. The Bill will allow the Minister to provide funding to Fáilte Ireland. He will have to win the argument with the Department of Finance.

We should develop a new programme. Long before the crash I prepared some ideas for a former Minister on investing significant sums of money in tourism capital infrastructure. We should be spending in the region of €1 billion a year over five years to create best of breed

facilities and attractions in four unique districts in the country. There could be a level of competition between regions in terms of who would have the best facilities for families, watersports or outdoor pursuits such as walking or hiking. We could create some of the best facilities in Europe.

Sadly, that is not possible in the current environment. For far too long we have failed to consider new markets. There are no facilities, with the exception of good hotels. We have not created major attractions like other countries for families and young people. Why does everybody have to head to France, Portugal, Spain or Italy? There is a weather issue. A level of development has taken place in recent years in some of the Nordic countries which now have very good tourism facilities. Why can we not forget about the weather, look at what attractions are available and try to create the best possible ones to attract inward investment to benefit the State?

There is a huge job to be done to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit within the tourism sector to develop ideas. It will then be up to all of us to try to find how to support it with grant aid. The figures will stack up if we can develop the entrepreneurial spirit we had in the days of Shannon Development. Dr. Brendan O'Regan was very proactive in developing the castle experience and Bunratty folk park. Other facilities have been successful such as St. John's Castle in Limerick. Many such attractions targeted the American market. A visit to a castle was a big thing in the United States at one stage but not any longer. We have to look beyond such attractions.

I am mindful of the fact Shannon Development continued to pursue the next level of tourism attractions. It has an attractive offering, of which the Minister may be aware. There is a proposal to build a theme park at the back of the folk park. Such projects should be considered for grant aid. It wants to attract an international player, similar to the management of other theme parks. As we do not have much experience in that, it is right to seek to tie up with other international operators to bring the best of breed theme park to this country, in the first instance to retain our own people. A significant number of Irish people travel abroad every year to facilitate families because the facilities are not here and it is not just the weather. We need to carefully consider that.

We also need to consider how we promote and market what we have which requires money. In the past I have been critical of the efforts of Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland to promote Ireland. When one moves out into the wider world in terms of attracting tourism it becomes exceptionally expensive and it is not possible for Ireland to fund the kind of marketing campaign that would give the growth rates we would want. We need to be considerably more effective in targeting certain sectors of the market.

I am delighted the certificate of Irish heritage has eventually come to fruition. I know it has been doing the rounds for some time and has been working through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It culminated this week with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade presenting the first certificate. I understand that later this month or early next month those certificates will be available. I believe Mr. Greg O'Neill from County Clare first proposed that idea. I know some people have suggested it came from the Farmleigh forum, but Mr. O'Neill, who was originally from Athlone and a schoolmate of the late Brian Lenihan Sn., would rightly recognise that it was his idea going back over 20 years. It is an exceptionally good idea in terms of making that connection.

We will need to consider other similar opportunities, including how we get into the many networks that exist. For example, there are walking clubs to which local authorities have given support and grants and which have benefited from the good work of FÁS and Fáilte Ireland. There are many walking networks throughout Europe and in other parts of the world and it is

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a matter of being proactive in making contact with them, doing the legwork and setting up festivals with a theme at this end affording people the opportunity to travel.

In my area as in the Minister of State's area there is a very strong history of traditional music. We have traditional music festivals throughout the summer which are very good for the region, and are well recognised and supported. I was delighted that an east Clare tourism group has decided to have a walking festival next month, which extends the tourism season. It has been building connections with other walking groups in Ireland and the idea is to look further afield. It is slow and expensive because most of the work is done by volunteers in the first instance or the very small tourism practitioners in the region, mainly bed and breakfast operators, and taxi and hackney service providers. It is a small group of local people coming together. A small amount of money to assist them in their marketing efforts to offer their wares to a broader audience would be most welcome. We need to consider the macro level in terms of branding Ireland, but we also need to assist at the micro level.

The Minister of State will be familiar with the fishing on Lough Derg. Some people spend time, energy and money travelling to places like Holland and France to attract people to come to participate in lake angling. It is an exceptionally good tourist offering and probably one which has been underexploited. Great work has been done by many of the local fishing clubs in their restocking programmes and returning the catch. There needs to be joined-up thinking with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and Inland Fisheries Ireland to eliminate poaching which has become a serious phenomenon in more recent years. There was always some poaching of salmon. While I do not want to get into the broader debate of who is doing it, there is a strong body of evidence that certain nationalities in particular have targeted lakes and are effectively removing many of the fish. We need to consider a programme that limits the number of fish caught in a particular way in order to protect that asset. If the information gets back to the fishing community that the rivers and lakes are no longer fruitful in terms of delivery of catch, it finds its way into the angling magazines resulting in a complete fall-off in activity. There is some work to be done in that area.

The Minister of State has given numbers indicating the increase in tourism, which is helpful. We cannot sit back on our laurels, particularly with the economic crisis that continues to prevail across Europe. There was growth in a number of European countries, but the forecast was not great, which means people will not be travelling. We will need to watch developments in the key markets from where people are still in a position to travel. Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland need to be flexible in recognising the state of other countries' economies.

I do not want to play down the increase in tourist numbers, about which we are all happy. Some of the increase was as a result of not having an ash cloud this year as we did last year which impacted many businesses and resulted in a bad year.

I was not a big fan of the VAT reduction. When the full analysis is done in due course, I am not sure it will have shown the level of benefits we would like for the cost it has had on the pension sector. There are some suggestions it has not been passed on and even when it is passed on, one would need to eat out many times to save enough to buy a meal based on the VAT reduction, but we have had that debate before.

Since his appointment, the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, has strongly indicated his intention to work much more closely with the State airports in an effort to have aviation policy and tourism policy work together in a more coherent way, which I always believed was the right approach. He has considerable work to do regarding Cork and Shannon Airports. While I am not suggesting it is coming from the Department, some of the information coming through the media about Shannon Airport in particular is of concern. Some members of the airport's board

seem to suggest the solution is the development of a long lease and ultimately the privatisation of the airport through the backdoor, which would not be helpful. All of the State airports need to be considered together in a collective way. If any of the critical assets are simply considered in a profit and loss environment and focused exclusively on being a profit centre, the region or country is robbed of that facility in terms of being able to pull together the lot and develop a coherent policy.

We need to get away from the notion of the privatisation of things like airports and considering them only in terms of profit and loss. Nobody ever considers a road in terms of profit and loss; it is critical infrastructure for moving people from A to B and the same is true of our train services. We need to start to view our airports in the same way. Some local people seem to believe that if the airport was privatised and taken into local hands, they could run it much better. However, that moves such airports out of the central picture. We need a central authority running our three main airports, similar to what existed previously. I never agreed with the State Airports Act 2004 giving rise to the notion of airports being somehow in competition with each other. We do not adopt that approach to roads and suggest that as someone could reach a destination quicker on the N7 than on the N8, the road should be privatised to force them to take off a few bends allowing a driver to get there quicker, which would be daft. We need to get back to managing the assets in a way that gives everybody a fair share of the incoming tourists, but it must be done with proper regulation and governance, in a manner that utilises the facilities to meet the policies that are set.

Over the years we have talked at length about balanced regional development but have done little to support it other than throw in the planks of infrastructure by building the roads — the airports are there. There needs to be a management policy sitting over those assets to manage them in a coherent way that states that Shannon Airport will be for North American tourism, that we will brand that and that will be the product offered there, while doing something else with Dublin and Cork Airports. We must also examine other potential facilities around that including the pre-clearance of cargo, which while not related to tourism is an important aspect. As the Minister of State will be aware, the pre-clearance for passengers travelling to the United States has been successful; probably this asset has not been sweated as much as it should have been as this stage but it is an important feature of assisting airlines in identifying other opportunities in the United States. Hot on the heels of that, we must continue our efforts to develop pre-clearance for cargo. That would create a level of activity in Shannon Airport or Cork Airport, if it ever got to that level, and would have the capacity to underwrite a significant cost base at an airport that would make it more attractive for, say, Shannon Airport to be able to offer better deals to airlines that would generate passengers. That in itself would have a snowball effect because much of the cargo now travels in the hold of commercial aircraft. There is a good deal of work to be done in the Department in marrying the tourism component and the transport component through the aviation side and, additionally, examining with Enterprise Ireland the importance of bringing in the cargo component while it helps to support the activity thereafter.

I mentioned briefly the importance of supporting the micro activity in the tourism sector, particularly for tourists engaged in outdoor pursuits, be it walking, surfing or fishing. Surfing has become a very significant product on the western seaboard, particularly in Clare, with which I am most familiar, but it extends to the Minister of State's county of Mayo and further afield.

I ask the Minister of State to use his office to ensure the tourism element of our future development is pulled together in a strong way with the transport initiative to ensure there is a coherent approach not only to the development of the product but a sustained marketing effort. I will not do what others did in the past and say we should spend, spend, spend. We must be careful about what we spend because we will not get the money from the Department

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of Finance in the first instance. More work can be done in identifying the tourism areas and opportunities. It is not all about having an advertisement on the front page of the *New York Post* but we could be on the front page of it with a story that is unique, different and has the capacity to attract interest rather than with a flat advertisement that is paid for by the Irish Exchequer at a phenomenal cost.

I know that some work is being done by the State agencies. I recognise the work of Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Shannon Development and a myriad of other agencies involved in tourism activity. They often get bashed, usually by the Opposition side of the House. I will not engage in that because I know the difficulties and constraints under which they work. I wish the Minister and them well in their efforts ahead.

Deputy John Browne: I welcome the Bill. I wish the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, all the best in his portfolio, as this is the first opportunity I have had to do so. He was very vocal when he was on this side of the House, therefore, I am sure he will implement some of the ideas and suggestions he had. It is important to increase funding for this area. I am sure the Minister of State will fight his corner at the Cabinet table to ensure adequate funding is made available for the future development of tourism.

I might not be as complimentary as Deputy Dooley to some of the bodies. The mid-west and the Shannon area do very well from Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland but I am not so sure the south east or my county, the model county of Wexford, which is probably one of the most beautiful counties in Ireland, gets the same level of support and assistance from those two bodies. The general feeling in the south east, particularly in my county, is that it does not.

Many people are working in the tourism industry. It accounts for approximately 200,000 full-time and part-time jobs throughout the country. It is an important industry for the future development of this country. We in the south-east corner have been trying for many years to promote tourism to our region, particularly between our region and Wales. Wexford County Council has been twinned with Pembrokeshire. The local hotels and golf clubs have an interaction between parts of Wales and the south east and that works reasonably well. There is an exchange in terms of golfing expeditions, angling and different types of fishing. We have a huge influx of Welsh visitors in the south east during the rugby season. Many of them might not have a ticket of the match in the Aviva Stadium but they come and spend their time in the south east on match weekends and that is very welcome.

There are tremendous opportunities for the development of marine tourism. The Minister of State comes from the west coast and I come from the south-east coast. The old fishery boards were fairly active in this area but I am not sure that the new body is as active. I do not know if the Minister of State has met the representatives of it yet. It could do much more to develop angling, boating and surfing. We have miles and miles of coastline and such tourism is probably under exploited at present. I was in that Department for a year and we worked very closely with the fishery boards to promote such tourism. There was a good level of co-operation between local authorities and the fishery boards at that time in developing unique tourist attractions based on the marine sector. It is important that we continue to develop that work together to achieve that. However, it cannot be just left to Fáilte Ireland or Tourism Ireland. Local authorities and the Department have a major role to play in working together in that respect.

Many local authorities have been involved in tourism projects and I cite my local authority as an example. It has been involved in the development of the Hook Lighthouse, the heritage park in Wexford, the John F. Kennedy Park, the Dunbrody Famine Ship in New Ross and many other projects. It is about developing tourism at local level. Nearly every large and small

parish in my county has some unique tourism project that they encourage people to visit. If people come to the county, they do not only go the towns, the John F. Kennedy Park or the heritage park, they expand their trip and travel to the countryside.

I met representatives of the Wexford IFA on a number of occasions. I have often talked about the development of rural tourism or agricultural tourism, as I call it, because rural tourism is essentially agricultural tourism given that the farmers provide the land for walking schemes. Farmers are developing in-farm visits and farm holidays. That is another area where there is huge potential for development and expansion. Farmers are doing well at present and they are exploring alternative schemes. It is important that agriculture is tied into tourism development for the future.

Tourism Ireland has made great play this week of the 500,000 million fans it has on its website. I spoke to a hotelier this morning, who telephoned me about another matter, who said it is grand to have fans on the website but we need bodies in Ireland. It is important we get people to come here. He made the point that the same number of consumers are leaving the UK this year as left it five or ten years ago but they are not coming to Ireland. He said they are turning left and they are going to sunnier spots, to Germany or other counties, but they are not coming to Ireland. It is an area we need to examine and spend more time promoting Ireland as a destination to which the UK visitor would come.

The visits of the Queen and President Obama accounted for massive publicity for this country. We all enjoyed the few days they were here and the publicity Ireland received. I ask the Minister of State to say, when he replies to the debate, how he feels we should be able to exploit the visits of Queen Elizabeth and President Obama to this country. I read recently that there are approximately 40 million Irish Americans in the United States. If even one per cent of them visited Ireland on a regular basis we would be doing very well. This is an opportunity we should not lose. The previous and present Governments made brave decisions in inviting Queen Elizabeth to come here. We have had regular visits by Presidents of the United States. We should not lose this opportunity. We have tapped into the goodwill between the British and Irish people.

We should use whatever opportunities we have to encourage more United Kingdom people to come to Ireland. Ireland is now a safe place to come. We had our troubles in the past and people may have been afraid to come. Now, one can come and move freely in both North and South. We should get the message out that there are 32 counties in Ireland. The whole of Ireland is a good place to visit and we have many tourism sites that people would want to see. We should encourage second generation Irish people in the United Kingdom and the United States to visit Ireland.

A million visitors come through Rosslare port every year, but Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland seem to be more supportive of airports than of ports. It is important that ports be given the same publicity and promotion as airports. Wales is on the doorstep of the south east and is only a short hop across the water from Dublin. It is important that tourism bodies promote our ports as well as our airports. There should be a combined effort, as Deputy Dooley said. Waterford airport and other smaller airports around the country have huge potential. All opportunities should be taken to encourage people to come here, whether the traffic comes through ports or airports.

I thank the Minister of State for bringing the Bill before the House. It is one thing to enact legislation but I am sure the Minister of State will have to present his case to the Ministers for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. However, if Deputy Ring is looking for money for Wexford I am sure he will have no problem with Deputy Brendan Howlin. If the Minister

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of State starts to look for money for that part of the country he will probably get it and he can then move on to the rest of the country.

I wish the Minister of State well in his position. I know he will do a good job and will fight to ensure that as many people as possible come to visit Ireland.

Finally, I must mention the visit of the tall ships to Waterford. The event was a huge success and a tremendous opportunity to encourage people to come here. I hope they will return to the south-east in the next few years.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. I thank the Minister of State for his help since taking up his position and wish him all the best for the future. The Bill is a necessary step towards facilitating significant investment in our tourism product.

In the current economic climate the importance of tourism cannot be overstated. As an indigenous economic sector, it is unique in that it has an impact on all areas of the economy, rural and urban. The industry is a very significant employer and requires minimal import content to produce its output. The rationale for increased investment in the sector is particularly strong and is to be supported.

The recent performance of Irish tourism is encouraging. However, for tourism to keep making a positive contribution to the Irish economy, it will be necessary to make the right strategic choices over the coming period. It is essential that a measured approach is taken when deciding priorities.

In the 1990s, Ireland experienced unprecedented tourism growth and outperformed the rest of European as a tourist destination. However, since 2001, the sector has become less competitive due to a number of factors as highlighted in numerous Department and industry reports, including the lack of investment in product development, changes in demand and customer needs and more aggressive competition from other destinations. Indeed, on a number of indicators, such as the number of tourist visits and revenue generated, the tourism sector has experienced a period of overall decline in recent years. During the period 2005-10 the number of overseas visitors and holidaymakers to Ireland peaked in 2007 at 7.7 million and then declined year-on-year to 5.8 million in 2010. The number of visitors from each of our three largest markets — Britain, Europe and North America — has declined year on year since 2007, though the number of domestic trips actually increased in the same period. Tourism's contribution to the broader economy in terms of GNP has remained relatively stable at between 3.7% to 4.0%.

The industry's role in balanced regional and rural development is extremely important. From the beaches in Youghal or the Ring of Kerry to Newgrange and the Donegal Gaeltacht, every corner of Ireland has a unique selling point. Naturally, Dublin generates the largest proportion of tourism revenue in Ireland and will most likely continue to do so. The south-west and west regions continue to perform quite well. The Shannon, the east and midlands and the north west in particular need to be included in an inclusive strategy to maximise the potential of areas. This needs to be addressed going forward. The industry continues to be a major employer with the Central Statistics Office and Fáilte Ireland estimating that those working in the tourism and hospitality sector make up somewhere between 7% and 10% of total employment. The level has decreased over the last couple of years.

The Bill before the House on its own is a technicality which facilitates Fáilte Ireland to continue its business. It should, though, form the basis for a response to the tourism product development strategyproduced by Fáilte Ireland, which outlined that competitor destinations in northern Europe are investing substantial sums of public money into tourism. In Norway,

for example, public investment in tourism has been running at €43 million annually. In Scotland, the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Agency spends up to €22 million annually on tourism. This investment is additional to the €52 million Government grant support provided by the Visit Scotland agency. Through its funding Visit Scotland is seeking to encourage the Scottish hospitality business to enhance its marketing campaigns. This initiative aims to address capacity utilisation in the industry which is centred on increasing occupancy rather than building more hotels. To this end, the hospitality industry is being encouraged to push off-season offers and use the internet for last minute marketing.

Similar initiatives here will need to address the overcapacity issue, particularly outside Dublin. Capital funding is necessarily supported by appropriate and extensive marketing of our product. This too is becoming increasingly competitive. I call on the Government in advance of its budgetary considerations, and in light of the responsibility on the Executive in the North to reciprocate, to increase funding in Tourism Ireland as an efficient way to maximise the marketing potential of our tourism product abroad.

There are undoubtedly opportunities to enhance further the way we manage our tourism industry here. Sinn Féin is committed to playing a constructive role in that debate on both sides of the Border. This opportunity should be taken to involve the sector, and indeed individual communities, in a real and meaningful way in the development of our tourism product.

Again looking at the Scottish example, Visit Scotland is seeking to encourage the hospitality industry to become involved in cross-selling which aims to involve local businesses in promotion and developing a comprehensive tourism package. Indeed, in Scotland, some local businesses have become involved in establishing destination marketing organisations. These are membership organisations made up of tourism businesses which come together to promote their area and develop the overall quality of the tourism product. Private businesses can promote themselves on the website, appear in literature such as pamphlets, and receive access and information on training and skills to enhance the tourism experience.

12 o'clock

This model should be further developed here to include the local community, including community and voluntary sectors, as well as local businesses and in a collective effort to develop and improve their tourism product.

For example, I would support the people of Kells in their call to have the Book of Kells returned to the town, in the context of a broader plan to open up the tourist potential of the area which includes the Boyne Valley, Lough Crew and the Hill of Uisneach, subject, of course, to the appropriate facilities being in place.

The Department and its agencies need to look at how such big ticket items can provide the nucleus of an improved product. There is huge potential in every corner of the country for product development. In this regard, I think of my own area, with its beaches, the heritage town of Youghal, the harbour at Cobh and Fota island. Product development, marketing, innovation and co-ordination can transform the economic landscape and change people's lives for the better.

Competitor countries are providing for substantial public investment in tourism product innovation. Examples include the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the Eden Project near Bristol. Such investments by municipalities and other public authorities in iconic attractions offer compelling reasons which motivate visitors to choose to visit a destination. In a similar vein, individual major events with a significant tourism impact have also received public investment in competitor countries. The Edinburgh International Festival receives €5 million of public funds annually and plays an important role in attracting visitors.

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For Ireland, cultural tourism continues to hold huge potential. It embraces the full range of experiences visitors can have to learn what makes a destination distinctive, including its lifestyle, heritage, the arts and its people. We have a rich cultural heritage, including megalithic tombs, Norman castles and Viking cities. The period during which the country declared its independence at the start of the last century also holds significance. No debate on tourism could pass without mentioning the potential to create a cultural and historical "Northern Quarter" in Dublin, including Moore Street, Moore Lane and O'Rahilly Parade, with the GPO at its heart. This area is rich in history and would act as a major national monument and a fantastic attraction for visitors from home and abroad. People who have visited cities such as Prague, Budapest and Berlin will be familiar with how such attractions add to the overall cultural experience and bring a nation's history to life. These are the strategic decisions which would make a real difference and similar projects need to be prioritised here.

The Ulster Canal project holds enormous potential to open up the central Border region which has experienced economic disadvantage for many years owing to its location. Harnessing the potential positive impact on all towns and villages in the canal corridor would lead to significant regeneration and benefits through increased tourism, business development and prosperity, not to mention the many construction and ancillary jobs that would be created. Sinn Féin will continue to call on the Government to live up to its responsibilities in this regard.

The role of the film industry in promoting tourism is recognised in many countries, including Britain where it is estimated that one in five of the nation's international tourists are inspired to visit by images in movies or on television programmes. The castle used as the location for Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films saw a 120% rise in visitor numbers following the release of the first film in the series. Ireland has had some experience of this through films such as "Braveheart", "Saving Private Ryan" and "The Quiet Man", benefiting counties Meath, Wexford and Mayo. I welcome the news that a Bollywood blockbuster is to be made at Trinity College this year and encourage the Minister to work with his colleagues in the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to maximise the tourism potential of such projects. This has been done in other areas by conducting national screen tourism campaigns based around specific films or television programmes; identifying specific countries for screen tourism marketing campaigns; undertaking promotions such as behind the scenes programmes, DVD extras and celebrity promotions; and creating a map showing the locations of films and television programmes shot in Ireland. North Wales Tourism has already done this and aims to exploit the interest in the movie and television industries by attracting an extra 30,000 visitors to the region each year.

I want to mention the potential appeal of Ireland as an outdoor activity destination. With a reasonably small investment, the waterways, walkways and cycle paths could be developed, enhanced and improved. The Minister will be familiar with the potential of such tourism. Fáilte Ireland's current product development strategy identifies gaps in a number of tourism market segments. An audit of the Irish tourism product found that it needed to catch up with its EU competitors in a number of areas, including cycling tourism. It identifies the very limited cycle-route network, the lack of bike hire services and bicycle-friendly trains as impediments. The Great Western Greenway along the west coast is a project with which the Minister will be very familiar. It is one that should be replicated right across the country to cater for cyclists, walkers, trekkers, surfers, anglers and the vast number of outdoor enthusiasts who come here from near and far.

The Bill removes the impending straitjacket. What we need now is swift intervention to maximise the full potential of the tourism industry. I commend the Bill to the House.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Since being elected, the new Administration has put the focus on its ambition to create jobs and, in particular, to develop the tourism sector in order to create jobs and generate revenue for the State. In spite of my deep differences with the Government on its economic policy and decision to adhere to what is the disastrous EU-IMF bank bailout and austerity programme, I share its belief that tourism represents an area which has great potential to create the jobs that we so badly need for the people and vital revenue for the State. In this context, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the opportunities to develop tourism and tourism related employment. I also welcome the fact that the Bill indicates a recognition that the Government has to act proactively to develop the tourism sector and increase the capital investment in developing tourism infrastructure.

Given that we are debating this important issue, we should ask what else could be done to develop the tourism sector and create tourism related jobs. We need to do a hell of a lot more and urgently. The simple fact is that in line with the disastrous economic plight of the country, the tourism sector has been hit significantly in the last few years. Many tourism related jobs have either gone or are under significant threat. As a first step, we must take measures and make investments to secure existing tourism related jobs and create new ones in a sector that we know has massive potential.

I would like to be localist and talk about my constituency of Dún Laoghaire. I want to do this not because I am just concerned about my constituency, but also because Dún Laoghaire is a port and still one of the main entry points for tourists to this country. It is a seaside town which has a particularly rich history, as well as a rich cultural, literary and architectural heritage. Located between Dublin, our major tourism hub, and County Wicklow, one of our most spectacular scenic landscapes, it has major tourism potential and many uniquely attractive features. The town is a microcosm not only of the country's potential to develop tourism and employment but also of the obstacles to achieving these objectives and, in many areas, the failure to fully realise that potential for many years. Dún Laoghaire has many attractive features. People from all over Dublin and beyond used to visit the town to enjoy its vistas and harbour which, by any definition, is a fantastic heritage site and architectural feature. When it was first built, the harbour was the largest man-made harbour in the world and even now could challenge for designation as a world heritage site. Dún Laoghaire's seaside vistas remain highly attractive and hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of domestic and foreign tourists and visitors enjoy its walks, including those into beautiful heritage towns such as Dalkey and beyond to Killiney Hill, another beautiful feature of the area. The town reaches into the Dublin Mountains and has some beautiful forests and parks which have tremendous potential at many levels. As I stated, it also has a rich literary history and associations with writers going back to Joyce, Beckett and Shaw and, in later times, Maeve Binchy, the recently deceased Hugh Leonard and others. I do not need to elaborate on this aspect of the town's heritage.

The potential of Dún Laoghaire has been grossly mismanaged during the years by the Government, local authorities and State agencies, in particular, the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company, a semi-State company which comes under the aegis of the Department of Transport. The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government also played a role in this regard to the extent that developments around the seafront and harbour usually take place in close collaboration with the local authority and the Department has an influence on getting this right.

The major problems facing the town which are, as I stated, symptomatic of those one sees elsewhere are evident in a number of areas. I will, first, address the town's position as a key route into the country for passengers. Stena Line is trying to get rid of its remaining permanent staff in Dún Laoghaire. It first reduced its twice daily ferry service from the harbour to one sailing and in recent weeks announced it will reduce its year-round service to a seasonal service

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which will only run for six months of the year. Consequently, the company's remaining permanent employees were informed in the past week or two that their jobs were to go. While the job losses remain subject to negotiation, management has thrown down the gauntlet. This development is a disaster for the town and will have a knock-on effect on the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company and its staff. As the ferry service has been run down, major pressure has been applied to the workforce in the harbour. For example, there have been five compulsory redundancies of harbour policemen and the company is seeking further redundancies, pay cuts and so forth. Workers in the company believe their jobs are under serious threat.

These developments are of major significance in several respects. First, the workers in question want to keep their jobs and do not want to be thrown on the dole. They will also have a significance, however, in terms of the harbour as an amenity and maintaining it as a working harbour and key route into the country and everything that goes with that role. The reduction in the number of harbour policemen diminishes the harbour as a public amenity. In recent years harbour policemen have saved a number of lives. Sadly, one of the less positive features of Dún Laoghaire Harbour is that occasionally people seeking to take their own lives have attempted to drive over or jump off its piers. On a number of occasions harbour policemen who were present acted quickly and conscientiously by jumping into the sea to save lives. More generally, they provide security for the thousands of walkers who traverse the harbour daily. When harbour policemen jobs are lost, the workers who want to work go on social welfare, creating costs for the State, and the harbour as an amenity is diminished.

If one goes back a little further, people who did simple things such as supervise the public toilets in the harbour also lost their jobs. All of the harbour's public toilets have been shut down. It is a major sore point for users of the pier, particularly those with children, that they do not have access to such a basic amenity as a public toilet. It is not available because the harbour company places great emphasis on cost-cutting at the expense of public amenities. One hears visitors say they will not walk the length of the pier because toilet facilities are not available or they will not return to the town because of the lack of litter bins on the seafront.

One plank of the Government's tourism development strategy is to drive down costs for tourists. It must be careful that by its actions we do not cut off our nose to spite our face. It would be a major mistake to cut the jobs and services provided by front-line tourism and amenity workers, including those employed in physically bringing visitors to the country, namely, Stena Line workers. To do so would diminish the tourism attractiveness and capacity of Dún Laoghaire which should be a jewel in the crown of Irish tourism. As a key entry point to the State, we should invest in and develop the town and secure jobs and services in the harbour. We appear, however, to be moving in the opposite direction.

Stena Line is engaging in an alarming Irish Ferries-type manoeuvre. Deputies will recall the famous Irish Ferries incident to which I refer. Stena Line, possibly in collusion with the harbour company, appears to be deliberately running down the ferry routes into Dún Laoghaire to put pressure on the workforce. By moving its service to Dublin Port, it intends to get rid of its workforce and, essentially, casualise it. It will then bring back in poorly paid workers and rebuild the route further down the road, with the loss of vital community jobs and many people ending up on social welfare. If a company replaces loyal workers who have been there for years in well paid jobs, it affects the money that is spent in the town and creates a workforce that is casualised and has less loyalty to the amenity and to the job they are doing, which does not help to make the place more attractive; it makes it worse. I appeal to the Government, even at that level, to say that Dún Laoghaire Port should remain, as it always has been, a key route into this country. It should put pressure on Stena to maintain its routes into Dún Laoghaire

and on the harbour company not to run down the vital front-line workforce that makes Dún Laoghaire Harbour and port and the surrounding amenity what it is.

That is one side of the equation. The other side consists of stuff we really see too much of. The authorities presiding over this, while imposing cuts on front-line workers in the harbour, do not seem to be imposing the same cuts on themselves. They seem to be wasting money on themselves, on consultants and on frankly ridiculous plans that contribute nothing to developing the harbour and seafront in a way that would enhance Dún Laoghaire town as a tourist attraction. Currently, Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company is losing approximately €10,000 per week. The Deputies will have to check these figures, but this is what I understand. How much is it spending on consultants? Approximately €10,000 per week — a figure that has gone up significantly over recent years. In 2007, consultancy fees were €296,000 per year. I have an estimate for the amount spent in 2009 on consultancy fees, revenue development funds, service management fees, exceptional costs and so on — which will need to be verified because it is difficult these days to get accurate figures from the harbour company which talks about things like commercial sensitivity — of €480,000. At the same time, the company is slashing the jobs of the people who do the work in the port. I might add that the CEO of the harbour company is, in my opinion — although I cannot get accurate figures for this either — very well paid indeed, probably earning between €130,000 and €160,000 per year.

Here is another interesting fact. One of the board members of Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company is a man called Mr. Gerry Nagle. Like all the board directors, he receives fees, which currently run at about €13,000 per year, for going to eight board meetings per year. In the last couple of years, however, Mr. Nagle has moved to Dubai. As a result, he has to be flown by the harbour board from Dubai to Ireland eight times a year, with his flights and overnight expenses paid for, to attend these meetings. This is extraordinary, particularly given the serious trouble the harbour company is in. I believe he is a former CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi. What the hell are we doing using public money to pay for flights from Dubai for a guy who attends meetings eight times a year when, at the same time, harbour workers, who provide the real services and contribute to the amenity value of Dún Laoghaire Harbour, are having their wages slashed? At the moment the company is seeking pay cuts of between 20% and 40% from the workforce. These are workers who have already been hit with the universal social charge and have, as a result, lost about €200 per month from their earnings. Now the company wants more, while consultants are being paid fortunes and board members are being flown in from Dubai. It is frankly outrageous. I appeal to the Government to take a serious look at this.

What these consultants seem to be paid to do is to come up with plans and visions. We have had a lot of plans and visions for Dún Laoghaire over the last few years, and I find them interesting. They are all very expensive, and most of them come to nothing. We have had plans and visions aplenty, for example, for the site of Dún Laoghaire Baths, which sits right beside Dún Laoghaire Harbour and has been derelict for the last 20 years. The baths used to be a major tourist attraction and people from all over Dublin used to come and swim there. The local community used to think of it as the best babysitter that Dún Laoghaire ever had — a place to bring one's children. It has sat there derelict for 20 years, but we have paid consultants a lot of money to come up with crazy plans for high-rise apartment blocks and so on. At one stage, there was a proposal for a 19-storey office block on the site of the sea front. Local residents resisted this fiercely with huge demonstrations and, thankfully, prevented it. In doing so, they did not just protect a vital sea-front amenity but, in the context of NAMA and the number of empty developments all over the country, probably saved the taxpayer in the region of half a billion euro.

This was followed by a proposal for a ten-storey apartment block on the Carlisle Pier. For people who do not know what the Carlisle Pier is, it is the site of the greatest emigration from

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this country by the Irish diaspora, the place where King George V arrived in Ireland in 1911 and where James Connolly organised a protest against this visit. Whatever side one takes politically, that is a historic moment that still has not been commemorated. The diaspora, one of the most important features of Irish history, and all the things that went on at that vital entry and exit point are not commemorated. Plans were drawn up, if one can believe it, to put a ten-storey apartment block on the pier, but they were resisted and defeated by the people. However, even now, after all the madness and chaos of the property bubble, the harbour company has come up with a new plan which includes putting 300 apartments in Dún Laoghaire Harbour. Are these people insane? We do not need any more apartments anywhere — certainly not in Dún Laoghaire nor arguably anywhere in the country. The people who have come up with this madness are being paid with public money. I am glad to say that as a result of public pressure a diaspora museum has been included in the plan. The Government should tell the harbour company we will have the diaspora museum but we do not need the 300 apartments. For God's sake, we will ruin the harbour as a public amenity.

Here is something else to do with the local authority. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council has agreed a capital budget with its major item of expenditure being €35 million for a plan to put a new library administrative headquarters in a beautiful green area just beside Dún Laoghaire Harbour called Moran Park. It contains a bowling green and the harbourmaster's lodge, which is a protected building and is connected to the harbour and its historical heritage. There is a reservoir at the back which is now badly run down but used to pump water into ships, including mailboats, that docked at Carlisle Pier. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council wants to spend €35 million putting a big symmetrical library administrative headquarters on this site. At the same time, Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company has an empty building of six or seven storeys beside Dún Laoghaire County Council. Part of the library service is already situated in the top floor of that building in Harbour Court, which is known as Building No. 2. The rest of the building, which is in public ownership, is empty and it would cost nothing to install a library administrative headquarters there. We would not then have to spend €35 million to construct a building no one asked for, on a site of historical and heritage importance and one of the last remaining green areas on the seafront in Dún Laoghaire. If we were to do that we would have €35 million to spend on something else, for example, on what people have repeatedly asked for, namely, that Dún Laoghaire Baths be restored as a public swimming amenity. That would cost a fraction of €35 million, perhaps €10 million. It would fit in with the heritage element and is precisely the sort of item that attracts people to Dún Laoghaire. It would be an enormous boost to the town at a cost of €10 million.

We could invest the rest of the €35 million in the diaspora museum people have asked to be situated on the Carlisle Pier. There have even been suggestions of a planetarium and a maritime institute or museum in Dún Laoghaire Harbour. Would that not be a good idea and make for a tourist attraction? We do not have a planetarium in this country and it would link in with the maritime history and heritage of the area. I used to go to the planetarium in London and absolutely loved it. There used to be a small one in Schull which, sadly, has gone. Would a planetarium in Dún Laoghaire not be a good idea? It would create jobs, bring tourism and be an attraction we could sell on the international stage rather than have 300 apartments, or a library administrative building which is not needed because there are already many empty buildings nearby in public ownership. I simply do not understand this and I appeal to the Minister of State on this point. The proposal of the Minister, Deputy Deenihan, to take the Bank of Ireland site in College Green from the bank and develop it as a heritage site is a brilliant idea. Can we not apply that sort of imaginative thinking to places such as Dún Laoghaire and repeat it elsewhere?

I am not qualified to speak about fishing, but anyone connected with fishing ports around the country would say that the diminution of our fishing industry is a blow not only to the people who work in the industry but also hits at the unique character and heritage of this country. That is what attracts people to come here. They do not come for the weather but rather because of our history, heritage and landscape, the sense of community and so on. Such communities are destroyed when small fishing industries, working harbours and places such as Dún Laoghaire Baths are closed and replaced with bloody apartment blocks or buildings no one asked for. That is the sort of imaginative thinking we need.

The Acting Chairman might tell me how much time I have remaining.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): The Deputy has two minutes but he does not have to use them.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I might as well use all my time. The issue of rates for small businesses and parking charges has recently been discussed by some of the Government and other Opposition Deputies. It is a larger issue and although it does not solely concern tourism, it impacts significantly on that industry. Dún Laoghaire has great potential as a small port-side town but its small businesses have been massacred by the imposition of parking charges and excessive rates. We have lost approximately 70 small business in recent years. All of the local businesses and the local population have asked repeatedly whether the parking charge of €2 per hour can be reduced. There is free parking in Dundrum Shopping Centre. This sucks trade out of the town and turns it into a ghost town. I strongly appeal to the county management to reduce parking charges to €1. Can we come up with a progressive rates scheme that would give a break to small and medium-sized business? Banks and big chain stores such as Tesco could afford to pay more. This would offer a break to small businesses and traders, precisely those elements which give character to heritage towns and make people want to visit places such as Dún Laoghaire.

I ask the Minister to examine the Stena Line issue and not permit the company to act towards its workers in the manner Irish Ferries did, thereby running down this historic port. He should insist that the harbour company and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council listen to the people of the area and that they take a sensible approach and focus on developing the heritage, keeping the jobs and making the most of the potential of the area rather than on what seem to be politically driven plans or a hangover from the property bubble. He should listen to the residents and small businesses which have the ideas and the imagination about how we might develop a place like Dún Laoghaire. He could then replicate that approach throughout the country and develop the jobs and tourism potential we know the country has.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): I call Deputy John O'Mahony, who I understand is sharing time.

Deputy John O'Mahony: I am sharing time with Deputy Bannon.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): There are ten minutes.

Deputy John O'Mahony: I am glad of the opportunity to contribute to the debate on tourism and to support the Minister of State and Government policy in the efforts to promote and exploit the potential of tourism which can bring major revenue into the country. I congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, on his efforts since he took over. This is my first opportunity to do so publicly in the House. I have seen him on local media, on skateboards, surfboards, bicycles and all the rest of it. At one stage there was a good sum of money on the Minister of State to win Gaelforce in his native town. I wish him well in his efforts.

[Deputy John O'Mahony.]

On a more serious note, I do not believe it is possible to overestimate the importance of tourism to this country, especially at present and into the future. All the evidence backs the rationale for continued investment. Given this background, it is imperative that we continue to provide the resources to tourism bodies like Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to develop and maximise the immense potential for tourism growth in our country.

We are also aware of our competitors who are investing major resources. In Scotland, for example, the Highland and Islands Enterprise agency is investing £22 million annually on tourism in addition to the £52 million grant provided by the Visit Scotland agency. The challenge exists and on our part it is to ensure our spend is effective, gives us value for money and exploits the potential of all the regions throughout our island — north, south, east and west.

As a representative of the west, the constituency of Mayo, I am acutely aware of the vast potential the whole region has to provide the ideal destination for tourists. The attractions are there: blue flag beaches, watersports and fishing. Ballina is the salmon capital of Ireland. There is beautiful scenery and there are facilities to match. There are hotels and leisure centres, adventure centres, golf courses, and pilgrimage centres such as Croagh Patrick and Knock. The challenge for Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland is to work closely with and engage with the various tourism interests in the region to tap into the potential that exists. Although much good work is going on, we are still only scratching the surface if we continue the 2011 trend of increasing numbers. This came as a result of measures taken earlier this year by this Government to incentivise the tourism sector by reducing VAT to a range of labour-intensive tourism services and introducing the tourist waiver visa to which the Minister of State alluded.

I welcome the decision of the Minister of State to devote a significant proportion of the revenues taken in from the €3 travel tax that still remains to support inbound tourism. This support will create a fund of €8.5 million which can be used for co-operative marketing with airlines, airports, ferry companies and tour operators in respect of inbound routes into Ireland, with particular focus on the UK, Europe and the US.

In that context, Ireland West Airport Knock is a crucial point of access for County Mayo and the west and north-west regions. On a recent visit to the airport the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, and the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Varadkar, witnessed, at first hand, the continuing efforts to bringing more tourists to County Mayo and the surrounding region. Ireland West Airport Knock will service ten different UK destinations this year and has the potential to attract 270,000 tourists into the region. This can support 1,000 jobs, create 1.2 million bed nights and generate over €85 million in tourism spending. Research carried out by Ireland West Airport Knock suggests that current promotions in the UK by the tourism bodies are not having a sufficient impact on realising this potential. In a recent survey it was discovered that 89% of visitors from the UK are coming here because they already know the region well because of contact with friends and relatives. None of the respondents to the survey indicated they had been motivated to travel there as a result of the promotion of the region. Greater investment in promoting and marketing of the region could have significant benefits both in terms of tourism revenue and job creation. I accept that the authorities in the region must be involved but our focus must be to target our marketing campaigns in a better way.

I was glad that, during his visit, the Minister praised the management and staff for the cost-effective and efficient manner in which the airport is being run and said that many lessons could be learned by our State airports from the lead given by Ireland West Airport Knock. While at the airport, the Minister launched a new service between Knock and Dusseldorf. This service which is due to commence next year, will be provided by Lufthansa, the fourth largest airline in the world. It will facilitate the west in tapping into a new market for tourists, which

already shows a growth of 15.3% between January and June of this year. Germany has long been identified as a key market for Ireland and the service to which I refer will be of assistance in exploiting that market. I appeal to the tourism agencies to work with Ireland West Airport Knock in order to help it in delivering tourists to the region in the coming months and years. This will ensure that tourism numbers will continue to increase.

Since it was established in 2003, Fáilte Ireland has also played a key role in the industry. However, it must also continue to develop, adapt and change to meet the needs of 2011. These needs are different to those which obtained in the 1990s. A range of facilities — natural and man-made — have been developed in the intervening years. Chambers of commerce, local authorities and other tourism interests are seeking to sell their regions, facilities and advantages to the market. Fáilte Ireland must engage with, guide and work with these entities in order that they might develop the potential of their areas. A key role of Fáilte Ireland is to work in partnership with the industry and with other State bodies and act as a catalyst in the sector. I know this is happening to a certain extent but there is a need for the agency to intensify and focus its efforts.

I have a Discover Ireland brochure launched by the Minister earlier in the year. The brochure includes a map of the western region but the fourth largest town in County Mayo, namely, Claremorris, is not shown. This is the despite the fact Claremorris is located a few minutes away from numerous tourist attractions and facilities, including a railway station, an international airport, Knock shrine, greenways, walkways etc.

Last weekend I travelled to Dublin for the All-Ireland football final. I congratulate my friend, Pat Gilroy, and the Dublin team on their tremendous success and commiserate with the men of Kerry. I suppose the latter will undoubtedly return to haunt us all again. On Sunday it was interesting that messages from people all over the world were read out on radio and television. The individuals who sent them indicated where they are residing at present and also where they were watching the match. I agree with Deputy McLennan who referred to our heritage, culture and human resources. Why can Tourism Ireland or Fáilte Ireland not work closely with sporting organisations, particularly those which run golf and Gaelic games? I understand that during the summer capacity crowds were only achieved at three or four matches. Would it not be possible to develop packages with hotels in towns and cities which would also include match tickets? Those tickets could be provided at a reduced price and this would not cost the GAA or other sporting organisations anything because the attendance at matches or events would increase. Packages such as those to which I refer would guide people in the direction of music or sporting events, for example, and this would allow them to participate and experience our unique cultural identity and Irishness. They might also encourage many of the thousands of those who, unfortunately, may have been obliged to emigrate in the short term to return to their home country for a visit.

Deputy James Bannon: I compliment the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, on doing a very fine job. I congratulate him on the fresh approach he has taken in respect of the tourism product. I would expect nothing less of a man who comes from one of the honey pots of Ireland, namely, Westport, County Mayo. I have great respect for the Minister of State and I have no doubt he will leave his mark on the development of tourism during his term of office.

In these times of economic constraint and restraint, the Bill, which relates to the very important area of tourism and which seeks to increase the level of funding for the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland, is welcome. Given that Longford is described as a tourism black-spot with Westmeath not far behind, I have a vested interested in the Bill. I am optimistic that funding will be made available to the midlands, despite or rather because of the neglect the region has endured in recent years. The infrastructural deficits relating to

[Deputy James Bannon.]

roads, broadband, substandard sewerage schemes which have impacted adversely on the tourism potential of the midlands have been well recorded by me and other Members. In that context, I will not rehearse them now. However, these deficits must not be overlooked and the rot of underfunding and withdrawal of essential services must be halted.

From the departure tax to various other stealth taxes, the previous Government brought the tourism industry to its knees. The Bill before us brings hope of growth at a time when tourism figures are indicative of international confidence in our country, although it could be said that it is merely paying lip service. Members are aware that the Bill is a purely an enabling provision and that funding is totally budget-driven. Tourism is particularly important to our economy, particularly as it attracts both domestic and foreign revenue and is a key employment sector. In 2009, some 190,000 people were employed in the tourism area and this figure can rise as our input into the sector increases.

One need only consider the investment other northern European countries, including our near neighbours in Northern Ireland, have made in tourism industry projects to realise the obvious fact of input equating to output holds particularly strongly in respect of this sector. Since the heyday of the 1990s, levels of competitiveness and innovation in Ireland have decreased dramatically. Tourism in Ireland is an area of huge potential but it cannot survive and prosper without Government input and funding. Failure to offer a helping hand in this regard would be self-defeating and counterproductive. The helping hand to which I refer could be extended to older UK citizens who have free travel but who cannot avail of it in this country. When one sees trains and buses, often half empty, crisscrossing the countryside, it seems obvious we should attract this valuable group of tourists. As the number of visitors from the UK continues to fall, any initiative that targets older visitors would be beneficial, particularly outside the main season — the traditional high season in our hotels. The level of funding given to Fáilte Ireland for supporting capital expenditure projects, as proposed in the amendment to the National Development Authority Act 2003, will increase from €65 million to €150 million. Such remedial action is necessary because tourism numbers, which peaked at 7.7 million in 2007, decreased to 5.8 million in 2010. There was a marked decline in visitors from Britain, mainland Europe and North America. In tandem with this decrease, foreign exchange earnings declined to €3.4 billion in 2010 from a high of €4.9 billion in 2007.

We need to take a fresh look at the structures that are in place to promote tourism. I have said repeatedly that we need to make changes to the regional tourism boards, which have outlived their usefulness. Aside from central government, there is an overriding need for local authorities to come together at regional level to maximise the tourism potential and opportunities of the regions. This was done in the midlands when a new brand, *midlandsireland.ie*, was launched. The goal of this initiative is to develop and market a unique image for the midlands and encourage investment and economic activity. The profile of rural communities will be strengthened in tandem with urban centres to highlight the unique nature of these areas as a cohesive whole, while recognising the individual characteristics of Counties Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly. These counties, which are in the heart of Ireland, could become viable centres of a dynamic tourist sector in tandem with industrial, academic and infrastructural advancement.

We need to examine how personnel are trained in this country. Many visitors to this country say that the tourism offices gave them information and brochures, but that needs to be followed up on. Tourism personnel need to be trained to answer queries and to be familiar with the areas in which they operate. This is essential if tourism is to be promoted. The staff employed in tourism offices should have a friendly disposition. It is very important to give tourists a good

impression and a warm feeling for the country. The value of any country is its people. It is important to have the right people who can promote and develop the tourism industry properly.

The natural profile of the midlands area that gives it its unique beauty and tourist appeal — its lakes, canals and boglands — has been dismissed for too long. These features are now at the centre of the tourist experience. Highlights of pre-Celtic, Bronze Age and medieval Ireland are to be found in the midlands and must be promoted. The reopening of stretches of the Royal Canal has been a huge tourism success for counties Longford, Westmeath and all others from Dublin through the midlands. It is very important for the Minister to put in place a marketing and promotion plan for this unique development, which cost the State a great deal of money during the Celtic tiger years.

The Government needs to have a proactive approach to the development of tourism in the midlands. It is heartbreaking that at the height of the tourism industry in 2007, Longford was excluded from the mid-Shannon area tourism tax incentive scheme, although Westmeath did benefit. Although tourism had the potential to be a major part of Longford's economic development, with the River Shannon being a particularly valuable tourist amenity, the Government of the day decided it was economically sound to omit Longford from this exciting and valuable tourism scheme. I am hopeful that under the new Government, Longford and the midlands will be given the recognition and funding they deserve. Longford and the River Shannon go hand in hand. If we enhance the parts of the river within its boundaries, we will increase the tourism potential of counties Longford and Westmeath. We have seen the benefits of the extension of the Royal Canal into Clondra. It is essential that it be extended as far as Longford town harbour for the benefit of tourism in County Longford.

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

Deputy James Bannon: I am almost finished. Our waterways are an ongoing attraction for tourists looking for water-based activities. The tourism infrastructure of the midlands is underdeveloped to a great extent. If the midlands area is to maximise the benefit it derives from our tourism, the Government and the private sector need to engage in forward planning and make a substantial investment. The growth of, and benefits from, tourism have not been evenly spread to rural counties outside the main honey pots of Dublin and other cities. It is time for the honey to be spread more evenly. Dublin has been established as one of the major tourism city destinations in Europe. We must target the development of tourism in neglected rural areas that have much to offer Deputies.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy James Bannon: I could go on for a week but my time is up.

Deputy Robert Troy: We will not object if the Deputy continues.

Deputy Barry Cowen: He should carry on regardless.

Deputy James Bannon: I would like to apologise to my friend, the Deputy behind me——

Deputy Robert Troy: His name is Deputy Peter Mathews.

Deputy James Bannon: I was not able to provide Deputy Mathews with time this evening.

Deputy Barry Cowen: I would like to share time with Deputy Troy.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Barry Cowen: I could listen to Deputy Bannon all day. I would have had no problem allowing him to continue to sing the virtues of his county. Deputies on this side of the House welcome this Bill and have no objections to it. We acknowledge and appreciate that the original Act provided that further legislation would have to be brought before the House if the €65 million cap was reached. It is no harm. I am sure it seemed like a colossal sum of money at the time. That this Bill is required proves there has been huge investment in tourism infrastructure in recent years. It has been upgraded substantially — directly by the Government and indirectly by Government agencies including Bord Fáilte, which is now Fáilte Ireland, and local authorities throughout the country. Local authorities have worked hand in hand with local representatives, organisations and associations affiliated to the tourism industry and to those who benefit directly from the industry.

Significant sums of money have been invested in the infrastructure of regions and population centres that depend on tourism. Basic infrastructure like water, sewerage and transport facilities needed to be upgraded and put on a footing that would serve these local areas well into the future. We hoped these improvements would benefit the sector and bring more visitors into these areas. As we know, this work was aided by various schemes and forms of grant aid. Deputy Bannon mentioned many of the tax incentive-based schemes that existed in these regions. These schemes have been the subject of much derision in the past ten or 15 years, but it cannot be denied that many centres of population that depend on the tourism industry were greatly enhanced by virtue of them. The accommodation associated with these centres is now on a footing which can be sustained into the future. The facilities in the vicinity of any such developments have also been upgraded, which is to be welcomed.

Having done this, it was then incumbent on the relevant authorities to upgrade and re-engage with existing attractions which had been successful during the years. There was much investment in areas such as Clonmacnoise and Bunratty Castle which one might call the old reliables that have proved popular for many visitors from throughout the world. Such work has been welcome. Like infrastructural development, these attractions now are on a sound footing for all those associated with their promotion to attract visitors, including new ones.

In recent years and from here on, as per all of the reports commissioned by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and others, the emphasis has been and should be on improving facilities and coming forward with new ideas and suggestions for attractions which can appeal to new generations and tourists who have never come to our shores. We are thinking of green, sports and educational tourism and looking at areas in which lifestyles and standards of living have improved in the past 20 to 30 years and from which we can seek to attract visitors to our shores. The means by which we do this are most important, too.

It is my belief and, I think, that of the holders of office that we must think outside the box in terms of the old reliables, as there is now a much more sophisticated audience to attract. For examples, many Deputies have pointed to their areas. The midlands region includes the counties of Offaly, Laois, Westmeath, Roscommon, etc. Unfortunately, when one looks at their performance, it is consistently in the bottom ten, but that is not to say there is not a great deal of good work being done. It is the job of the Government to offer extra facilities and services and give attention to these areas in order to reach the level expected. As I stated, the transport system has improved considerably — road, rail and air transport. People can now get around the country much more easily and in a short space of time, which is to be welcomed. However, we must look at specific regions which are underdeveloped and offer better and more assistance to them, whether it be financial or in the form of promotion.

One new programme in my area offers mountain biking in the Slieve Bloom Mountains. This is a popular activity in Scotland and Wales which are visited by many people from here on a

regular basis. There is a group in County Offaly which received funding, initially from Fáilte Ireland, to carry out a study of how successful such a venture might be. It has proved that the group's plans are sound and that the venture can be profitable, both for the region and the country. We await the provision of further funding towards the cost of this worthwhile project. I am sure the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, has seen it on his desk and know that he will do everything possible to expedite it in order to give it the support it deserves and prove such events and programmes synonymous with an area can prove very successful for the country also. As I stated, that must be the thrust of future investment.

When looking at the regions, we must look at what a region has to offer that is distinct and what assistance the Minister can give, including capital funding towards the cost of building tracks, walkways and pathways to provide access to new attractions. Accessibility must be to the forefront of everything the Minister does. There are so many tourism groups and organisations doing all they can for their areas and it is incumbent on the Government to ensure there is synergy between them because the last thing we want is to have them all fighting their own battles and winning none. It is important that there be synergy in each region to identify and investigate new ideas to see how they can be advanced and improved upon.

We have invested heavily in the tourism sector. The Government has played its part in recent times, through the VAT reduction in the restaurant and hotel sector, which I welcomed. It has been of benefit to the sector which greatly appreciates it, as we all do. We all hope we will continue to come forward with such suggestions in order to improve the sector and, importantly, build up morale. There is some progress being made in this regard. This is imperative. I do not want to be party-political on this or any other issue in that regard because the consequences for the country are too serious to do anything else. There will be plenty of other occasions in years to come to win old battles and have slagging matches across the floor. Everything must be done to improve sectors such as this.

In recent times we have seen improvements in the agriculture industry and the synergy within all of its sectors with reference to Food Harvest 2020. We acknowledge that the Government has taken on board this document and is pursuing the input made by the previous Government. Every effort will be made by everybody concerned on the CAP proposals to ensure they will be successful and have no detrimental effect on rural areas, of which the agriculture industry is the bedrock. In these depressed times, with the aid of the Leader programme and county development organisations, etc., those involved in it have also diversified and provided extra tourism attractions to sustain the sector. This, too, must be acknowledged.

It is imperative that we get the basics right and the rest will follow. The Minister of State, Deputy Ring's heart is in the right place. He comes from a rural background in the west and is aware of the benefit of the sector to his constituency. He is also aware of the benefit of Knock airport, etc. Not only did it attract many people who had emigrated back to their locality, it also made it much easier to visit the region more often. The emphasis must now be on hitting new targets, for example, the Asian community. We must also work with the providers of education services, sports travel and a raft of other services to tap in to the tourism potential of each area.

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

Deputy Barry Cowen: I hope the next time we come back to discuss the raising of a cap the money will have been as well spent as it has been in the past. I wish the Minister of State every success.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Deputy Troy has nearly nine minutes.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Acting Chairman could have let Deputy Cowen speak for longer.

I, too, welcome the Bill. It is welcome that we are raising the cap on the sum allowed to be spent on tourism related projects, from €65 million, as set out in the National Tourism Development Act 2003, to €150 million. Tourism has a vital role to play as we try to rebuild the economy. The sector is to be acknowledged for the work it has done to date but, as I think everyone would agree, it can play a much greater role in rebuilding the economy. Deputy Cowen referred to the decrease in VAT which the new Government introduced earlier this year. That has played a role in helping the tourism sector, the hospitality sector in particular. I spoke recently to a restaurateur who suggested it had had a major impact on his business. He went on to extend the VAT decrease across every line in the business. He did not restrict it to the Government changes and he stated that it had had a positive impact on his business.

We can spend as much as we wish on tourist attractions but unless we market them well, the money is not well spent. The situation in County Westmeath at the moment is that the local authority has failed to renew the contract of the tourism officer because of the embargo on the recruitment of public sector employees. This is having a worrying effect on the tourism and hospitality sectors in County Westmeath.

Fáilte Ireland is excellent at promoting what Deputy Bannon referred to as the honey spots such as Dublin and Killarney, but one seldom sees it promoting less well-known destinations in Ireland. I wish to put on the record of the House today that those of us in County Westmeath have a great deal to offer. There are lakes in County Westmeath as well as Belvedere House gardens and park in which the local authority, Westmeath County Council, has invested a considerable amount of money since it bought it in 1982. Locke's distillery is in Kilbeggan, there are dog tracks in counties Westmeath and Longford and there is a racecourse in Kilbeggan. Ardagh in County Longford is a beautiful village which won the tidy towns competition some years ago, and the River Shannon runs by as well. These facilities are not marketed well enough. While we welcome that additional money will be spent on new tourism projects, the Minister of State should consider whether each local authority or region should have a dedicated tourism officer with sole responsibility for marketing the various attractions within his or her region. Tourist figures this year are up 300,000 on the same period last year, and this is welcome given the bad times. Nevertheless, we must market and sell ourselves better.

As Deputies are aware, tomorrow is culture night throughout Ireland. This is an ideal opportunity for us to set out our cultural institutions and venues. Let us consider the various attractions on the list for tomorrow night. I understand Leinster House will be open tomorrow night for tours on the hour. This is an opportunity for us to sell ourselves as a cultural destination. Fáilte Ireland has stated that cultural tourists spend more than ordinary tourists. It is important we sell our cultural institutions but not only in Ireland. We should begin to consider selling and marketing them more vigorously on the international stage.

Ireland is a favourite spot for Americans and the English, but we should consider emerging economies and the Far East as well. We should consider China and India and try to increase our visitor numbers from these regions. We should consider the new diaspora, those who have come from other countries and studied and received their education here, whether in Trinity College, UCD, DCU or wherever. They hold a certain loyalty to Ireland because they came here and studied for between three and seven years, depending on the course of study. They have studied here and retain a great loyalty to Ireland. We should try to tap into the resource these people represent. They have gone back to the own countries and made good there and they are keen to give something back to the country which educated them.

It boils down to having dedicated marketing officers, whether for each county or region. The national tidy towns competition plays a pivotal role, especially for small rural towns. For

example, those in Abbeyshrule, County Longford, were glad of the recognition it received this year. Deputy Bannon alluded to the opening of the Royal Canal as far as Clondra where it meets the River Shannon. This has had a major impact on small rural villages such as my village of Ballynacargy, County Westmeath. This year we saw boats coming up from the River Shannon. Some people might ask what the big deal is about it, but the canal was closed for the best part of 30 years and no boats came up, so it is a big deal and it has created a great atmosphere to see them coming from the River Shannon this year. Some ten years ago the boats came from Dublin when the canal was being renovated and upgraded. It is a considerable tourist attraction and a good deal of money was spent on the Royal Canal by the previous Government. A great deal of work has been done by the Royal Canal Amenity Group as well. Many people have given of their time and effort voluntarily to ensure the canal remains open despite the proposal some years ago to close it in and make a roadway out of it. That would have been disappointing, but it did not happen. It is a welcome addition to the towns and villages through which it flows.

I welcome the Bill. Anything which invests money in the tourism industry is welcome. The Minister of State should take on board the need to have marketing officers for the various counties or regions, even if a cap on staff numbers is in place. I call on the Minister of State to consider the position in County Westmeath where we are losing our tourism officer. I took a holiday this year in County Mayo and it was very welcoming.

Deputy Michael Ring: Good man.

Deputy Robert Troy: The Minister of State was on the radio on the day we were driving down to County Mayo and he was extolling the great things it had to offer. It was very enjoyable. We should be marketing within our own country as well.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: I congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, on his elevation to his current post. I have always thought of him as one of the most distinctive and compelling voices of the Dáil. The core purpose of the legislation being debated today is to allow the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to increase the level of funding that can be made available to Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism development authority, for the purpose of supporting enterprises and projects relating to the development of tourism facilities in the country. I welcome this legislation and I commend the Minister and the Government on the steps they have taken already in promoting the tourism industry.

Speakers have referred to how tourism is vital to the economy and how it has been identified by the Government as a key industry in leading our national recovery. Tourism is one of the strongest indigenous industries. The jobs created and supported by tourism cannot be transferred out of Ireland. It is not multinational in its character, nor is it geographically specific. Urban and more remote areas alike can benefit from tourism. Often it is the more remote areas, those bypassed by industrial and commercial development and therefore remaining unspoiled, that have the greatest natural charm, draw and beauty to offer to our visitors.

The value of tourism to our economy can be easily demonstrated. Tourism attracts both foreign and domestic revenue. It is an important employer with 180,000 people employed in the sector. Many of these jobs are in geographically remote areas, for example, along the western seaboard, and are vital to the local economies. Tourism is also a very important source of tax revenue. In 2007, tourism contributed almost €3 billion to the Exchequer, but unfortunately this dropped to €1.3 billion in 2009. Ireland experienced unprecedented tourism growth in the 1990s but since 2008 the industry has been in decline, with visitor numbers, total tourism revenue, Government revenue and employment numbers all falling. The total number of overseas visitors peaked at 7.7 million in 2007 but declined year-on-year to reach 5.8 million in

[Deputy Michael Conaghan.]

2010. Visitor numbers from each of the three largest markets — Britain, mainland Europe and North America — have also declined year-on-year since 2007. As I mentioned, the tax take from tourism has dropped by nearly two thirds over the same period.

On the reasons for our decline, the period of economic growth which saw our economy grow and allowed us to invest significantly in our tourism infrastructure had the knock-on effect of raising prices and damaging Ireland's competitiveness. For example, a survey conducted by Fáilte Ireland showed that while in 2000 some 68% of visitors felt that Ireland offered "very good" or '"good" value for money, this figure had fallen to just 28% in 2009. In addition to the competitiveness issue, the Tourism Action Plan Implementation Group identified in 2006 a concern that Ireland's tourism product had become somewhat "tired" and lacking in "bounce" and "verve" for many tourists. Some of the existing facilities do not seem to provide a compelling reason for visitors to come to Ireland. This weakness is borne out by the fact that, in 2009, 40% of visitors to Ireland thought the overall experience was either "poor" or "very poor".

The value and significance of tourism to Irish jobs and the economy is huge, and the recent decline is therefore of major concern. The Government has identified the tourism industry as one which can lead in Ireland's economic renewal, and I welcome the work that has been done to date. The programme for Government makes a clear commitment to improving Ireland's tourism product and outlines measures which can boost visitor numbers from key markets. Recovery of our share of the British market has been identified as a key priority and marketing strategies are being developed for emerging long-haul markets.

The jobs initiative unveiled in May of this year further shows the Government's commitment to boosting tourism. The cut in the VAT rate on services relating to tourism from 13.5% to 9% will help with competitiveness in the industry and create jobs. I commend the Minister, Deputy Varadkar, on his willingness to drop the €3 travel tax, coupled with his refusal to be held to ransom by the airlines. The removal of this tax will benefit the travel industry and has the potential to increase tourist traffic into Ireland, but this must be met and matched by the airlines, which must play their part in opening and re-opening routes which will bring tourists to our shores.

There is a continuing and strong rationale for making more funds available, as per this Bill, for further investment in our tourism industry. The World Tourism Organisation is forecasting that, globally, tourism will increase and has great potential for future growth. For example, travel to Northern Europe is forecast to grow by an average of 3.8% per annum. Tourism is a competitive industry and we must not rest on our laurels. Competitor destinations, particularly in northern Europe, are investing substantial sums of public money in tourism. For example, the Highland and Islands Enterprise agency in Scotland spends up to €22 million annually on tourism, in addition to €52 million spent yearly to support the Visit Scotland agency.

There is no doubting the rationale behind continuing to invest in tourism, and for that reason this Bill is very welcome. However, it is essential that we invest wisely to maximise the benefit to our economy, and we must take on board the recommendations of Fáilte Ireland and other expert bodies. For too long, tourism policy has been accommodation-led and based on an attitude of "build the hotels and the tourists will come". Indeed, the culture of cosy relationships between policy makers and property developers led to lax regulation and a subsequent saturation of the market. The drop in tourist numbers means that many hotels now stand empty for months each year and many are struggling to keep their doors open. There has been a growing realisation that, in a competitive market, hotels alone cannot attract tourists to Ireland.

It is worth noting that many of our competitors are investing in signature capital projects, iconic attractions which can offer a compelling reason for visitors to choose the destination. For example, in Northern Ireland huge investment is currently being made in two major symbolic attractions — the Giant's Causeway visitor centre and the Titanic quarter development. In 2007, the tourism product development strategy published by Fáilte Ireland recognised that Irish tourism was at a critical point. After an audit of all tourist attractions, events and activities, the strategy concluded that less support should be provided for accommodation and more investment should be made in tourism products and events that will attract visitors and provide a stimulating and rewarding experience for customers. More recent strategy documents have stated that the stock of attractions needs to be maintained and enhanced, and that progress is necessary in developing a select number of new attractions, as well as upgrading some major attractions.

In my constituency, I have seen the value and success of amenity and attraction-led tourism. Through the development of three major tourist attractions, the Kilmainham-Inchicore area has become a major focus for tourism in Dublin. Last year, as many as 100,000 people visited the Kilmainham-Inchicore area, mainly to see these three big attractions — Kilmainham Gaol, the Royal Hospital and the Irish National War Memorial Park.

Some 40 years ago, visitors to the Kilmainham-Inchicore area were rare. Kilmainham Gaol was almost in ruins 60 years ago. Local people took the lead. They brought out their ladders and tools and commenced a campaign for restoration and recognition. They were joined by community leaders and the actions and passion of the community forced the OPW and the Government of the day into saving this local icon. It is impossible now to imagine Dublin's historic landscape without it. The same story was played out with the Royal Hospital and the memorial park. We remember when cows grazed in the ruins of the Royal Hospital and youths and young men rallied cars across the lawns of the memorial park. However, agitation from local people convinced of the authentic nature of these attractions fought to have them conserved, and they have proved a great success.

In addition to existing major attractions in the Kilmainham-Inchicore area, there are a number of other features in the district which have huge potential to drive tourism in the area, if properly developed. The Kilmainham-Inchicore area has the potential to be a real cultural tourism quarter in this city, something now recognised by Dublin City Council in its most recent development plan. Alongside the gaol, the Royal Hospital and the memorial park, I would like to refer to three additional sites in the Kilmainham-Inchicore district that have massive cultural tourism potential.

One of these, the old St. Michael's CBS, now vacant, was once part of Richmond Barracks in Inchicore and was the scene of some of the pivotal events of the 1916 Rising. It was here that the penultimate act of the rebellion played out, where the leaders of the Rising were brought, held, screened, court martialled, sentenced to death and then marched down Emmet Road to Kilmainham Gaol. It was here that Pearse and the other leaders met their fate. I would like to see this important historical site reinvigorated and restored in time for the centenary of the 1916 Rising. Indeed, the local heritage group has submitted a plan to Government for the reinvigoration of this old barracks building and has received quite a positive reply.

I now turn to the two other projects in the Kilmainham-Inchicore area, which relate to our industrial heritage. One of the greatest advantages Ireland has in attracting tourists is the rich heritage we have on this island. Ireland is rightly renowned for its cultural heritage, music, literary tradition and the arts in general. One aspect of our heritage is consistently overlooked, however, namely, the field of human endeavour that is our industrial heritage. Although we have the raw material in the form of the historic legacy, unlike in many other countries this

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key part of our material culture is neglected in Ireland. Action must be taken to recognise and celebrate great moments of inventiveness and genius in Ireland's industrial activity. For example, the harnessing of the force of flowing water to drive the production process was best mastered in the Kilmainham-Inchicore area in the valley of the Camac. As for the harnessing of steam to drive the great locomotives, the city's key legacy from the industrial revolution is the Inchicore railway works. In particular, the mill in Kilmainham is one of Ireland's most important industrial sites and is the last and best preserved example of the innovation of this period. It has been identified by the leading industrial archaeologist in Ireland as potentially the third leg of a significant cultural tourism cluster together with the Royal Hospital Kilmainham and Kilmainham Gaol.

Other countries do not abandon the celebration of their industrial past so easily. For example, I have visited an old industrial works in Brisbane, Australia, where visitors young and old learned and marvelled at their industrial tradition. Incidentally, when some of the old men there asked me where I was from, I replied I was Irish. They then speculated that I probably knew of the Inchicore railway works because they knew where the great railway works of Europe had been. These men had worked in the railway works and had been brought back there by the local tourism body to demonstrate to children, adults and visitors how pieces of ore resembling stone could be transformed into metal. Children queued and watched in awe as these men demonstrated their craft. At the same location, people could take simulated trips in old steam trains. They could inspect the great craft that went into the making of such giant features of the industrial revolution. I also have visited the old industrial city of Porto in northern Portugal, which recognises fully its industrial past. The built fabric of this old industrial town, which is home of the port industry and many amazing examples of transport history, is now protected as a UNESCO world heritage site. Porto, which was not a typical tourist destination, now draws thousands of visitors to see the authentic legacy the city bequeathed to the world and which is protected by UNESCO.

In Ireland, however, our monuments to the industrial revolution like the Inchicore railway works lie neglected. A previous speaker mentioned the old Locke's distillery, which constitutes a good example of the conservation and retention of our industrial heritage. The discerning cultural tourist has an interest in all fields of human endeavour. Industrial attractions such as the sites to which I referred have an authentic tourism value, as evidenced by the experience of the aforementioned two overseas locations. This glaring deficit must be recognised and Ireland's great industrial heritage must be invoked, safeguarded and celebrated. Moreover, select pieces therefrom must be retained in tangible forms because, by so doing, the great work and craft of ordinary people will be celebrated, as will that of those inventors and engineers who were part of this great endeavour. I intend to write to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and ask them to consider the idea of commemorating our industrial heritage through developing an industrial heritage facility in the Inchicore-Kilmainham district. I firmly believe this would be a great attraction which would add unique value to the Irish tourism product.

Dublin City Council's development plan for 2011 to 2017 envisages the creation of an urban cultural tourism quarter in the Kilmainham-Inchicore area. The combination of the aforementioned attractions, including both those currently in operation and those in desperate need of restoration before they are lost, will result in this area having the city of Dublin's largest and most diverse cluster of archaeological, architectural, political, cultural, ecclesiastical and social heritage sites. This has been recognised in the city development plan and is one of the plan's objectives. Furthermore, the development of this district as a hub of cultural tourism fulfils all the criteria for the sensible development of our tourism industry. It is in exact alignment with

the reports' findings on authentic products that have a universal appeal and real, as opposed to concocted, character. Fáilte Ireland has clearly outlined the need to focus our tourism efforts on attractions that will increase tourist traffic and stimulate the industry. This can be done by opening up this previously untapped aspect of our material heritage. This Bill will allow for significant future investment in tourism which, if deployed prudently, can help the industry play its part in Ireland's economic renewal. I commend it to the House.

I will take another minute, if I may. I have rarely spoken in the Chamber, although I often speak in committees and elsewhere. I wish to thank those who have supported me in local elections for the past 25 years in Ballyfermot, Inchicore, Kilmainham and Chapelizod, as well as the people of Dublin South-Central, who sent me to the Dáil this time. I also invoke the name of the late Jim Kemmy, the Limerick socialist who was a close friend and who was the main influence on my entry into electoral politics.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Was that the Deputy's maiden speech?

Deputy Michael Conaghan: Perhaps.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): I understand it was and I congratulate him.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for the opportunity to speak on this new legislation. Before going into details, I also congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, on his promotion and wish him well and the best of luck when dealing with the issues relating to his important portfolio. I welcome both the National Tourism Development Authority (Amendment) Bill 2011 and, in particular, the broader debate on tourism and its considerable potential for development as a job creation strategy. Members must be more creative in respect of its two major aspects, however, namely, local home tourism and international visitors. In addition, the arts should be included as an important aspect of this debate. That sector constitutes a major resource on the international stage and the image of Ireland is highly positive in this regard. This area must be developed and the relevant audience targeted. In addition, the local population must be encouraged to support their neighbours and friends who are directly involved in the tourism industry, by which I mean restaurants, public houses, bed and breakfasts and small hotels. It is particularly important that as legislators and people who are in the public eye, Members commend and work hard to support the people who are directly involved in the tourism industry.

I holidayed at home this year in counties Wicklow and Kerry. I was again reminded at first hand of our country's beauty with its beautiful mountains, rivers, lakes and beaches. While we never will have the fantastic weather enjoyed elsewhere in Europe, this means we must develop alternative types of holidays. We also must monitor our cost base to avoid frightening off potential visitors. At the same time, quality and standards must be our focus to ensure that on visitors' return home, they tell other potential customers. Moreover, good manners and respect also are issues that must be discussed, and during the so-called Celtic tiger years, the great historical personal touch possessed by many Irish people may have been lost. During the Celtic tiger years, we went through a phase of being highly self-centred and, at times, not particularly nice to visitors.

The primary purpose of the Bill is to provide the statutory basis to allow the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, to increase the aggregate level of advances that may be made to the National Tourism Development Authority out of the capital moneys provided by the Oireachtas for the purpose of supporting enterprises and projects related to the development of tourist traffic and the development of tourist facilities and services. In this regard, I welcome the plan to support enterprises and projects relating

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to tourist traffic. However, a common-sense approach is also required with a focus, as I noted earlier, on a quality service and job creation. On foot of the changes in the market economy and the advent of mass unemployment, this must be at the top of the tourism agenda. Only yesterday, I disagreed strongly with the Government decision regarding the development of the casino in County Tipperary.

If people have ideas to create jobs, we should take them seriously. People who attack those who want to gamble a few bob on a horse or showjumping event are out of touch with the vast majority of those who want to participate in such pastimes.

I congratulate the Dublin team, in particular Pat Gilroy. I was in St. Vincent's GAA club with the Sam Maguire and it was a fantastic night. There was a great celebration attended by hundreds of people. Young people got their photograph taken with Pat Gilroy, Paul Conlon and the rest of the squad. It brought a lot of people out on a Monday night in Marino. Small businesses, shops, and pubs gained from it and there was a great happy atmosphere. Sport is very important for tourism.

I left Croke Park last Sunday and went to Gaffney's in Fairview. It was like Italia 90, with people on the street having a drink and a chat. I spoke to some of the bar staff and found extra staff were taken on for the day. People forget that such events are also part of the tourism industry.

Another controversial issue which has arisen in the past few days is related to the tourism sector. I would love to see the country become an international centre for conflict resolution. With our history and recent past, in terms of the peace process, Ireland could become a hub for developing peace strategies internationally and human rights. We have learned from the mistakes in our history. Many people across the world in the middle of a conflict would love an independent, neutral country that is respectful of human rights, peace and justice to help them. Ireland could be a centre of excellence for conflict resolution.

During the debate on the presidential election an issue has arisen with the intervention of Martin McGuinness. We have to examine our mindset. The people in the Twenty-six Counties need to decide whether they accept the Good Friday Agreement and support democratic or inclusive politics. A section of the population does not seem to accept this. If Northern Unionists and Nationalists can swallow tough decisions why are some people in the Twenty-six Counties antagonistic? It is related to the tourism industry.

There is huge potential for people who have learnt from the hurt and conflict during the years to open an international centre. We need to examine the mindset reality of the situation. At all times we must be respectful of all the victims of the conflict in this country. We could use the model of the peace and reconciliation forum internationally. Instead of closing centres such as Glencree we should start inviting people to the country to see if we can assist them.

A number of Deputies mentioned Kilmainham Gaol which has huge potential. I visited it for over 20 years with many children and took the tour. It is another aspect of the industry.

I was pleasantly surprised to see camping is becoming very fashionable again for many families, in particular those with children between the ages of four and 12 years, despite the weather. Caravans and campsites have benefited from the recession as families have sought cheaper accommodation. The domestic market is expected to be strong and if the weather stays fine it could be developed. The Irish Caravanning and Camping Council said camping is becoming trendy again with families and together with the recession and good weather it could have a bumper season. It also said it was hopeful for a good domestic market this summer to make up for the loss of other tourists. It is a sector with potential.

There are other reasons to be positive about tourism. There is a general feeling the industry's performance is slowly starting to pick up following two extremely difficult years. The travel tax has been abolished, VAT has been reduced and improved roads and airports have made it easier for the industry to function. We should acknowledge these positive developments. If somebody tries to do something about VAT or the travel tax we should not be afraid to commend him or her. There is room for optimism about developing the tourism sector.

We have to face issues such as accommodation, which is connected to the boom years. There is overcapacity in many areas. The biggest issue facing the accommodation sector is that there are too many beds for the available demand. Consequently, many hotels, especially those which are financed by NAMA or owned by banks, are slashing prices to a level with which it is impossible for other operators to compete. Bed and breakfast establishments face difficulties because they cannot cross-subsidise room revenue with bar and restaurant revenue as hotels can. I urge people to consider the problem. Such businesses employee two or three people to serve breakfast and clean linen. We often forget such jobs are part of the domestic economy.

When I talked to people in the tourism sector I found soaring fuel prices have squeezed margins. The transport sector has been hit particularly hard and there is a limit to what it can pass on to consumers in the current economic climate. Aer Lingus stated. "Rising fuel costs eat into the profits, so we need to find other ways to cut costs."

The Fáilte Ireland tourism barometer is a survey of tourism businesses designed to provide an insight into tourism performance for the year to date and the prospects for the remainder of the season. It has concerns about visitor levels in hotels, self-catering accommodation and golf clubs. One hears a lot of smart comments about golf clubs but they bring a lot of tourists into the country. People like to come to Ireland and play a game of golf.

We need to be very careful about our rivers and lakes and conscious of pollution. I have experience of fishing on Lough Derg in the Dromineer area in Tipperary. German tourists want clean lakes and rivers. There is a huge market in Germany for such tourism. Such visitors stay in bed and breakfasts and small local hotels, have a few drinks and spend a few bob. It is very important.

I note visitor levels for the year to date are reasonably good for hotels, with 43% reporting an increase. There was a 41% increase in self-catering numbers and 46% of golf clubs reported an increase in visitor volumes compared to 2010. There are signs that we can do something and be positive.

The Minister will be aware of an old friend of mine, Councillor Christy Hyland of Westport, who is very involved in the bed and breakfast trade and would say it is tough going at times. One in five bed and breakfasts is reporting increased visitor numbers but the majority, 59%, reported a decrease. We need to ensure we look after such persons and that they are supported in any way possible.

The key overseas market of Britain is not performing as well as we thought, something which we have had to address. We should not be afraid to encourage our families in England, Scotland and Wales to visit Ireland on their holidays. We should not forget the industry is not just about marketing brand Ireland but also developing the economy.

Many hotels and businesses in the tourism industry are labour-intensive, something which is important to consider. The industry employs low paid workers but if people are in the system, paying their taxes and making a contribution it is a positive thing which can be developed. I am reticent to use the phrase "turning the corner" because many people have used it in the past and it did not happen.

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One way to turn the corner is by developing tourism. I mentioned the arts earlier, an area where we have an international brand that could be developed strongly. The brand is out there and we have quality artists and musicians on the international stage who will attract many people to the State.

Section 1 amends section 24(2) of the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003 to provide that the aggregate level of advances that may be made to the authority out of the capital moneys provided by the Oireachtas for the purpose of supporting enterprises and projects relating to the development of tourist traffic and the development of tourist facilities and services is increased from €65 million to €150 million. We are talking about tourist facilities and services. There are no direct budgetary or financial implications in the proposals contained in the Bill. It is an enabling provision and the annual amount of capital expenditure by Fáilte Ireland will be determined in accordance with the normal budgetary process. There are no staffing implications.

Many good people work for Fáilte Ireland, but we need fresh ideas and people coming onto the pitch. One of my dreams would be to see the country become an international centre for conflict resolution. We should use the experience of the Good Friday Agreement and overcoming conflict on the island. I recently spoke to a group of Palestinians who visited Leinster House. From the welcome they got they knew the majority of the Irish people are supportive of assisting them to get the out of the mess they are in by starting their own state, in which I wish them well. They said they would love to come to Ireland if there was any potential for serious talks between themselves and the Israelis. When travelling abroad I hear people referring to our experience in that regard. The Government should consider making Ireland a hub for conflict resolution. We should have an international centre and bring in people from across the world, which would give a very positive image of the country.

I welcome the discussion on tourism. I look forward to being able to develop this process. I would like to see people from north and south of the Border develop an all-Ireland approach. When talking about Ireland we should not stop at the Border. We should encourage people to go to the North as well to see the beauty of the Ards Peninsula in County Down and all the way around to Derry. That will also facilitate the development of our own people and assist in bringing peace and reconciliation. There is nothing like going to stay in a home or hotel in another area which one might not normally visit. In the past 20 years I have learned in that regard. That is the kind of people politics we want on the island. I urge the Government to consider that. There are some magnificent parliamentarians in the Northern Ireland Assembly and in the Oireachtas. Some of them are working closely together and there is no reason not to focus on an all-Ireland strategy to develop tourism. Developing tourism will create jobs which will assist the country to get out of this economic mess.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I wish to share time with Deputies Walsh, Barry and Jim Daly.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Olivia Mitchell): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: The main purpose of the Bill is to amend the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003 to increase the level of funding for capital expenditure projects. The proposed change to the legislation is required to allow funding for tourism product development as set out in the annual Estimate to be provided to Fáilte Ireland. The Bill offers an opportunity to highlight the Government's commitment to the tourism sector.

The National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003 resulted in the dissolution of Bord Fáilte Éireann and CERT Limited, and the development of the National Tourism Development

Authority, Fáilte Ireland. Section 24(2) of the 2003 Act, however, placed a cap of €65 million on the total level of funding which can be granted to Fáilte Ireland to spend on capital expenditure projects or enterprises which support the development of tourism traffic or the marketing of tourist facilities and services. Section 24(1) of the 2003 Act gives the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, the power to advance out of the money provided by the Oireachtas such sums as the Minister may determine.

In the 1990s Ireland experienced large tourism growth and outperformed the rest of Europe as a tourist destination. Since 2001, however, the sector has become less competitive owing to a number of factors, including changes in demand and customer needs and more aggressive competition from other destinations. The tourism sector has experienced a decline in recent years. The total level of financial support for tourism provided by Oireachtas grants has fluctuated in the period from 2007 to 2010. Just over €20 million is available to advance to Fáilte Ireland before amending legislation is required. It is anticipated that the existing cap will be exceeded in the course of 2011 and 2012. The Departments of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and Finance have agreed a figure of €150 million based on this year's allocation and likely future allocations.

Fáilte Ireland has published a tourism product development strategy 2007-13 which states that less support will be provided for accommodation but more investment is required for tourism infrastructure. The strategy identifies priority areas for capital investment based on a comprehensive audit of tourism attractions, activities and events. The strategy also outlines that competitor destinations in northern Europe are investing substantial sums of public money in tourism, including the development of capital projects. Fáilte Ireland has responsibility for supporting the tourism industry in the areas of product development, marketing of domestic tourism on the island of Ireland, training and education, research and strategic planning, specialist product marketing and promotions, and the implementation of special initiatives to attract international sports events to Ireland. The Bill will ensure increased capital funding is made available to Fáilte Ireland, which will enable the agency to compete favourably with other northern European countries.

I express my satisfaction at Dublin winning the all-Ireland football championship last Sunday. While there is a big recession in the country, based on what I saw in Croke Park on Sunday, I do not believe there is a recession in Dublin. I wish the wee county, Louth, the best of luck as it will need luck in the future.

Deputy Brian Walsh: It is wonderful to have someone of the calibre of the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, at the helm in the area of tourism within the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. As a west of Ireland man, like me, he has a deep appreciation and understanding of the value of tourism to the economy. He has already started his own initiatives which will reap rewards and benefits in the years to come. I understand this is the first legislation he has brought before the House and he could not have picked a more significant Bill.

Our tourism sector is one of the tools we need to use to repair our broken economy. The sector has immense potential. Tourism was worth €45.3 billion to the economy in 2009 and contributed more than €1.3 billion in tax revenues to the Exchequer. It also provides jobs for up to 190,000 people. However, the needs of the industry have been neglected in recent times. While the previous Government stoked the dulling embers of the building boom, in many respects the tourism industry was not given the same level of attention and was left to suckle from the hind teat for far too long. After a period of unprecedented growth in the 1990s, investment under the stewardship of the previous Government was inadequate to overcome the aggressive marketing strategies of competing destinations and revenue here fell as a result. By 2009 funding for capital development in the tourism sector, which the Bill addresses, had

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been slashed to just a quarter of the amount provided for in 2007 and, accordingly, revenues fell by €1 billion during the same period.

We also lost much of our competitiveness during the time. Inflationary pressures saw prices soar and prospective visitors decided to look elsewhere and seek value for money in other destinations. All of this has brought the tourism sector to a critical point. This Bill is part of the rebuilding process and it will dictate the fortunes of the industry for years into the future.

The World Tourism Organization has forecast vast growth between now and 2020 with Europe poised to be the main beneficiary of this growth. If we are to avail of this trend, however, decisive action is required now. Decisive action has already been taken by the Government. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald yesterday described the jobs initiative as a failure when speaking in reaction to the announcements by Aviva Healthcare. It was a breath of fresh air when the Minister for Finance introduced that initiative. He said what could be achieved by it was modest. It was not intended to assist the insurance industry, rather it was clearly targeted at the tourism industry. The VAT reduction has been successfully passed on in most cases to the consumer. That is helping to restore the competitiveness we lost in recent years. The reduction in employers' PRSI will also facilitate job creation in the sector. I commend my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, for introducing the visa waiver scheme which has positioned Ireland ideally to capitalise on the hundreds of thousands of visitors to the United Kingdom for the London Olympics next year.

2 o'clock

We reduced and signalled that we intend to abolish the travel tax subject to a deal being hammered out with the airlines here. There was much huffing and puffing and banging on the table by the chief executive officers of airlines here as they told us the travel tax was damaging the industry and the number of visitors coming to the country, but they have not responded to the invitation by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to show where they can increase the capacity of visitors coming here. If they do that and demonstrate how they will do that, the travel tax will be abolished.

Visitor numbers and tourism revenues have fallen steadily from their peak in 2007 but there are reasons for hope. After years of troubling decline, we have had a 13% increase in overseas visits. That was witnessed in the first half of this year, signalling that Ireland is open for business. Figures from North America and other long-haul markets are almost back to levels last seen in 2008. The number of people choosing to rediscover what their own country has to offer, rather than holidaying abroad, has also increased in recent years. I holidayed in Killarney this year and despite the inclement weather, we had a most enjoyable holiday. The country has a huge amount to offer. Galway, the area I represent, no more than the area the Leas-Cheann Comhairle represents, is a thriving centre of excellence in the arts, music, literature and theatre. It has benefited a great deal from the jobs initiative and businesses there are quick to remark on the benefits that have accrued to them as a result of the initiatives introduced earlier this year.

The Galway Harbour Company has ambitious plans for the development of a new harbour facility in Galway. Tomorrow evening I am due to meet representatives of the harbour company and some of the largest cruise line operators in the world whose cruise liners visit Galway and who have pledged their support for bringing their vessels into Galway Harbour if we can increase the capacity there. That is an example of where infrastructural investment can reap rewards locally.

The success of the high profile visits of President Obama and Queen Elizabeth II also generated worldwide positive coverage. Members opposite — not necessarily the Members present — who occupy the far-right hand corner of the House, although they may be offended by me

describing them as being on the right, had questioned the cost associated with these visits. The benefits that will accrue to this city far outweigh the costs that accrued to the State from these visits. Time will tell that the huge exposure we got was invaluable. We cannot become complacent, however, notwithstanding the progress that has been made in recent times, as competition destinations are heavily investing in marketing and infrastructure. We must do all we can to bring visitors back to our shores, and this Bill is an example of our doing that. I commend it and I will be entirely supportive of it. I wish the Minister of State, who has temporarily left the Chamber, well during his tenure in office.

Deputy Tom Barry: I welcome the Bill which highlights the Government's commitment to the vital tourism sector, and I warmly welcome the extremely encouraging figures in terms of visitor numbers. Our main markets, Britain and the United States, which account for more than 60% of all visitors to Ireland, saw increases of 8% and 15%, respectively, in visitor numbers, and the figures from Europe are also particularly encouraging. Visitor numbers from the Benelux countries are up an impressive 28%, France 23% and Scandinavian visitor numbers have increased by 21%. These increases must be recognised.

The domestic market, however, generates €1.3 billion in revenue and we must remember that the so-called staycation is very important. Competitiveness is improving and the direct intervention of the Government in that regard has been crucial. The jobs initiative not only reduced the VAT level to 9% for labour-intensive services, it also halved PRSI contributions for many employers in that sector through work placements and internships and offered a helping hand to struggling businesses. We know from our constituents that the VAT reduction is certainly working on the ground.

In the programme for Government there was a commitment to target available resources at developing and co-ordinating niche tourism products and activity packages, and in that regard we must not forget cultural and literary tourism. This is a significant area that is largely unexplored in many parts of the country and has phenomenal potential.

I wish to refer to the Avondhu Blackwater Partnership in Cork which launched the Blackwater Valley heritage trail at the beginning of this month. The innovative series of tours were developed by the local development company to promote the rich heritage of the Blackwater Valley and to enhance the major tourism potential of north Cork. To augment the tours, a free high quality brochure was published featuring 23 heritage sites encompassing an area from Blarney to Mallow and Fermoy to Lismore. The brochure gives an historic summary of sites such as Bridgetown Priory near Castletownroche, Labbacallee megalithic tomb near Glanworth, and Ballysaggartmore towers in Lismore. In addition, interpretative panels are also now on display at each site. People can drive the trail route or they can avail of the new guided bus tours which Avordhu Blackwater is co-ordinating, using local guides with priceless local knowledge. Avondhu Blackwater also offers specifically designed heritage trails for schools, tour groups and other organisations such as active retirement groups in exploring the rich heritage of the area.

To make the tours a reality, Avondhu Blackwater Partnership teamed up with Fáilte Ireland, an initiative in which I was glad to be involved, to offer a new high quality tour guide training course aimed at people who have a general interest in local heritage and history and who would like to learn more about the tourism industry and, importantly, how to guide groups in a professional manner in local areas. They recognised that the right local people are the key to unlocking an area's tourism potential. The training was free of charge and the tours are already proving a hit with visitors from as far away as New Zealand. In essence, the local community is taking ownership of the local tourism.

[Deputy Tom Barry.]

The tourism capital investment programme grants scheme is an excellent tool which will develop new attractions for visitors and also upgrade existing amenities. We often talk, rightly so, about sectors such as agriculture being a natural resource, but our heritage is one of our greatest natural resources. It is immensely valuable and has huge potential as we revert to what do best, which is providing exceptional holidays for visitors from at home and abroad.

We cannot and do not want to sell Ireland as a sun destination, which would be a bit of a hit and miss scenario. The tourism capital investment programme grant scheme must take into account our rivers which flow through all our counties, and we have the River Blackwater in Cork. The potential for water sports and cruises to bring life to our rivers cannot be ignored. Also of merit is the E8 European walking route, which traverses through mainland Europe, Bulgaria into the United Kingdom and from there into Ireland. Capital funding to fund and create spurs off this E8 walking route would be very beneficial to rural tourism.

Investment in our fabulous forest walks and information boards is also crucial. Anything that can capture the imagination of the tourist and bring our localities to life is valuable.

With the advent of iPhones, one of which I have in my hand, and app stores——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I hope it is switched off.

Deputy Tom Barry: It is, as you can see, a Cheann Comhairle. Capital funding should be available to create tourism apps for specific regions, which would be really helpful. This would allow the tourist to custom plan his or her journey. Informing the public of the huge choice available to it is crucial. Tourism is like any business. It must be marketed in an accessible, cost effective and up-to-date fashion.

I commend the Bill to the House. It is another fabulous piece of work by the Minister.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: This is a very short Bill but which is the subject of a very long debate. It is intended to further develop the tourism industry, which is to be welcomed.

As I listen to the debate, it is clear that we are all referring to our own areas. However, the collection of the proposals shows the range of what is available nationally. Sometimes the local becomes the national when everything is knitted together. I have heard some really good ideas and I am sure the Minister of State will have a difficulty in confining them to the amount of money available.

While we are doing well from a tourism point of view, I would like to highlight some things we could do better. One of our biggest tourism destinations is the Cliffs of Moher where the visitors' centre is absolutely beautiful and knits well into the landscape. However, there was a massive overspend when the centre was developed and the prices have now been pitched to recoup that overspend rather than at the pockets of visitors. While the staff are great, one of the biggest let-downs is the Atlantic Edge Exhibition. An animated bird flies around which could represent anywhere in the world. However, the visual landscape has a real wow factor. Why can a helicopter not go up and show people what the cliffs look like from a distance? I do not think the exhibition is what the tourist expects to see. It certainly was a let-down for me, and I think the same is true for others. We can do better. We need to take stock of the lack of engagement with tourists and the lack of responsiveness. At the Cliffs of Moher visitors are charged according to the number of people in a car, not per car. When added to the cost of food, this is prohibitive. While this is a great destination, we seem to be telling people they should go there, while warning them that it is costly. We might, thereby, be eliminating some repeat business. We must pay attention to this.

Those tourists who come to Ireland now spend less than in previous years and they choose cheaper options. The bus tour sector has been holding its own. We spent years developing Kilkenny Castle and the lovely walkway in front of it. However, it is very difficult to park a bus there. The development was not designed with buses in mind, yet the buses are bringing people to spend time there. Let us be a little more thoughtful.

There appears to be an old boys' network with regard to who is asked for ideas. Some recent entrants to the tourism market need to be included. The cost of inclusion in Fáilte Ireland brochures is prohibitive for smaller companies which want to get a foothold. A tourist will expect to receive impartial advice in a tourist office, but the brochures may only contain information on the products that can afford to be included. We do not allow the new generation to come through. We are doing well, but we could do better. The same could be said of OPW sites. The same operators continue to be facilitated. New operators could be brought to these wonderful sites which have been developed using public money.

Arthur's Day could become our second St. Patrick's Day. As today is Arthur's Day, let us not scoff at the idea. The House must pardon me if I refer to a local connection. Arthur Guinness was born in Celbridge, brewed his first pint in Leixlip and is buried in Ardclough, which are all in my constituency. We have some claim to him. The Guinness Storehouse is a huge tourist attraction, but we do not take it that stage further.

We could do things that do not compete with each other but are complementary. In my constituency Carton House, Castletown House and Leixlip Castle are all marketed separately. We do not look at these attractions from the point of view of a tourist who wants to have things packaged. We need to make connections.

I have a difficulty with the term "product development". Visitors come to Ireland for the friendliness of the people, the landscape and the culture. These are much more than products.

We often take a fragmented approach to doing things. One of my biggest hobbies is researching family history. I have been doing this for years and constantly find new bits and pieces to add to the richness of my family history. Everybody has this richness. I have almost completed writing a guidebook to family history and hope to do so when I get time. I noted today that the website *ancestry.co.uk* has introduced 40 million records onto the site. Why are we not doing some of these things ourselves? I have a long Dublin family background. The last of my family to settle in Dublin arrived in the 1870s, but I have found linkages in Limerick, Westmeath, Belfast, Omagh and Laois. I know at first hand the importance of finding these origins. I have gone back to those places on numerous occasions and bought every guidebook and history book I could find about them. I have spent money in these locations and will be a repeat tourist in them. I think I am the prototype for others to do the same thing. We are punching above our weight in this regard. David McWilliams put it together when he talked about the Irish Diaspora and Ireland being the mother ship. Genealogy could be the way to introduce people to a much richer engagement with Ireland and provide for repeat tourism.

Because of the loss of records, particularly what remained of 19th century census records, in the destruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland in 1922, there is a perception that it is very difficult to trace Irish family histories. There is, in fact, a huge source of information, if one looks for it. Much of it has been put together through State investment and voluntarism and we are giving this away. I acknowledge the approach taken by the former Government and the motivation of the current Minister in making the genealogical records freely available on-line. The 1901 and 1911 census returns have been very well used.

Let me give some examples of things we have done which we could have done better. We spent €10 million digitising the register of births, marriages and deaths in the General Register Office in Roscommon. Most of these records commenced in 1864. I recently asked, in a

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parliamentary question, why I was able to search the index, on which we spent the €10 million, on-line through the website of the Church of Latter-Day Saints but could not do it on the website of the General Register Office. The GRO website does not even mention the possibility of searching the records on-line through the website of the Church of Latter-Day Saints. I have no problem with the church having the records because it has been a terrific resource world-wide. The GRO website tells one it is necessary to queue up in the research room of the office, search the indexes manually in the big books and then request the record. That could be done much more effectively as we are not making use of that resource. I have no problem with charging people for searching some of the records, but we charge €6 to do a particular search. When I started it cost €2, then it was raised to €4 and now it costs €6. That is fine if someone is not trying to research a common name like Mary Murphy or Patrick Byrne, where one would have to do 20 searches to get the right record. Twenty searches costs €120 and that is prohibitive. Let us be careful about how we charge for these services.

Digitising these records is very labour intensive, but it may well be an initiative that is worth the investment. We could do it through something like a FÁS scheme to advance the process. I was also told that there could be privacy and fraud issues when making these records available online. Why were these not issues when we were putting the census records online? The same range of information is being provided. We may have to limit the years back to a certain date, say 1930, in order that we are providing privacy, but anyone can walk off the street and get those records if they want them; therefore, there is no privacy issue in that instance. We are not being sensible about this. Griffith's Valuation is available on a free to view basis, but other records like the Cancelled Valuation Books could be digitised.

I commend the staff of the National Archives for their work, but the National Archives building is too small. I have had the pleasure of going to Kew on several occasions and searching in the British Public Record Office, and it is a huge tourism attraction. We do not have that kind of interface here. We have a fragmented approach. There is a genealogical service in the National Library which is really about pointing people in the right direction. Instead of our service being a one-stop-shop, we give people a map and tell them to go here, there and everywhere. We are not really putting our best foot forward.

There seems to be some dispute on whether *www.ancestry.co.uk* has a legal entitlement to put the church records on-line, but those records are already on-line in most cases, and I know Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú had an involvement in the Family History Foundation. Much of the money that goes through its pay per view goes back to developing the records. We need that money to develop the rest of the records, but I am not sure we are giving ourselves the opportunity to do this.

I was lucky with my own family history in that there was a Guinness archive that I could search, and I am sure there are other industries which could add to that source. If we had the records office to do that, it would be possible. I wonder if we have a NAMA building that could hold a bigger and better National Archives. Boland's Mill will be an embarrassment in 2016. Are there some things down there that could be used for archives that have a historical connection? Everyone is thinking outside the box on this issue.

There are many records, such as the railway records and the Garda records that go back to Royal Irish Constabulary and Dublin Metropolitan Police records, to which we are not paying attention. If we really cared about the Diaspora, wanted them to be connected and saw them as a resource, we would have to be looking at doing something to take the lead in co-ordinating some of the efforts that are being made in this area. Much of it is happening with volunteers. It may well be that a small amount of effort in assisting those volunteers could produce serious returns.

I am a bit obsessive about this, but there are great opportunities in it. I would like us to take those opportunities rather than them being easily taken away by a site that has the resources required, such as that which I described. We could do more with it ourselves.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: I am sharing time with Deputy Michelle Mulherin. I add my good wishes to the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, in his new job. I cannot think of anyone more suited to this job through geography, experience and inclination. It will be an extremely important job in restoring the fortunes of the economy.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill, and the opportunity it affords to debate the industry, which has always been important to Ireland. In recent times and for the foreseeable future, it assumes an even greater importance because it has been identified as one of the industries with the potential to drive the domestic recovery. It has the potential to create high levels employment and to bring jobs not just to Dublin and the cities, but to every town and village in the country.

I am happy to support the raising of the cap placed on capital spending in the 2003 Act, from €65 million to €150 million. It is vital, even in difficult times, not only to continue to upgrade existing facilities, but also to invest in new ones. Demand in this industry is constantly changing. People's tastes are changing and we need new products. Tourism products become very tired if they are not constantly renewed and we would find it increasingly difficult to compete with other non-sun destinations if we did not continually refresh what we have on offer.

I listened with interest to what Deputy Catherine Murphy had to say because I was going to mention the need for investment in our cultural institutions. I realise they do not come under this particular tranche of money but we really need to restore and improve the buildings that house our national cultural institutions. Little was done in this regard during the Celtic tiger years, and the National Archives is one those institutions that comes to mind immediately. It is such an important area for genealogical tourism, which is a major growth area. It is particularly significant in a country that has had wave after wave of emigration, but the National Archives building is in a woeful state. It is a tribute to the dedicated specialist staff there that they are able to maintain access to so many of our archives. That access has been increased enormously by the digitisation of records and I understand that the process of digitisation, which will make things more available to people, is continuing. If the Minister of State does find the money or the NAMA building that was mentioned which could house the archives, I would recommend it be considered as a priority for the Government.

A second priority is the National Library. I mention these two institutions because their material is degrading as a result of not having the proper conditions for storage. Whatever about the tourists, let us ensure we do not let it degrade any further.

Probably the most important area for capital investment is in e-tourism. No matter how wonderful and imaginative a product is, if it is not on the web, it does not exist for the majority of people, especially those outside Ireland. This means we must invest in high quality nation-wide broadband, which would facilitate marketing, booking and buying over the Internet. I know that great progress has been made by Fáilte Ireland in facilitating and training in e-marketing, but we cannot take our foot off the pedal if we are to compete. Internet capability must be available to all players, from the smallest bed and breakfast establishment to the largest facility in the country. Technology must also be made available and used to improve access to the tourism product because if one's product is not on the shelf, it cannot be bought. The Internet is the most important shelf as far as tourism is concerned and everyone knows it is the main source of information on holiday destinations, hotels and so forth. Even those who

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want to go away for one night do not telephone Bord Fáilte or another tourism body but check the Internet, perhaps via an app.

Since the collapse of tourism in the middle of the last decade Fáilte Ireland has targeted its marketing efforts at our traditional markets, the very markets which dried up when the Celtic tiger died. I have questioned the decision to concentrate exclusively on these markets. While Britain and the United States will always be important, other countries on which we have not focused marketing efforts show greater potential for growth. I refer specifically to the new European Union member states from which we do not have many tourists, despite a significant number of air connections. We must target our tourism efforts at cities with which we have good air links. Unlike Thailand or Australia, people do not tend to visit Ireland for three weeks or one month but come instead for a few days and, in many cases, only a weekend. Our tourist catchment area is those areas that have ready access to an air link to Ireland. Given that no one will take two flights to travel abroad for a weekend or three or four days, our tourism marketing efforts should be targeted at cities with air links to this country.

We must also focus our efforts on trying to maintain current air links. In this respect, I am pleased the Government chose to link tourism and transport in one Department, as I had strongly recommended. Until now, there has been a disconnect between tourism and transport. It is pointless to market Ireland as a tourist destination in European towns and cities with which we do not have an air link.

I welcome the reduction in the travel tax and introduction of the Dublin Airport incentive scheme to encourage the opening of new routes. We will not know whether the scheme is working until the beginning of next year. I ask the Minister to monitor the effectiveness of the incentives in place and, if necessary, revise and re-target them to ensure they increase passenger numbers and encourage the opening of new routes.

I am pleased Fáilte Ireland is adopting a destination management approach. The future of tourism lies in this area and Fáilte Ireland needs to go further in this regard. The role of State bodies must be to co-ordinate and integrate the provision of accommodation and access to facilities, whether small or large, local or national, cultural, recreational, sports or heritage in nature. They must ensure all facilities are co-operating at local level to avail of the synergies of proximity. For instance, local hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation providers should provide transport to the starting point of planned walks, which are increasing in number. I welcome, for example, the recent opening of one such walk in the Minister of State's constituency. Visitors must be able to reach the starting points of walks because most of those who come here on a walking holiday do not arrive by car. They also need to be collected and such services must be provided locally.

Walking holidays offer major potential as walks do not require good weather and walking routes require only minimal capital investment. In many cases, local authorities and Coillte have already provided all that is required. However, most walks are isolated and on their own do not justify someone travelling from abroad. The way forward is to connect walks and market them to potential tourists as a national or regional package and easily accessible. Fáilte Ireland, as the over-arching tourism body, should bring together diverse providers to produce an infinitely superior product than can be provided by one individual player. No other body is in a position to do this job.

Country houses and gardens are another area for which one does not need a wonderful climate and that is experiencing growth in Europe and globally. It is difficult for individual private operators to attract tourists. Marketing every country house with a nice garden separately would entail considerable duplication. To maximise growth in this area Fáilte Ireland

should market holiday packages and ensure tourists can move with great ease from one country house or garden to another.

I welcomed the establishment of a cultural and heritage tourism group in the dying days of the previous Government to connect State agencies and tour operators bringing people into the country in numbers. Tours are an important area of tourism which has significant growth potential. Until now, the services and products provided by the Office of Public Works and other organisations have not been matched up with what tourists want. I understand a meeting of this group has been arranged. I ask the Minister to ensure the group continues with this important initiative.

In these difficult times, when there is little money available, we must examine everything we do to ascertain if we can do it better. I have strong views on the proliferation of bodies which duplicate each other's work and deliver their services in a less effective manner than would a single body. I am not convinced it is necessary to have two separate tourism bodies, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland. Many local bodies should share over-arching jobs such as marketing and sales and collaborate rather than compete with one another to improve effectiveness. While the various State agencies at national, regional, county and local level are all worthy and do good work, their value is diminished by the lack of a more cohesive approach.

It is great that tourism numbers have turned around and are heading in the right direction for the first time in a number of years. This development is a vindication of the Government's policy of recognising the need to reduce costs in tourism and other industries. Measures to change wage setting mechanisms, reduce VAT and employers' PRSI are beginning to pay off. Tourism has been correctly identified as a growth industry. It is a sector in which Ireland has a natural advantage and, as an export service, it is a foreign currency earner. The growing middle classes of the emerging economies offer considerable potential. For this reason, I welcome measures to make it easier to obtain a visa to visit this country, as the difficulty in securing a visa acts as a significant deterrent for people from emerging economies such as China who wish to visit here.

I support the measures in the Bill and extend my best wishes to the Minister.

Deputy Michelle Mulherin: It is great to see the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, dealing with this matter. I am delighted we are in government, which gives us an opportunity to take stock of what is happening in the tourism industry and the area of tourism promotion. Tourism is one of the pillars on which we hope to build our economic recovery. It is an area in which the Minister of State has great experience, as well as an appetite to see it succeed. The background is that in 2007, 7.7 million tourists came into the country, while in 2010 the figure was 5.5 million. Certain measures have been taken by the Government as an indication of its support for tourism, such as the VAT reduction, the reduction in employer's PRSI and the changes in the system of visa applications to make us more accessible to people who want to travel. These are all welcome.

The country has never had more tourism products. Everyone's area has something, whether it is activities such as golf courses, fishing, deep sea angling or walking routes, which are being developed, or our natural and built heritage, including national monuments, and there has never been more investment. It is no big deal to put a package together. I believe that should be the job of golf courses, hotels and so on. The next question is how we actually get people in, which is the responsibility of Tourism Ireland. The products are available and Tourism Ireland must market them. There is a big question over this. Whether we get it right or wrong will decide the success of our ambitions to see the tourism industry grow. Instead of putting together packages and so on, Tourism Ireland should be working with our airports, airlines and ferries, all of which represent gateways for tourists to get into Ireland. If they are not

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physically coming into the country, we can have all the packages and products we want and spend all the money we want, but it will not help the tourism industry. The likes of Ryanair and Aer Lingus are bringing 20% fewer people into the country. This represents not only fewer flights and fewer tourists but also fewer jobs, whether in the airlines or in the tourism sector. Having a focused approach and working with the airlines would resolve a problem which is of strategic significance, that is, how to get people onto this island.

I have a serious question for the Minister of State about the accountability of Tourism Ireland. We give it a budget, but how do we measure the results we get and whether the company has been innovative? It is all very well to say the money is accounted for and to show what it was spent on. The question is whether it is being spent in the best way and whether we are getting the best return. For example, Tourism Ireland has pulled out of sponsoring strategic golf tournaments. We have the best golfers in the world. We have never had more golf courses and they have never been so competitive. They are open for business and they want to bring money in, so they would be amenable to various initiatives. It may be said that golf is expensive, but no holiday is cheap. The people who have these products have a hunger to bring in tourists.

One possible market is the Irish Diaspora. There are 80 million people around the world who claim to be of Irish descent and who are proud to be of Irish descent. Are we happy with 5.5 million tourists coming into the country, not all of whom are of Irish descent? It is a pretty small number, and that is just one measuring stick. I am not aware of how tourism numbers are measured. Tourism Ireland will give us figures at the end of the year and we will cry and say things are too expensive and so on, but a great deal of money is being pumped into marketing, and I wonder how effective that is.

I will mention a case in point, with which the Minister of State will be familiar. I do not feel I have received a satisfactory answer to this. Knock airport, in our region, is a growing airport and a success story. However, when a survey was carried out at the airport of people travelling from Great Britain, where Tourism Ireland is active in promoting this country, it found that 99% of those people were coming to Knock airport because they had family or friends in the area or had been recommended to do so by family or friends. Only 1% reported exposure to any sort of marketing. What about all the other British people who have no Irish blood in them, so to speak? Should we not be encouraging them to come over? We had a great success story with the visits of the Queen of England and President Obama, which earned us a lot of political capital and goodwill. This was a Red C survey. It is a shocking indictment of Tourism Ireland and I do not see how it has explained itself. As I understand it, even three quarters of the way through the year, it has no records of visitor numbers and no indication of whether targets are being achieved. It waits until the end of the year to compile the numbers. Thus, instead of having the ability to take correctional measures during the year if required, it is always a year behind.

That is my main point. I do not think we are getting value for money. We could have all the tourism products in the world but it would not make any difference. We have a few gems, such as the Minister of State's town of Westport as well as Killarney and Galway. There is a lot more to offer in the country. Tourism Ireland should not be lazy; it should be innovative. Let us measure its progress. Hard-earned taxpayer's money is being spent on marketing, but it is all a bit fluffy at the moment. We need to pin it down a little more.

Deputy Tom Fleming: I welcome the Bill, which is a positive initiative. As a growth industry, tourism is one of the prime indigenous products we have. Our tourism infrastructure needs to be expanded and developed. So far this year, the trend has been that American and continental visitor numbers are up by approximately 15% or 16%, but visitor numbers from Britain, our

nearest neighbour and biggest market, have not recovered to this extent. The United Kingdom was always our stable tourist market. We will have to analyse this. I believe visitor numbers from the UK are up by only 8%. We will need to identify the reasons for this and deal with the issues in the short term.

In the south west we have excellent access for UK visitors who wish to bring their own transport such as cars or caravans via the Cork-Swansea ferry or the Rosslare ferry. The viability of the Cork-Swansea ferry in particular is dependent on numbers rising to what they were in the mid-2000s. The return of the Kerry-Dublin public service obligation is vital for the tourism industry and the economy of County Kerry. The continuation of flights between Kerry Airport and the United Kingdom and the Continent is also vital.

As well as our traditional strongholds in the countries I have mentioned, we must seek new and vibrant markets to boost visitor numbers. For example, Russia is a high potential and lucrative market that we should explore and pursue vigorously. It takes only three hours to fly to Ireland from Moscow, compared with over six hours from the east coast of the USA. The Russian economy is performing reasonably and the middle to high earners have good disposable incomes. There have been links between Shannon Airport and Russia in the past, with the setting up of a duty free zone in Moscow.

With regard to product development, the skills are available. Tourism is a labour-intensive industry and our hotel and catering staff across the hospitality sector are highly trained and efficient. A hotel employing up to 100 people is invaluable to the local economy and, subject to its performing well, provides good and sustainable jobs. The tourism season is getting longer. Unlike many companies, such as Aetna in Castleisland, County Kerry, and TalkTalk in Waterford, not to mention the recent speculation about Aviva, a hotel will not up sticks and move on.

Regarding the decline in visitors in recent years, it is obvious that tourists are looking for more than just scenery. Value for money and visitor attractions are paramount. We must ensure tourists are happy and satisfied with their experience here and that they spread a good image of Ireland abroad.

We have an abundance of natural amenities for promoting activity holidays such as, for example, the rural and mountain walks being created throughout the country. Our landscape is ideal, being safe and suitable for these activities which cater for both walkers and cyclists. There is a great initiative in County Kerry whereby Pat Falvey who has taken part in several expeditions, including to Mount Everest and the South Pole, is promoting mountain walks in the Carrauntoohil area. It is proving to be very popular. In the Minister of State's county, Mayo, there is a great walking and cycling route between Newport and Mulranny. These initiatives are being replicated throughout the country and make great use of our natural resources.

Inland fisheries are another great under-utilised resource. Rivers and lakes need restocking and refurbishing, a most important factor, having regard to the salmon from the Atlantic Ocean that spawn in them. We must develop fishing stands for people with disabilities and promote and concentrate on fishing by ladies because up to now it has been a male dominated recreational activity. There is an initiative in south Kerry whereby fishing stands for the disabled are being developed in conjunction with the promotion of ladies fishing, both of which offer great potential. On the west coast, surfing sites are among the best in the world, receiving global recognition and attracting enthusiasts from all over the world.

There is great scope to develop the cultural tourism sector. Visitors from the traditional markets of the United Kingdom, the USA and continental Europe bring in more than €65 million per annum.

[Deputy Tom Fleming.]

On genealogy, we need a central headquarters where all allied information and records would be made available. The records currently available are fragmented and members of the Irish Diaspora often find it difficult to trace their ancestry in a straightforward method. I suggest Killarney House which is being refurbished be the designated centre. As Killarney is the capital of the Irish tourism industry and a worldwide brand, it would be appropriate to have this service centrally located in Killarney House when it has been restored to its original condition. One hopes that will happen in the near future.

We need to provide for an all-inclusive transport system travel ticket for all ground transport throughout the country, including bus, rail and Luas. We could then liaise with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and extend the scheme to cover the whole island. Currently, visitors have to operate in a piecemeal fashion, whereas in their own countries they are able to purchase all-inclusive transport tickets. We must pursue this matter.

It was drawn to my attention recently that senior citizens, or persons aged over 70 years, coming to this country were experiencing great difficulty in finding self-drive cars. Some have been refused. One individual travelled across the Border to Belfast and, with his full licence, had no difficulty in getting such a car which he was very glad to be able to drive around the country. Unfortunately, he had to travel from Dublin to Belfast to get it, which gives a very bad image of the country and makes people feel most unwelcome. When they return to their homeland and talk to their fellow citizens, they spread a negative perception of the country.

The film industry also offers great potential to attract visitors, whether from Hollywood or Bollywood. A film is being shot on the streets of Dublin with a company which will be located in the city for a number of weeks. This will generate much needed revenue and is great for the local economy. In addition, the scenery at all of the locations filmed will be shown on a world-wide stage, which is most important.

We must concentrate on and emphasise the food product we have available in this country, including artisan products for sale at country markets. We must get the catering industry to buy into and promote this aspect. Our image is of pollution free lands and rivers because we escaped the industrial revolution in other countries which will stand to our good in the coming years. We need to engage in much more promotion in this regard because there is a ready market available that we should develop.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I understand Deputy Dominic Hannigan is sharing his time.

Deputy Dominic Hannigan: I wish to share my time with Deputies Eric Byrne, Seán Kenny, Ann Phelan and Kevin Humphreys. We will each have four minutes.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Bill and wish to refer to the significance of the tourism industry to the island of Ireland. The Bill ensures there will not be a situation where Fáilte Ireland will not be able to provide funding, given that the tourism industry will play a unique part in our national recovery. Tourism is one of the key industries in which we hope to focus on job creation and also offers a way of stimulating domestic demand for local business.

I am Chairman of the Good Friday Agreement Implementation Committee and have meetings with Tourism Ireland on a regular basis. It is one of the all-island bodies formed under the Good Friday Agreement and one of its key objectives is to sell the island of Ireland abroad and to support Northern Ireland to reach its tourism potential. It has told me that it is seeing a change in international perceptions since the peace agreement. Year on year, more people see the island of Ireland as a safe place to visit, which is good news and correlates with the growth of our tourist market.

Tourism Ireland is funded by grants from Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Its key action is to spread the message that Ireland is a good place to visit on holidays. It is focusing on key markets in Germany, the USA, France and Great Britain because these markets account for approximately three quarters of all overseas visitors. I note Deputy Fleming's remarks about markets such as Russia and China being potentially large sources of tourists and that we could do more work in that regard. However, it is important to recognise that the vast majority of tourists comes from the four markets cited and these are the markets in which we can get best bang for our buck in terms of investment in the tourism industry.

The island is being sold abroad as one tourism commodity in order to bring international visitors to destinations on both sides of the Border. This is being done via on-line media, targeted promotional advertising and stands at festivals and trade events. Targeted events and campaigns are being used to focus on the Diaspora, for example. We are putting particular emphasis on the Scots-Irish and Ulster-Scots in the United States and Canada.

If any Member is interested, there are up-to-date figures available which show how the tourism industry is performing. I note Deputy Mulherin's remark on the necessity of having such figures. We have them from as recently as this morning and they tell us there has been 10% growth in the first six months of the year, which is great news. For the Republic, the figure is 12%, with a slightly lower figure for the North. This is one of the consequences of the Government's attempts to generate jobs through initiatives such as the 9% VAT rate for tourist and service industries. This has allowed us to compete and, as a result, attract more visitors to the country. The key factor in attracting additional tourists is ensuring we have something attractive for them to see.

For example, in 2013 Derry will be the UK's City of Culture and I am sure we can expect many tourists to travel from that city to the Republic during at that time. In recent months, hordes of tourists attended events such as the Rose of Tralee and the Lisdoonvarna festival. This afternoon the Solheim Cup will begin in County Meath. This will be the largest golfing event to be held in the country in many years, and 80,000 visitors are expected to attend the event over the weekend. President McAleese is due to take part in the opening ceremony later today. Events of this nature, which are put together by many agencies, can assist in attracting additional tourists to the country. I congratulate Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and local tourism boards on their efforts in ensuring more tourists visit the country. The latter leads to the creation of many local jobs, which are badly needed at this stage.

3 o'clock

Deputy Kevin Humphreys: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Bill. I also welcome the increase in funding to €150 million for future capital investment. There are some fine examples of the impact such investment can have and one which comes readily to mind and which was opened recently is the Mayo greenway. This project, which has won wide acclaim, shows how we can generate tourism in an eco-friendly manner. As Deputy Hannigan stated, the tourism market has grown by 12% during the past six months. This is evidence of the investment the Government has made in the tourism sector through the jobs initiative and the reduction in VAT. It also highlights the impact of increased advertising in respect of quality holiday destinations in Ireland. There is a need to obtain value for money in respect of the money we are investing, and a long-term analysis must be carried out to ensure such value for money will be forthcoming. In that context, some form of review mechanism must be put in place.

There is one area in which there is major potential in respect of tourism in Ireland and that is the cruise ship industry. In the current year alone some 80 cruise ships will visit Dublin. This industry could be expanded to Cork and Galway. People who take cruises are high-end, valued

[Deputy Kevin Humphreys.]

tourists and they contribute to the economy in a substantial manner. I request that a proportion of the money we are intent on investing in tourism be set aside for the purpose of investigating the possibility of developing a terminal in this country at which cruise liners could commence and end their voyages. This would give rise to added value through the creation of additional bed nights. Evidence from other countries shows the benefits to which cruise liner terminals can give rise. For example, only ten years ago the city of Boston in the United States only received visits from 50 cruise liners per year. However, when a terminal was put in place, this number increased to between 80 and 100 per year and additional bed nights resulted. There is a great opportunity for Ireland to develop this type of high-end tourism product.

I am concerned with regard to one statistic, namely, that which relates to the service price and value. Tourism surveys show that the latter has been falling off in recent years. We must increase our efforts in this regard. Word of mouth is the best form of advertising. If a tourist comes to Ireland, returns home and states that he or she had a good time and obtained good value, that is worth more than any newspaper or television advertisement. We must ensure tourists have a good experience when they visit this country.

I ask the Minister of State to give serious consideration to developing the aspect of the tourism industry which relates to cruise liners, particularly in respect of major cities such as Galway, Cork and Dublin. An investment in this regard would realise a massive return over a number of years. It must be remembered that when a cruise liner docks in a port, it brings with it approximately 3,500 tourists.

Deputy Seán Kenny: I welcome the Bill, the primary purpose of which is to allow the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to increase the level of funding to the National Tourism Development Authority — Fáilte Ireland — from €65 million to €150 million. In that context, I wish to refer to Howth Tourism, an organisation which comprises a group of businesses in the retail and hospitality sectors in Howth. The businesses to which I refer co-operate with each other to promote the town as a tourism destination for visitors from Ireland and abroad. Using its own funding, Howth Tourism has printed thousands of maps which highlight for visitors all the town has to offer. It has also developed a website and organised events and annual festivals to promote Howth as a tourism destination.

Not only does Howth Tourism want to sustain the 500 tourism related jobs that already exist in the town, it also wants to expand its efforts and activities. In that context, it is investigating the possibility of developing Howth, which has a number of very fine restaurants, as a destination for culinary tourists into the future. It is also seeking to attract tourists in search of outdoor pursuits such as hill walking. The summit of Howth Head and the peninsula on which the town is located are ideal for such pursuits. In addition, Howth Tourism is examining the possibility of developing the town as a destination for tourism related retail businesses.

I agree with Howth Tourism's belief that there is a growing marine leisure industry in this country. There is obvious evidence in this regard with the Volvo ocean race and the tall ships race both taking place in and around the coast of Ireland. I would like Howth to capitalise on the potential in this area. The Burke-McIver report into fishery harbour centres, which was published in 2009, states that there is a huge opportunity to develop marine leisure pursuits in this country and makes specific reference to Howth in that context. Howth Tourism is working closely with Fáilte Ireland in developing a tourism strategy for the town and has been selected to lead the Dublin coastal villages project. Fáilte Ireland has also been investigating the marine leisure tourism business and I understand it will issue a new report later this month which will highlight the importance of this business.

One major obstacle to the development of Howth in the ways to which I refer relates to the fact that the harbour is under the management of the marine division of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. I have learned that the harbourmaster in Howth has no tourism remit and is under no obligation to host events, activities or promotions in the harbour area. While I accept that the harbour is a working area and that this must be a primary consideration when examining the possibility of developing tourism activities, it is also the case that the working nature of the harbour impedes this development. As a result, there is a need to utilise the major attraction that is the harbour itself and also arrive at a point where tourism activities can be developed there in a way which will not interfere with the harbour's operation, with shipping, and so on.

Any increase in funding that may be available should be used to enable Fáilte Ireland to work more closely with the marine division of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in order that a tourism function might be provided at Howth Harbour in the interests of exploiting the tourism potential that exists there. The issue of tourism in Howth Harbour is an excellent example of how what is envisaged in the Bill could be of benefit in developing tourism in general. I ask the Minister of State to pursue this matter with the relevant authorities to ensure that what I have outlined can be achieved in order that we might improve the position in respect of tourism.

Deputy Ann Phelan: As most of the previous speakers have already covered the points I wish to make, I will not, if Members will excuse the pun, labour those points. I welcome the Bill, which has been introduced at a time when opportunities to create jobs in the traditional industrial and support services sectors are severely limited. I also welcome the opportunity to examine ways for the State to invest in a tangible, people-intensive industry such as tourism. Fáilte Ireland was established in 2003 as a result of the need to streamline and integrate the delivery of the range of State supports relating to tourism activities and to facilitate product marketing and development, human resource development and training within the tourism industry. I am delighted that recovery of our market share in Britain is a priority in the Bill.

We could not have bought the type of exposure across the globe that Ireland enjoyed during the recent visits of President Obama and Queen Elizabeth ll. Not only did these visits do a great deal for our image abroad, they also made people here feel good about themselves. In the light of the bad times we have endured in recent years, it was great that everyone was so upbeat during the week in which the visits took place. We were delighted to take part in what occurred earlier this year.

In the context of capital projects, Rothe House in Kilkenny is a particularly fine example of a tourism product and the staff who work there are very committed to delivering a really good service to the many people who visit the house. I know they welcome a large number of visitors.

Kilkenny is known as the cultural heart of Ireland. However, I have not forgotten indigenous tourism which also needs to attract investment if alternative options are to be offered to the people. We must make an attempt to offer real value in valley periods of the market, in the interests of our balance of payments and in the light of the need to encourage people to invest in jobs at home. I can think of many alternative outdoor pursuits in my constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny, including boating and fishing on the natural asset that is the River Barrow. There is excellent mountaineering and the very best of eco-tourism in the area. We need to increase the appreciation of our beautiful counties of Carlow and Kilkenny. Given that it is full of arts and crafts and heritage interests, it is right that Kilkenny is regarded as the cultural heart of Ireland.

State investment through the Government, Leader and other partnership groups, locally and regionally promoted tourism interests and local authorities deserves to be acknowledged and

[Deputy Ann Phelan.]

encouraged. I would like to see a link between all of these in order that there is no overlap of resources. Those involved with the Leader programme, the remit of which centres on rural development but also extends to tourism, are doing extremely good work. I would like to see a link with them also. Their interests must be embedded in whatever emerges from the changes to the National Tourism Development Authority Act.

Food is becoming a huge attraction for tourists. The many small food festivals throughout the country are hugely important for the economies of small communities and villages. I would like Fáilte Ireland to provide grant aid for these small festivals, if possible. Those who organise these events obtain a substantial return from the limited amount of voluntary work and resources for which they look. Perhaps we can support, or continue to support, such festivals. It should not be very difficult for them to fill in the various returns. They are looking for small amounts of money, on which they will deliver significantly.

Deputy Eric Byrne: I want to make a specific case for the development of serious tourism amenities in the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains region. It is fantastic that Dublin is ideally located with its bay, rivers and mountains in close proximity. Some of these mountains are on the doorstep of the capital, within a 15-minute drive. If one is up early enough on a Sunday morning, one can drive to the heart of the Wicklow Mountains from Dublin in one hour. If one does not want to go into the depths of the mountains, one can get to closer areas in half an hour. I know these mountains intimately and suggest their tourism potential has not yet been exploited.

Although there has been an increase in the level of domestic walking — usually involving clubs and groups — there has been no comparable increase in the number of walking tourists from overseas. Any capital city would be blessed to have such a spectacularly beautiful range of mountains on its doorstep. I accept that there is a national park in County Wicklow, but if we were really serious about attracting tourists to these mountains, we would start by managing them. It is intimidating and frightening to see the outrageous destruction being caused by excessive walking in certain areas. The use of motorbikes and quad bikes is destroying some of our pre-Christian cairns. If the Minister of State, Deputy McGinley, has had the time to look at the damage done near Kilbride, he will know what I am talking about.

I applaud those charged with responsibility for the creation of facilities such as the wonderful boardwalk around Glendalough. If one travels away from that area on a misty day into the Wicklow Mountains proper — towards Lough Firrib, for example — one will not encounter any markings. Irish mountain ranges have practically no markings on their summits. There is usually no indication of how long it might take to get from one peak to another. I have walked in the High Tatras in France and on most of the mountains in Ireland. It is practically impossible to get lost while walking in France or in the High Tatras because the walks are so well marked. Markings tend to be painted on rocks or trees. In Ireland, however, we are in the infancy of the management of our mountains.

I appeal to the Minister of State to accept that the potential of our mountains is phenomenal and fantastic. There has been an increase in the footfall of local indigenous walkers, as I have said, but there has been no comparable increase in the number of tourists coming here to walk. If we are to attract such individuals, we must ensure they will feel safe in our mountain ranges and that the ways are marked. As the Minister of State is aware, weather conditions can change in minutes. The Wicklow Mountains are beautiful on a lovely sunny day, but the sun can disappear quickly. When the mist comes down, one can be in blizzard conditions before very long. I have experienced such conditions. It can be dangerous for those not well acquainted

with maps and compasses. Statistics show how many have died or got lost on our mountains. Figures are available to show how frequently mountain rescue teams have to be brought out.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: The figures are nothing like those for the Donegal mountains.

Deputy Eric Byrne: I believe someone had to be rescued in County Donegal the other day. The point I am making is that there is a phenomenal mountain range on the doorstep of the capital city. If one travels 30 minutes from the city, one can experience isolation, wilderness and pure beauty. However, we are not marketing these mountains properly.

I will conclude by congratulating those who help to maintain our mountain boardwalks. There is a little boardwalk on the way up Djouce Moundtain from near Lough Dan. There is phenomenal erosion in areas not covered by these small boardwalks. The destruction caused by those who regularly bring quad bikes and mountain bikes onto the mountains is frightening. I remind the Minister of State that if we want to attract tourists, we need to manage our delicate mountain environment. Sadly, our mountain ranges are not being managed.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: Time will tell whether I use all the time available to me. Having listened to Deputy Byrne, can I suggest a skiing industry be developed in the mountains he mentioned? It sounds like they have potential. I have to say I would be a little scared to go up them after hearing what the Deputy had to say. I do not like the idea that I might get caught on them.

I intend to vote in favour of this very good Bill. However, I would prefer if the cap was raised above the €150 million level proposed in the Bill. The country is short of money, obviously, but money is being spent on things we could do without. The footpath outside my house seems to be replaced every couple of years. No one asks for this to be done, but there is always money for it to be done. I would like the level of investment in the tourism industry to be ramped up beyond €150 million. The additional amount to be spent will be just over €100 million, because €43 million of the limited €65 million fund has already been spent. I would like this sum to be increased further. There is actually money available. We have lovely footpaths, as I said, and one would never have a problem getting anywhere on them. The problem is that when one uses them, there are not enough places to go to. It would be better to concentrate a little more on developing the destination, rather than the route to it.

When I learned I had to talk about the Bill for up to 20 minutes, I wondered what I could say about it for such a length of time. I suppose I would have no problem in talking for 20 minutes if I were to expand on its relevance to many other areas, as other Deputies seem to be doing.

Deputy Ann Phelan: It will not be a problem to the Deputy to talk for 20 minutes.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: I thank the Deputy. I will take that as a compliment.

There is massive potential for tourism to develop in those areas in which the industry has not concentrated on. I am not saying one should not try to develop tourism further in Deputy Fleming's area, Galway or Dublin where I accept tourist numbers have decreased. The potential for the industry to grow in such areas is more limited than it is in areas such as those from where I come. As I know my own locality best, I have more to say about it. It has massive tourism potential and there is absolutely wonderful access to it. This was not the case a number of years ago, but things have changed. There are two train lines going through my constituency — three, if one includes where it splits at Athlone and goes to Galway and to Westport. There is a fabulous airport at Knock which in my case, if one knows the correct road from my house, is only 17 minutes away. There is also one of the other major ingredients, potential

[Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan.]

accommodation. In our area, there are not enough hotels. That would require a great deal of investment. What there is, which suits family holidays, something I would not have understood a few years ago but do now that I have a family, is self-catering accommodation. Investment in this area could turn something that puts people off coming to many areas, namely ghost housing estates and empty apartment blocks, into a plus by developing these apartment blocks, where suitable. One would not put a tourist near some of them and if one put tourists in them, they would never come back to the country, but there is considerable potential in some areas. For example, there is an apartment block in my town with, I think, 35 empty apartments and nothing is happening with it bar that the bank we own now owns it. We own it and I suggest funding should be put in because then there would be accommodation in the area. There is access and accommodation, and there definitely is a product.

Galway, where I lived for many years, is a fabulous place, but is it eight times more interesting than south Leitrim and Roscommon? According to the figures in my possession, remarkably it is. Some €400 million was spent on tourism there in 2010, which is one hell of a figure considering how much of it has come back, but the most accurate comparable figure I could get for south Leitrim and Roscommon was €53 million. This is not an insult to where I come from, but we will never get to the level that Galway is at. If we aspire to reach one third the level of tourism revenue that Galway gets, then, going by the figures in my possession where for every €30,000 revenue created in this sector one gets a new job, we have the potential to create between 2,500 and 3,000 jobs.

We have the longest border with the River Shannon, the mightiest river in either Great Britain or Ireland, and its tributaries, including the River Suck. If one lives in an area, no more than those who live beside Niagara Falls who do not hear them anymore, you do not necessarily appreciate it. The River Suck was featured on a documentary on one of the national stations, either RTE or TG4, and after seeing it I thought it is such a fabulous river that one would nearly have to try not to get tourists in. Investment is needed in that area, for example, through, as Deputy Fleming and others stated, putting in fishing stands for those with a disability. The fishing stands would work equally as well for men and women — one would not need different ones. The Department needs to put in that infrastructure.

We are very close to having the perfect product but we need a little more investment to create a few more facilities in areas so there are clusters. As one of the Deputies opposite stated, tourists will not come for only one amenity; they will come for many. If there are a few amenities together, they will have a greater reason to come.

I do not know what it is in the nature of many Irish people that they are quick to run their own town down. I do not know why that is so but it spreads a negative message about an area. When one looks closely at rural areas such as mine, they are amazing. They are wonderful and unique. They offer something that Killarney, Dublin and Galway do not offer. They offer tranquility. One will not go to Galway city for tranquility. One will go there for a hell of a time rather than tranquility and we should be marketing and selling rural areas accordingly.

There are examples of where moving funding from areas, such as the building of unnecessary footpaths, into other projects can create significant employment. For example, in my first few weeks as a councillor I sought to get my local swimming pool opened all year round and was told there was not enough money. Over a six month period, they spent approximately €280,000 on three projects in my town that no-one wanted, no-one asked for and no-one would be bothered if they never happened, but the people would have been elated if that funding had been spent on the swimming pool, for local reasons as well as from the point of view of developing tourism.

I hope the Government will consider increasing this cap above €150 million because when one spreads around the country the €100 million that will be left after this, it will not go too far. If the Government did increase the cap, it would certainly pay for itself rather quickly. For example, the swimming pool project on which I am working needs €475,000, which would ensure a pool that is currently losing approximately €75,000 every summer — it is open for three months of the year — could be brought to a position where it would employ six or seven staff, would no longer lose money, would bring people into the local area and would be that last piece in the jigsaw in making family holidays viable. Also, with the €470,000 or €480,000 that the Government would spend on it, so much would come in in taxes, whether from the staff employed, VAT, etc. that one is not talking about such considerable expenditure, and yet one would have a final piece in a jigsaw which would make tourism viable in my area. As a parent who goes on holidays with his kids who always want to go to a swimming pool, if there is not one in an area, we do not go within miles of the place because it is no good. The same is the case for many who want to go on holidays.

Another matter mentioned earlier is the Internet and mobile technology using Bluetooth, etc. That must be developed much further. Many Members will have an app on their iPhone where they can tap the map, it zooms in on the area the more one taps, and it goes to any town in Ireland and reveals tags in individual businesses in each area on what is happening. This means that in areas such as mine — it is not sustainable to have a tourist office in every town as it would not make sense — one has now a virtual tourist office in every town. Whatever it would take to get more people in these areas onto those maps should be done so businesses which, perhaps, thought it was not worth their while would be given an incentive.

Another area that needs to be explored is that of more joined-up thinking. At this stage, it is nearly tedious to mention joined-up thinking, because it has been around for so long and no-one ever seems to adopt it. The Government can spend all of this money but tourism will not grow if it does not create a tie-in from all the other areas, such as the local authorities, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

I mention the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from the point of view of food tourism and developing the area of markets so that if a tourist comes into a town, he or she does not end up having to go to one of the German superstores, the only advantage of which is that they know exactly where the bread is because it is in the same place as where they came from. The Department should get involved in helping develop markets. Unfortunately, since the 1950s and the 1960s, when Ireland was far from perfect and when in many ways I would not have liked to lived there, a town such as mine, Roscommon town, Strokestown and Mohill in Leitrim, all had markets and were teaming with life. There were cows on the street and cabbage plants for sale. There was loads of different things, such as those one sees now in France and Italy. There was more life in evidence. If funding could be put into that area, which is why I think the funding the Department is spending on this needs to be raised, it would help considerably.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government needs to come on board on this because the countryside is strewn with rubbish and litter. When I was addressing this issue last week to the Minister, Deputy Hogan, I made the point that the polluter pays principle is a great idea but asked what happens if the polluter cannot afford to pay and what will the Department do as rubbish will end up in the wrong place. Also, there are many people who can afford to get rid of their rubbish but do not do it either — I am not picking out a particular person. Nevertheless, all of these items are required to be put right before we can maximise the potential of tourism.

[Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan.]

There is also a role for the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and especially local authorities when it comes to fixing a bad bend on a road. Although it is the policy of many councils to replace a ditch or hedging when they remove a bend, in general, one ends up with a chain-link fence and concrete posts which are not very attractive to tourists and for which they do not come here. There is also the replacement of stone walls with concrete mass structures. Are we trying to run people who come here out of the country? This is a recipe for disaster. They may believe they are saving money, but it will simply cost them a great deal more in the long run.

I have referred to ghost housing estates and how unsightly they appear, but there is also the issue of derelict buildings. There are derelict buildings in many towns throughout the country with which people have no money to do anything. If they try to do something with such a building, they must do certain things to maintain its heritage and must do so in the right way, rightly so. However, this often leads to a situation where it costs a ridiculous amount of money to do the work and the building falls into disrepair or down around everyone's ears, which makes the place appear rather untidy and not the type of place to which one might wish to go on holiday.

We should concentrate on getting costs down also. My parliamentary assistant who must be too well paid, was on holidays in Germany two weeks ago. He came back with the news that one could have a slap-up meal and two pints in Berlin for €10. This is in Germany, a highly developed economy, possibly one of the most developed in the world. Where could one do that here? One cannot. One can buy a pint of beer in Berlin for €2.10 and it is nicer beer than what is produced here. We must bring down costs to try to compete with this and tne way to do so is to do something about rates. My suggestion to bring them down is to get rid of all the directors of services and use the money spent on them to reduce rates. Also, we should get rid of 75% of councillors because they do not have any power; therefore, there is no point in having them. In that way one could reduce rates and businesses could bring down their costs. Obviously, people would be more likely to come here as a result.

The high level of wages is another issue. Wages do not appear to be especially high when one is living in this country because the cost of everything else is also high, including one's mortgage. However, as long as there is a situation where someone working in an hotel has a €200,000 or €400,000 mortgage to service, we will never be able to bring down costs. Something must be done about the amount of people's outputs if we are to become more competitive. The person who works in the Bierstube in Berlin does not have to pay out €1,000 or €2,000 to repay his or her mortgage and as a result does not need as much money on which to live. People here would be happier on less money if they could buy more with their money. In such circumstances visitors would be more likely to come here.

The euro currency has crippled us when it comes to the British market. The currency is fine for Germany and the Netherlands. It is appropriate for their economies, but it makes us highly uncompetitive. I realise everyone might be horrified at the prospect that we might be obliged to leave the euro, but I foresee many advantages if we could leave it in a managed way. At this stage being part of the euro is like being part of a religion my mother warned me against. She said, "It is easy to get in, but they will not let you back out again." This seems to be the case with the euro.

All of these measures could help. Certainly, I do not have all the answers, but some of my suggestions could help greatly. Those living in areas such as where I come from will not see a vast number of jobs being created by multinationals in the years ahead; therefore, we must go with what we have. They cannot transfer our beauty spots to another country and the jobs with

them. They cannot take our great food which we can continue to produce forever. I will vote for this measure. I would prefer to see more money being invested because it would be the best money ever spent in the country if done in the right way since the potential of the tourism industry is phenomenal in the area from which I come and other similar areas that have not been exploited to their true and full potential.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I welcome the Bill. In recent years tourism and agriculture have been largely forgotten about. There had been a strong market during the years, but, unfortunately, we experienced the so-called building boom. When people were selling houses to one another, we took our eye off the potential of the tourism industry. I welcome the Government's announcements, especially on Lough Rynn in my constituency, where funding has been granted for a rowing centre. This is part of the thinking outside the box of how to invest in local tourism ventures.

Before I became involved in politics, I was involved in an action group, the Lough Key Forest Park action group. Coillte was handed a vast park and had no mandate to make money from tourism initiatives. As a consequence, it could do nothing with the park. I brought the matter to the attention of the local authority and people in the area sought control of the park. They were afraid that, being a semi-State body, Coillte could sell it. At the time funding was available from the European Regional Development Fund which was able to grant aid any project to a figure of 80%. I approached the then local authority manager with a proposal and suggested the local authority get involved with Coillte in order that we could draw down project funding of €8 million from the European Union. The total cost would be €10 million. However, the manager declined my proposal, suggesting it presented too much of a risk. Some eight years ago a new country manager arrived and we had a sum of €2 million. We received €8 million from the European Union and now Lough Key Forest Park attracts more than 200,000 visitors per year. It has resulted in significant investment in the area but it is also a win-win for the local authority. There is a facility worth approximately €10 million which forms part of the tourism infrastructure and more could take place there.

I agree with Deputy 'Ming' Flanagan that a great deal more could be attained from investment in tourism. I thank the Government for getting rid of the travel tax. This provided an incentive and reducing the VAT rate has also brought down costs. However, there is more to be done. I travel to Germany, the United Kingdom and France where accommodation is a good deal cheaper. Previously, we lost sight of the fundamentals. One must offer value and a welcome. We have brought down costs in the past two years. However, prior to that, it was galling and embarrassing. I recall travelling to Switzerland 25 years ago. We almost could not afford to buy a drink because it was so expensive. When I returned there three years ago, the price of a pint was two thirds of the cost in Ireland which shows that we lost sight of what was happening and that we had killed the market by raising prices here.

There are many initiatives that could be taken. We should consider the position of the United Kingdom. However, we have a unique selling point, that is, the Irish welcome which we should exploit. We should consider what has taken place during the years. I am keen to see certain things happen. In this regard, the provision of walking routes and cycleways is important. The Government has provided for some investment to open cycle paths and there is talk of getting people from A to B, but in Holland it is easy to cycle 40 to 50 miles because the cycle paths and other infrastructure is in place.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: They have nicer tobacco too.

Deputy Frank Feighan: That is illegal in this country, seemingly.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: It is illegal there too.

Deputy Frank Feighan: Allegedly. There is a certain type of tourism in Holland, although it is not the type of tourism I would like in this country as we would look for a purer tourism.

There are many aspects, such as our music and heritage. Many people who come to Ireland visit places like Croghan in Roscommon. We have a great difficulty with Ryanair and Aer Lingus flights coming into Dublin because we need to get people away from the city. It is our fault as well in that we will go to Paris or Düsseldorf and then tell everyone we have been to France or Germany.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joanna Tuffy): The Deputy should adjourn. He will be in possession when the debate resumes.

Debate adjourned.

Message from Seanad

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joanna Tuffy): Seanad Éireann has passed the European Financial Stability Facility and Euro Area Loan Facility (Amendment) Bill 2011, without amendment.

Topical Issue Matters

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joanna Tuffy): I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 27A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Nicky McFadden — the emergency department in the Midland Regional Hospital Mullingar ; (2) Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn — the impact on community safety of the proposed closure of more than 200 Garda stations, particularly in smaller rural communities such as County Donegal which may lose up to 24 Garda stations according to media reports; (3) Deputy James Bannon — the need for the Minister for Education and Skills to give urgent consideration to designating Longford as the headquarters of the County Longford and County Westmeath amalgamated VECs in light of its prime location and the significant capital investment by the Department of Education and Skills in VEC infrastructure in Longford over the past two years; (4) Deputy Catherine Murphy — the notification by the HSE that it will not fund the operation of the only centre specialising in domestic violence in Kildare, Teach Tearmainn. The new purpose-built centre was funded by the HSE and caters for the whole of County Kildare which is now the fourth most populated county with 209,000. There is a particularly young demographic. This decision comes at a time when refuges in Ireland generally are experiencing a huge increase in the demand for their services. To have a building that could provide a measure of safety to women and children and not be in beneficial use can surely not be justified as a good use of the millions it cost to build; (5) Deputies Joan Collins, Clare Daly and Richard Boyd Barrett — the future of the Rowan ward at Cherry Orchard Hospital, Dublin; (6) Deputy Derek Keating — the urgent and serious situation of public transport in Dublin city and the decision by Dublin Bus to alter many services without notice or consultation which is affecting up to 500,000 users. This non-consultative practice has been engaged in by Dublin Bus which is funded by the Exchequer to provide a public service and is responsible for providing a city wide service from, for example, Rathcoole to the Irish Financial Services Centre, Lucan to UCD and Clondalkin to O'Connell Street. Recently Dublin Bus has initiated bus timetable changes, re-routing of services and the cutting of a number of services without any consultation with the customers who rely on such a service to get to work, the city, hospitals and important appointments. I also want to raise under the topical issue debate the practice of Dublin Bus reducing its services after 10am where some routes have no service for 40 minutes or an hour, yet the company is in receipt of large sums of public funds

from the Department of Social Protection to meet the free travel and disability travel permits which it does not audit when assessing the activity of a service to and from the city; (7) Deputy Eoghan Murphy — ministerial plans to pursue disarmament and non-proliferation in the coming year; (8) Deputy Noel Harrington — the -position with regard to tier 1 international connectivity. A new Hibernia express cable is being laid from the UK to the USA with the potential to insert a branching unit into the southern part of the country through Cork. A limited window of opportunity exists, with a decision needing to be taken before 30 September 2011, as once the UK-USA cable is laid, the branching unit cannot be inserted once in service. The benefits would include protecting current industry and promoting job creation. Tier 1 international connectivity in the southern part of the country would present all regional hubs along the Atlantic corridor and the south west as serious candidate locations as a European headquarters for data-centric companies, Internet players and financial services organisations, or back-up locations for their presence in other European locations, while at the same time protecting and promoting the competitiveness of indigenous and multinational industry in regional Ireland. A lot of progress has been made in recent weeks to advance the prospects of the new tier 1 connector via the Hibernia Atlantic new cable which would significantly enhance connectivity, improve latency and reduce telecommunication costs along the Atlantic corridor and the south. The Cork Chamber of Commerce and its members fully support this project given the significant opportunity it presents to Ireland. I ask that this matter be considered as a matter of urgency, urge the Minister for Communications Energy and Natural Resources to give his full support to this project and call on the Minister to outline his views on this project and state the support he intends to give to it; (9) Deputy Thomas Pringle — the need to restore the exceptional needs payment for applicants for social housing who are offered accommodation in properties secured under long-term leasing arrangements by local authorities; (10) Deputy Seán Conlan — the HSE proposal to reduce the opening hours of the minor injuries unit at Monaghan Hospital; (11) Deputy Dessie Ellis — the plans to transfer the role of administering rent supplement from welfare officers to local authorities; (12) Deputy Joe Costello — the need to ensure no family loses their home owing to inability to pay their mortgage; and (13) Deputy Brendan Smith — the need to engage Aviva and IDA Ireland to protect as many jobs as possible.

The matters raised by Deputies Eoghan Murphy, Brendan Smith, Joe Costello and Joan Collins, Clare Daly and Richard Boyd Barrett have been selected for discussion.

Topical Issue Debate

Nuclear Disarmament Initiative

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: As the Minister of State, Deputy Creighton, will be aware, yesterday, 21 September, was the international day of peace, a day that has been recognised by the UN for the past 29 years. It was also the first day of the opening of the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly, where leaders from around the world have come together to discuss their plans for progressing peace and human security for the coming year.

Our first endeavours in the United Nations in the 1950s were always in pursuit of peace, be it in sending peacekeepers around the world, as we have done for many decades and continue to do, or in the control of nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament generally. Indeed, the first Minister sent to the United Nations in the 1950s, Mr. Frank Aiken, pursued a treaty on the non-dissemination of nuclear nations. In 1961, the Irish resolution adopted by the UN took a hold of that vision and in 1965 was converted into the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,

[Deputy Eoghan Murphy.]

NPT. We have continued to work in the pursuit of arms control and disarmament since then and, most recently, at the review conference for the NPT in 2010, we were very successful in achieving some significant progress in nuclear weapons zone in the Middle East and will continue to work towards those endeavours. We have also worked very successfully in trying to abolish landmines and cluster munitions. In 2008, a declaration was signed in Dublin that brought into effect the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Peace day is about more than one day, however. We must continue with these efforts on a constant basis until we have achieved a world that is free from the threat of nuclear weapons and other such threats. Tomorrow in New York, on the margins of the General Assembly, there will be a conference on facilitating the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, also known as the Article 14 conference. This is a treaty that was opened for signature 15 years ago, in 1996, yet it still has not come into force. It is the next most important step in achieving a world free of nuclear weapons and the next most important piece of architecture in the nuclear non-proliferation regime, yet it is still not in force.

There are nine countries involved but it is two states that have held out from signing and ratifying the treaty. It is imperative that Ireland, given its position and its history of involvement in this area, pursues that goal, particularly the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, and that it gives dedicated effort to achieving finally the entry into force of that treaty sooner rather than later. This was the last major WMD arms control treaty to be negotiated by the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, a conference which has been in stalemate for the past 12 years, which is a disgrace. We must also make efforts in this regard.

The Tánaiste is at the UN General Assembly at present. I wish him well in his endeavours and in the negotiations and bilateral meetings he will hold.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Lucinda Creighton): I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. His timing is excellent. Disarmament and non-proliferation is a priority and the Government is committed to seeking further progress in this area in the coming year. As the Deputy pointed out, Ireland's engagement on this agenda goes back to the 1950s and then Minister, Mr. Frank Aiken. Nuclear non-proliferation and implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty have been priorities of Irish Governments for more than 50 years and we have a proud record of engagement and achievement in this very important field.

The NPT, the primary international mechanism for controlling the spread of nuclear weapons, is reviewed every five years. The 2010 review conference adopted forward-looking action plans across all three pillars of the treaty — disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy — and on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Full implementation of these plans would considerably reinforce the non-proliferation regime. The first preparatory committee in the 2015 review cycle will take place in Vienna in May 2012, and this will offer an important opportunity to assess progress. Ireland played a crucial role in the 2010 negotiations and it is our intention that we will maintain our active role in the upcoming review cycle.

A number of practical steps were agreed in 2010 on implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution, including the convening of a conference in 2012 on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. Ireland brokered this important agreement. While progress on its implementation has been disappointing to date, I hope the 2012 conference will take place and Ireland will do all it can to make it a success.

An important objective for the coming year here will be to negotiate a strong and robust arms trade treaty at a diplomatic conference in New York. This must address the challenges posed by unregulated trade in conventional arms and their diversion to the illicit market, and it must prevent these weapons from threatening security and development or violating human rights and international humanitarian law. Ireland has been active in preparatory work for an arms trade treaty, and this continues to be a priority issue. There will also be a review in 2012 of the UN programme of action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons which cause death and injury to hundreds of thousands of people every year, and Ireland will work to strengthen the programme of action.

The Government remains firmly committed to the elimination of all cluster munitions, which cause unacceptable harm to civilians, and implementation and universalisation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, CCM, adopted in Dublin in 2008, is a key objective. At the second meeting of States Parties in Beirut earlier this month, Ireland was appointed co-ordinator on clearance for 2012-13. It is the Government's intention to work hard in the year ahead to make significant progress in supporting implementation of the CCM on this key provision on clearance and destruction of cluster munition remnants, an area in which Ireland has considerable expertise. We also hope that it will be possible to conclude a CCW protocol in Geneva this year, compatible with and complementary to the CCM, which will extend further the protection of civilians from unacceptable harm caused by cluster munitions.

A critical concern remains the dysfunctional UN disarmament machinery, particularly the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, which, as the Deputy noted, has failed to do substantive work for more than a decade. An important priority is revitalisation of the machinery to make it more responsive to 21st century challenges.

I assure the Deputy and the House of the Government's commitment to work to the full to achieve progress on the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda in the year ahead.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I thank the Minister of State. It is very encouraging to hear that the Government is preparing for the 2015 review conference on the NPT. It is particularly encouraging that the Middle East review will be going ahead in 2012, and I wish everyone the very best in that regard because it is very important to what we are trying to achieve in that region as well as in the wider world in regard to nuclear weapons disarmament.

With regard to the measures being pursued at present in regard conventional weapons, it is very commendable that we have a commitment in this area, both through the UN system and also through the NGO system. I wish the Government the very best on both those tracks.

The Tánaiste will become chairman of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe next year. I am the head of the Oireachtas delegation to the parliamentary assembly for the OSCE and I offer him and his Department all my support in everything he hopes to achieve next year. The delegation will be interested in meeting the Minister to hear more about his plans while chairman of that organisation and I look forward to hearing from him in that regard.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: I will be brief. I again thank the Deputy for drawing Members' attention to this issue. The Government's preparations for taking over the chairmanship of the OSCE are at an advanced stage. In the course of the autumn, I will undertake a considerable amount of bilateral work in which I will be wearing two hats, one obviously in respect of EU bilateral relations and the other pertaining to preparations for the OSCE and meeting other interested parties across the European Union and beyond.

I am proud of Ireland's record in the area of disarmament. We are rightly perceived internationally as having credibility and as having given strong leadership and unwavering commit-

[Deputy Lucinda Creighton.]

ment to achieving a nuclear weapons-free world. We have contributed to significant and not insubstantial achievements in freeing the world of landmines and cluster munitions. I assure Members the Government is committed to working to continue to make a difference in respect of both nuclear and conventional disarmament and in strengthening the non-proliferation regime. Implementation of the final document of the 2010 review conference and of the Convention on Cluster Munitions adopted in Croke Park three years ago are priorities, as is the negotiation of a robust arms trade treaty during next year's negotiations in New York. I note that while treaties are in place in a number of areas, what is needed in many cases is action to fulfil existing commitments, rather than new initiatives. As I indicated previously, making the dysfunctional disarmament machinery work is fundamental for the future. Progress in recent years has been facilitated by an improved international environment and renewed political will on the part of a number of states in possession of large arsenals of inhumane weaponry. It is to be hoped this will be maintained and translated into concrete steps and action, particularly in the forthcoming non-proliferation treaty review cycle. The ultimate goal of course is a nuclear weapons-free world and the Government will do all it can in the coming year to bring us closer to that day.

Job Protection

Deputy Brendan Smith: Aviva Insurance employs 2,000 people across the State and has enjoyed a profitable year to date according to its mid-year results. It announced significant changes in its operations last May, which should have been a clear indicator of possible job losses but the Government still has not taken any action and has stated it will wait until the company completes its review.

Aviva Insurance is a British company that employs 1,200 people in Dublin, 200 in Cork, 200 in Galway and additional staff in various branches throughout the country totalling 2,000 staff. Ireland is the only European country in which Aviva has life insurance, general insurance and health insurance operations. Aviva posted positive half-year results in August 2011 and overall, the company reported a 5% increase in its operating profit, up to €1.5 billion, and an increase of 21% in its operating profits in Europe to more than €600 million.

In the first six months of the year, general insurance and health premiums increased by 5% at the insurer, due to strong sales of its health insurance products, as it is benefitting from consumers exiting from the VHI. On the investment side, it reported life and pensions sales in Ireland increased by 16%, "following continued opportunistic sales of single premium investment bonds". Given these results, there must be scope for Aviva to retain its employment numbers. It is important that the Government and the IDA exploit all opportunities these positive figures present to retain jobs.

The company announced in May it is moving its European headquarters from Dublin to London, having established it in the former in only 2009. More relevant to possible job losses, it announced it was restructuring its business. The fact the company announced last May it was undertaking significant changes should have alerted the Government to possible future job losses. Did the Government or its agencies take any steps at that early stage? According to an internal Aviva review seen by RTE's "Prime Time" programme, between 300 to 500 jobs are under review as the company considers moving part of its general insurance operation to Britain.

The company has refused to confirm or deny possible job losses and has stated such talk is premature. I understand this was the response received by the Unite trade union in its recent discussions with the company's management. The Taoiseach, Deputy Kenny, stated media reports about job losses were causing "great anxiety and concern for those who work in Aviva"

Moreover, in the Dáil yesterday, he declared "It is only right and proper that I do not comment on this until such time as the company arrives at its conclusions, having carried out its analysis." The IDA has been in contact with Aviva but according to the Taoiseach, it cannot make any judgment on the latter's future until the internal review by the company is carried out. It must be the Government's role to be proactive on these issues. As the company is currently in the process of reviewing its options, this is the precise stage at which the Government can have a positive input, rather than leaving it until the company has made decisions.

Finally, all Members are conscious of the concerns of the workers and the families regarding their future job prospects.

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Sean Sherlock): I thank Deputy Smith for raising this matter. My primary concern is with the workers facing uncertainty today. Taking account of the domestic economy, Aviva has decided to review its operations to ensure its capacity is in line with domestic demand to ensure sustainability. Industry figures show that general insurance has fallen by more than 20% in the past two years, while life insurance and pensions have fallen by more than 30%, due to concerns over long-term savings and people cancelling or reducing pension policies. Aviva has stated it is committed fully to Ireland and is currently in discussions with unions representing staff about the review. Until this review has been completed, it would be premature to speculate about the outcome. To be fair, it is pertinent that the Government allows the unions to engage with Aviva to see where that process might go.

As for the role of the IDA, the Deputy has greater knowledge than me in this regard and is well aware that it supports multinational companies predominantly trading outside Ireland or internationally. As part of its business in working to attract international activities into Ireland from multinational companies, the IDA has been in contact with Aviva at both corporate and local levels. The Minister has asked the IDA, given its knowledge of the company, to continue to work with it to mitigate any possible negative outcomes. Consequently, the IDA has been active in this regard.

Ireland has succeeded in building an international financial services industry that is diverse in the activities carried out and which enjoys a world-leading reputation in several sectors. While the past three years have represented a severe stress test for all the financial centres, firms at the International Financial Services Centre have shown resilience and flexibility. Employing 33,000 people directly and many more indirectly, the IFSC remains both critical as an employer and as a centre of economic activity. The goal of ensuring that jobs and economic activity are protected is a mainstay for the Government and I ask that Members allow further review to take place and for the discussions to conclude with the unions representing the staff. The Government undoubtedly will engage at a later point.

4 o'clock

Acting Chairman (Deputy Joanna Tuffy): Will a copy of the Minister of State's contribution be furnished to Members in due course? It does not appear to have been supplied.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: Yes, certainly.

Deputy Brendan Smith: It will be fine if it is circulated later to Members.

I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Sherlock, for his response. He made some comments recently with regard to the industrial development agencies in general and the IDA in particular and I share the views he expressed. I note his statement today referred to the success of the financial services industry and the inward investment in recent years. Moreover, in many of his statements on the investment in research and development that now is paying dividends, he

[Deputy Brendan Smith.]

quite rightly lauds the policies that have been developed and implemented over the past decade.

None of us is suggesting we come into conflict with the union's position, proposals or discussion with the company.

It is much better that a Government representative, such as the Minister, Deputy Bruton, or the Minister of State conveys to the company the concerns of the workers and community. We want to maintain and increase the number of jobs in the country if possible. Based on the figures I quoted, Aviva is a very profitable company and is doing extremely well.

I hope the Government will not be responding to a negative announcement from the company. It is essential that members of the Government at ministerial level take an active approach to convey to the company our anxiety that it retains its staffing complement in the country at a difficult time for employment. The Government can, in its deliberations with the company, deal with any concerns it might have and provide an analysis of the economy.

Sending a development agency to deal with the company on its own when there is a major threat to jobs is not adequate. I am sure the Minister of State agrees the Government has to take a hands on approach to this issue when people's jobs and livelihoods are at stake. We all sincerely hope jobs and livelihoods are not at stake and want to ensure we take every opportunity to send a clear message to the company that we want it to retain its staffing complement on our island.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I acknowledge the Deputy's statement. There is no sense of complacency on the part of the Government on this issue. We must have regard to the fact the Cabinet has asked the IDA, given its knowledge of the company, to continue to work with it to mitigate any possible negative outcomes.

Let us be frank. I can dance around the language of redundancies and job losses but if a multinational company that transcends many boundaries has decided the course of action it will take, it is difficult for Governments to influence decisions. Nobody wants job losses but sometimes decisions are made in other centres, financial powerhouses and capital cities other than Dublin.

The key point is for us to engage with the company and try to move it from its current trajectory in terms of job losses. We will do everything we can in that respect. If the company makes a decision God or man will not shift it. We should be honest and frank about the discourse. We must try to ensure the same situation as TalkTalk does not arise and there is an early warning system that ensures we can engage with a company to try to stem the flow of job losses and learn valuable lessons to ensure the policy is tapered to have the right mix of companies.

I will engage further with the Minister, Deputy Bruton. The Deputy's comments are on the record of the House and I will relate them to the Minister and the IDA.

Housing Policy

Deputy Joe Costello: I am delighted to welcome the Minister of State. The new approach to dealing with topical issues is excellent. It is my first time speaking on it.

Deputy Seán Crowe: If the Deputy gets an answer.

Deputy Joe Costello: If we do not get the right answer we will pursue it. At least we have an opportunity to do so. In the previous system we could not pursue anything, there was a set reply and that was the end of it.

How we deal with housing and distressed mortgages, in particular the family home, is a major burning issue of the day. The family home is sacrosanct and a fundamental principle should inform all our deliberations, namely, that no family should ever have the roof over its head taken from it because of an inability to meet its payments. As long as a family is making a serious effort to deal with the situation — circumstances have arisen such as mortgages, employment and other things — it should not lose the roof over its head.

There is a very strong declaration of intent from the Government in its programme for national recovery. A policy of putting the interests of big developers and the banks ahead of people looking to purchase a home was a direct cause of Ireland's disastrous property boom and bust, something I am sure the Minister of State knows. The Government is committed to helping homeowners in distress to weather the recession and ensure Ireland has a sustainable housing policy. Both parties believe more protection is needed for homeowners with distressed mortgages. The recommendations of the Cooney report are inadequate to address the scale of the current crisis and a more radical approach is needed to protect families in fear of losing their homes.

We all agree it is the intention of the Government to address those issues. We need to determine how to put it into practical operation. A two-year moratorium has been introduced, mortgage interest supplement is available and there is the flexibility of interest only repayments. We now need to have more radical reforms because the number of people having difficulty with their mortgage repayments is increasing by the day.

I am dealing with two deadlines on 1 October. A self employed consultant became unemployed and was entitled to nothing. He has three young daughters in secondary school. He was not entitled to jobseeker's allowance, mortgage interest supplement or the advice of a community welfare officer. No aspect of the current system is of any value to him.

After much toing and froing he eventually managed sort out his jobseeker's allowance but has been adamantly refused any mortgage interest supplement because his wife is working. She is on a low wage but it has prevented him from accessing it. The repayments for a home that was bought during the boom are substantial and he is simply not able to meet them. He is facing repossession on 1 October and the matter has been put into the hands of a debt collection agency which is insisting on it.

The second case involves a 73 year old woman who ten years ago signed over her house to her son when he started a garage business on the understanding, but without the legal provision, that she would be there for the rest of her life. The bank is now owed more than the value of the house, repossession has been sought and the court has determined that she has to be out by 1 October.

She has been told by the debt collection agency to go to the local authority who will deal with the issue, but it has told her it cannot do anything until the house is handed over, in other words until she has been evicted from her home. Is it satisfactory that the roof is taken from over the head of the poor senior citizen concerned simply because the market operates in an unreal and artificial fashion?

There are many such cases. I look forward to the response of the Minister of State.

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): I thank the Deputy for raising the matter. He assured me that this is his first time to speak on Topical Issue Matters and it is also my first time. I hope it proves to be a more useful engagement on the issues.

The issue to which he referred, on which there is common cause among all Members, is that no family home should be lost because of inability to pay a mortgage. The programme for

[Deputy Brian Hayes.]

Government proposes to introduce "a two year moratorium on repossessions of modest family homes where a family makes an honest effort to pay their mortgage". Of course there will always be circumstances in which it may be in an individual's interest because of burdening debt to get a fresh start. However, in the great majority of cases, including the two examples the Deputy put on the record, we must use as an instrument of public policy a clear desire and determination to ensure people can stay in their homes and work through their financial difficulties.

As the Deputy is aware we now have in place the recommendations of the Cooney report, which came to a conclusion last year. The biggest new issue from that is the proposed introduction of a deferred interest payment whereby if people can pay two thirds of the interest on the mortgage, one third can be set aside. Given that it has taken eight months for this system to be introduced, we must ask whether the banks are operating this. Are people seeking it or even aware of it? When people get into the kinds of difficulties the Deputy mentioned, the first objective must be to get to some manageable payment, regardless of how small, for a period of time to see if the person can work through his or her difficulties. The Minister for Finance has been clear in his direction to the banks and lending agencies to ensure that option is available to people.

The Government's economic council, comprising the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister for Finance and Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, has asked for a report on this issue by the end of the month to analyse what further action can be taken. The Deputy rightly referred to the mortgage interest relief component, rent supports and now the new deferred interest proposal, but not enough is being done. Many banks are now restructuring debts, but the question is whether they are doing so in a realistic manner. The most recent information worryingly indicates that even on those mortgages that had been restructured, a significant proportion got into difficulty again, which begs the question as to whether banks are being realistic about what people can afford to pay.

The Government is acutely aware of the issue. The economic council, a very important subcommittee of Cabinet, has asked for this report by the end of the month. Following that report, which I presume will be published, we will then consider what additional measures can be taken by the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Finance, other Departments, the Central Bank and others to ensure we manage the issue and achieve the objective of ensuring that people do not lose their homes.

The level of repossessions in this country by comparison with the UK and other countries is still relatively low. I believe my prepared script points out that figures from the Central Bank show that by the end of June this year, 54 residential properties here had been repossessed. In the same period there were 119 voluntary surrenders. Those figures are relatively small in the context of the numbers with which we are dealing. The bigger issue is the insurmountable debt people have and in time the Government will introduce additional measures to address that and make it manageable.

Deputy Joe Costello: I thank the Minister of State for that reply and his prepared script also seems comprehensive — I look forward to having some bedside reading from it.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I hope the oral reply is better than the written reply. I think it probably is.

Deputy Joe Costello: The quantity is there — I will check the quality. Certainly the oral reply was excellent. However, I have not received an answer to the question I posed. The Government should abide by the fundamental principle that no family should lose the roof

over their heads. We then need a mechanism to prevent that happening where there is an honest effort being made by the household members, who may no longer include a breadwinner because of the circumstances that have arisen, to do what they can to sort it out. A safety net needs to be put in place to continue the process rather than simply taking court action that seeks repossession and the involvement of a debt collection agency which has no care in the world other than to extract what it can, including repossession if the debt cannot be dealt with.

There is the commitment to the personal debt management agency which would have quasi-judicial powers. A safety net needs to be introduced as quickly as possible to assist people such as the 54 people who have had repossessions and the 119 who surrendered possession voluntarily. We do not know what happened in other cases where people move lock, stock and barrel to Australia or elsewhere and leave everything behind. However, we must provide the support for the thousands of people who are in serious debt arrears. The existing supports are very welcome — we need to look at how the bank restructuring has taken place there, but at present we do not have a bottom line, which I would like the Minister of State to address.

Deputy Brian Hayes: The Deputy's point is well made. What is the principle? The principle is that people can stay in their homes and some form of debt resettlement is put in place. However, it is not realistic to suggest that would happen in every circumstance — I am not suggesting that is what the Deputy is proposing. On some occasions because of the level of indebtedness it is not in the interest of the person for that principle to be extended wholesale.

The Deputy has referred to the very sensible suggestion of a personal debt management agency which is, as he knows, contained in the programme for Government. This would operate as a halfway house between the banks and the people to come to a fair assessment as to whether the banks have reached a settlement. There is considerable merit in what he is saying. I know this is an issue the expert group is reviewing and will come to a view with Government in due course.

There is a fundamental point as follows. At the moment, if I am dealing with a bank that comes to a view as to the level of indebtedness and how much I can afford to pay, even if I disagree with its assessment, where do I go to appeal it? I appeal it to an appeal board within the bank — it is an internal decision of the bank as the Deputy will be aware. We need a beefed up agency like the Credit Review Office for small business, which comes to an independent assessment given all the information. That has the advantage, first, that the banks are given a clear steer and, second, if it ever gets to court there is an independent assessment of the facts and figures presented to that agency. That would make considerable sense. I am not second-guessing the outcome of the expert group that is due to report shortly.

Deputy Joe Costello: Will that be at the end of this month?

Deputy Brian Hayes: I understand the economic council expects to receive the report by the end of the month. It will then be a matter for Cabinet to make a policy decision on it. The proposal the Deputy has made, which is in the programme for Government, is under active consideration at the moment. The Government is minded to pursue this suggestion once the Cabinet has had a chance to review the expert group's report.

Hospital Services

Deputy Joan Collins: Before making a few points about the future of the Rowan ward at Cherry Orchard Hospital in Ballyfermot, as the Minister of State is probably aware, according to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre website there are approximately 7,000 reported cases of HIV in Ireland, including 331 new HIV diagnoses in 2010, comprising 240 males and 89 females. There were 134 new HIV diagnoses among the category of men who have sex with

[Deputy Joan Collins.]

men. There were 123 new cases among the heterosexual category, 54 male and 69 female, in 2010. One of the saddest findings is that 136 babies were born with HIV in Ireland last year.

I give that information to set the context because many people might not know that the 18-bed Rowan Ward in Cherry Orchard Hospital in Ballyfermot is the only public HIV unit in the country, to the best of our knowledge. People travel from Cork, Galway, Donegal and elsewhere if they need to access treatment in that hospital. That in itself is wrong. We should not have only one public HIV respite unit in the country. We have begun to hear rumblings from the HSE — through the usual manner in which it gets word out that it is about to close a ward or that there are problems — that this ward could be closed.

This ward is a safety net for the thousands of people with HIV who need to come into the unit to get reassessed if they become ill, or to be properly fed and get proper rest. It is a very important ward. Many of the people to whom we talked believe the ward is a lifeline for them. If they did not have access to this ward, they would be in serious trouble. Many people who access the ward are homeless and need the services in Cherry Orchard Hospital. St. James's Hospital treats patients going through the chaotic and chronic stages of HIV but the ward in Cherry Orchard Hospital provides respite care and serves people who need to cope with readjustment and require support. It is a very sensible service. If it were not available, the patients who attend it would have to go directly to the main hospitals which, as we know, are already operating under huge pressure. The service provided in this ward is both socially and economically necessary. The nursing staff are brilliant; all the patients have great praise for the senior nursing staff. They do more than just run the ward well; they give of their own time.

Rumours abound that this ward will be closed. It is always impossible to get a straight answer from the HSE. The head of the HSE in the Dublin West constituency will not confirm or deny the rumours, yet on Monday, 12 September, the word was out that the staff were instructed not to allow any more admissions into the ward. That in itself amounts to nearly the closure of the ward and is an alarming development for those who want to access this service.

There are three men who have been in the ward for up to 14 years; the ward is their home at this stage. They are fearful of what will happen to them. When asked where they would go, they were told they would be probably moved into one of the elderly units that cater for elderly people with Alzheimer's disease and other conditions. This is not acceptable. What we want to hear today is a categorical announcement from the Minister of State that this ward will remain open. If there are problems with the ward because of its age, we want to hear that it will not be closed until an alternative, fit for purpose accommodation for HIV patients is found for these patients.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): I thank Deputies Collins, Daly and Boyd Barrett for raising this issue.

I will read from some of the text that has been circulated. The Government's response to HIV and AIDS is led by the National AIDS Strategy Committee, NASC, which is an advisory group to the Minister and was set up in 1991 to address the emerging AIDS crisis. Membership of the committee includes officials from the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive, representatives of NGOs and other Government Departments. In addition to HIV, the committee has also taken on an advisory role with regard to sexually transmitted infections, STIs. The NASC published its first report in 1992, and followed up in 2000 with the production of the AIDS Strategy 2000 document, which is still the policy from which Ireland operates in relation to HIV and AIDS.

Last year there were 331 new HIV diagnoses which represents a 16% decrease compared to 2009 when 395 new cases were diagnosed. Recent figures published by the Health Protection

Surveillance Centre show that the category of men who have sex with men is now the predominant mode of transmission in Ireland. While this overall decrease in new HIV cases is very welcome we must continue to focus on effective preventative measures to address this trend. Government policy is that appropriate treatment is made available free of charge to all who test positive for HIV at the various statutory centres that provide HIV and STI services throughout the country.

In regard to the Rowan Ward, it was established in 1990 in response to a number of clients who suffered from AIDS and AIDS-related disorders. Since that time there have been very considerable advances in the treatment of HIV and AIDS. The Rowan Ward has in recent years evolved into a facility providing socialrespite care to what is now, thankfully, a static group of people living with HIV. Of the 18 beds available, three people living with HIV have become long-stay residents of the unit. This facility is based on the campus of Cherry Orchard Hospital, which primarily provides long-term care to the local elderly population.

I advise the Deputy that in the short time available to me to look into this matter, I was told that the HSE is currently reviewing all services on the Cherry Orchard campus in the context of the current economic pressures and the existing moratorium on recruitment of additional nursing staff. The review will explore if services currently being provided by the Rowan unit could be provided more effectively in a different setting, taking into account the needs of the people currently using this social respite service. No decision will be made on the Rowan Ward until the review is completed. However, whatever decision is taken, the residents of the Rowan Ward will continue to receive appropriate quality care.

I thank the Deputies for bringing this matter to my attention. I was not aware that this was on the cards. I have had some difficulty in getting a definitive answer from the HSE in the past hour or so that I have been in a position to pursue the matter.

While this is a service matter for the HSE, I am very dissatisfied with the extent and the quality of the information that has been available to me. I had hoped to be in a position to provide more detailed information and to share it with the Deputies this afternoon. Unfortunately, that information was not forthcoming. My intention now is to establish the facts surrounding what is a rumour about the future of this unit. I want to know whether the unit is to remain in use and, if so, the plans for it. In the event that any question arises about the closing of this unit on the basis that it is not suitable for one reason or another or cannot remain in existence, I want clear information about suitable and appropriate alternative accommodation for the long-stay residents who are there at the moment and an assurance that there will be a facility which will be able to cater for any future demand in this regard.

In regard to the issue of respite care, if a decision is taken on the basis of the review that I am told is under way, replacement beds will have to be made available for those people in the unit who predominantly are people who have difficulties in regard to homelessness and addiction, who are being catered for at present, which provides respite for themselves and for their families. I will seek an assurance that suitable alternative accommodation will be made available.

I regret that I am not in a position to provide more detailed information to the Deputies and I thank them for bringing this matter to my attention.

Deputy Joan Collins: I thank the Minister for her reply. Obviously, she is experiencing the same difficulties as everybody else with the HSE in trying to find out exactly what is the position in regard to this ward. I am pleased that she expressed concern about the need for this ward, the respite care that is required and the need to provide for the three long-stay patients in the ward. I ask her to contact us as soon as she hears from the HSE in regard to

[Deputy Joan Collins.]

the matter. We do not want any changes to be made until a suitable alternative ward is made available, appropriate systems are in place and there is access for HIV-AIDS patients to respite care. I believe the Minister would agree that this is a very important service for these people who, in the most chaotic moments of their lives, need somewhere to go. This ward has been a mainstay for these people in the past. I welcome the Minister's response. I hope she will follow through on it and that the ward will not be closed unless an alternative is provided.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I assure the Deputies that I am looking for a full report on this from the HSE. I want to establish the facts and precisely what the plans are for this facility. I wanted to try to get a categorical statement from the HSE on the plans as soon as possible. As soon as I have that information, I will share it with the Deputies and write to each of the three of them directly to provide it. I am also anxious that any decisions will be taken in consultation with the national AIDS strategy group because that is where the expertise lies and the plans encompass the community working in the area of AIDS. I will be looking for this consultation to take place and will be in touch with the Deputies as soon as I possibly can.

Ceisteanna — Questions

Priority Questions

Institutes of Technology

1. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is considering the re-designation of institutes of technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25609/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The national strategy for higher education to 2030 lays out a clear development pathway for amalgamated institutes of technology which meet specified performance criteria to seek redesignation as universities. A small number of new technological universities, with their own legislative framework and a distinct mission that is faithful to the ethos of the technological sector, working with existing universities, institutes of technology and other education providers, can enrich the quality of the higher education landscape. I have asked the Higher Education Authority for its formal advice on draft performance criteria and it is engaged in a consultation process in this regard. I expect to be in a position to publish the criteria before the end of December. Once a process is in place, it will be open to institutes of technology to come together to make applications for consideration for redesignation. All applications will be considered as part of an independent assessment process.

Deputy Brendan Smith: This question is of the utmost importance, particularly for the south east in view of the very disappointing news of the major loss of employment in Waterford with the closure of the TalkTalk facility. When does the Minister expect the HEA to sign off on the relevant performance criteria? Will he encourage the institutes of technology to work together to achieve university status? Is that his view at this stage? At the end of March, in reply to a question from Deputy Halligan, he was clear in stating he did not want rebranding or relabelling of institutes of higher education. I totally agree. Following a Government meeting in early September, it was reported in the national press that the Government would accelerate the provision of a new technological university in Waterford, following the announcement of

the job losses mentioned. Is the Minister taking a different view now with regard to the needs of the south east than he did earlier in the year?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I am not taking a different view, but I am conscious of the urgency of the criteria being published because of what has happened in the south-east region. That is why, since the most recent job loss tragedy in the area with the TalkTalk job losses, I have asked the HEA to accelerate the finalisation and publication of the criteria. As I said, I hope to have them by December and by December I mean before Christmas.

Deputy Brendan Smith: Does the Minister expect the criteria to be forwarded to him by December?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I have asked the HEA to get them to me as early as possible, that is, this side of Christmas. Then it would be a matter — if I can anticipate the Deputy's question — for all of the institutes, specifically Waterford which has been to the forefront in this matter. The Deputy knows the history. The institute in Waterford was redesignated and as a consequence of that decision, others sought similar designations and the entire sector was lifted.

In the context of the problem in the south east, as it manifested itself recently and as was said at the Cabinet, the Hunt report addressed this issue in general and stated a technological university could and possibly would be an option, provided the institutes coming together changed the substance of the activity in the new entity, as distinct from simply changing the name. That is where we are. Let us see what the criteria specify and take it from there.

Deputy Brendan Smith: All of us are conscious of the linkage between the provision of higher education, whether at institute of technology, further education or university level, and commercial activity. The needs of the south east are pressing. Will it be the Minister's role to sign off on the criteria subsequent to the HEA submitting them to his Department? Does he expect to be in a position, in the spring, to set down specific criteria for possible redesignation of institutes of technology?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The HEA is not the decision-making body, as the Deputy knows from his own Cabinet experience. It will make recommendations setting out the criteria on which the Government will decide. I will bring the recommendations to the Cabinet and decide on them because of the importance of the matter. I will do this sooner rather than later.

Special Educational Needs

2. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will investigate the possibility of giving additional special needs assistance support to help three children with severe learning and physical disability who have recently enrolled at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; if the current inadequate allocation of SNA support to this school contradicts commitments from him that newly enrolled children with special needs will receive adequate SNA support. [25631/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The overall level of special needs assistant, SNA, support in the special school in Kildare, referred to by the Deputy, is being reviewed by the National Council for Special Education, NCSE. The school is a special school for pupils with moderate general learning difficulties and severe to profound learning difficulties and also has a number of classes for pupils with autism. The NCSE will assess the care needs of the new pupils in the context of the overall care needs of current pupils and also take into account the existing levels of SNA support available to the school. Notwithstanding the outcome of this review, it is the position of both my Department and the NCSE that, given the exceptionally high levels of teaching and

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

support staff which have been allocated to the school, it has sufficient existing supports to provide for the teaching and care requirements of all of the children enrolled in the school, pending the completion of the review.

Deputy Seán Crowe: We have addressed the issue of special needs assistants on previous occasions. I approach it today from the angle of a special needs school. Following the "Prime Time" programme on this issue, more people have contacted public representatives. The Minister has said his Department believes the school in question has sufficient special needs assistants in its system. That, in itself, is creating a problem. Parents say they are being told there are sufficient SNAs within the school structure. They and I understood that the matter was under review.

An SNA is assigned to an individual child and my question refers to three specific children. When the school originally applied for SNAs for them, it was told the support would not be made available. One of the children has CINCA syndrome and Down's syndrome. He also has cardiac defects that require further surgery, pulmonary hypertension and chronic lung disease. He uses a hearing aid and a wheelchair, wears nappies and cannot walk or talk. For some reason, he has been assessed as not needing a special needs assistant. The other two children also have difficulties and the parents believe the system has failed them.

I ask this question because we have failed these children in the past. I recognise the Minister's difficulty with regard to the provision of SNAs, but problems continue to arise. Does the system need to be changed? Perhaps I will have a better understanding when I have more experience on the select committee dealing with education issues and see the broader educational needs. However, the parents and I do not understand why this problem cannot be solved. Is the system archaic, or does it not lend itself to being understood? More and more families are contacting me and other public representatives. We need to make the system simpler. It does not seem to be responding to the needs of the child, and that is where I am coming from in this question. It is one school, but it could be any school.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I understand the Deputy's interest and his genuine concern, which I share in respect of all children with special needs. There are currently 56 pupils enrolled in the school, of whom three pupils have been allowed to attend only on a partial or limited basis by the school management and board, pending a review by the NCSE of SNA allocation levels. The school is seeking to have that level increased and the NCSE is considering it. The school has 56 pupils with special needs and there are ten teachers, 20 full-time SNAs and one part-time SNA. An SNA is not necessarily assigned full time to a particular pupil. They are not personal assistants; they help in certain areas.

The NCSE has received a request from that school, which has stated that these are highly dependent children, as the Deputy has indicated, and it is up to the NCSE to decide professionally if an extra SNA support is necessary. We have the capacity to allocate that from the 10% kept back in May and June. I do not know when the review by the NCSE will be completed, but on foot of what the Deputy has raised, I will try to ensure this is accelerated as quickly as possible.

School Transport

3. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the methods being employed under the school transport scheme in order to guarantee that certain services are terminated under the ten pupil rule; if he will agree that this application of the eligibility criteria unfairly excludes some families in view of the fact that when it comes to eligibility under the scheme, the distance from the school is measured from

door to door even though the children in question have never been picked up from their houses; and if he will review its application. [25437/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The school transport scheme is a scheme of national application. To be eligible for school transport, there is a minimum distance requirement of 3.2 km in the case of primary children and 4.8 km in the case of post-primary children.

The methodology used by Bus Éireann to establish eligibility based on distance has not changed. It is and always has been the distance from the child's home to the nearest appropriate school by the shortest traversable route. The actual point at which children are picked up on a school bus route is not, and never has been, a relevant factor in determining eligibility.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. The actual point at which children are picked up should be a relevant factor in determining eligibility. The idea behind it was to try to save money, because there is certainly a shortage of money, but the children in this case were never picked up from their house. Their pick-up point is within the criteria. When they asked if the children could be picked up from the house over the last few years, because it was causing a problem for them, they were told "No". When it suits, the company will use one distance and when it does not suit it will use another.

One of the children will miss 19 days of school between now and Christmas as a result of this, unless the mother or father gives up work. The alternative is to get a taxi, which will cost €150 a month. The family has offered to pay extra if that is what it takes to get on the bus, but they have been told that unless there are ten pupils on the bus, the extra money cannot be paid. I do not think they are being treated fairly. This is leaving the family in an awful situation. The message being sent out is that the Government is encouraging someone to give up a job and paying taxes that help to pay for these services, in order to justify some ideology.

I fear the idea behind this plan is just to get rid of many of these schools by making it completely unfeasible for them to survive, which is not fair at the end of the day. If there is any hope that our area is to develop, all of this infrastructure will be needed there. Bit by bit, there is a downward spiral until eventually we will have tumbleweed going through these areas and absolutely nothing else.

A bit of fairness is required here. Where the bus picks them up is within the required distance; it does not pick them up from the house so why measure it from the house?

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: There is no ideological hang up as to how this scheme is applied. The practice whereby school transport is limited to children living beyond a certain distance from a school is the international norm. It is practised in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and in most countries in Europe. At a time of very scarce resources, it is important to focus the school transport regime on those that are most in need of it, namely, those who live furthest away from the school. Having said that, Deputy Flanagan seems to be referring to a particular case which I am having difficulty understanding. If he relays the details of the case to me I will undertake to examine it closely and see can we arrive at a solution.

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: I will definitely do that because I note the Minister of State said it is a time of scarce resources. If this continues, there will be even fewer resources, because there will be another person not working as a result.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you Deputy. Will you give the Minister of State the appropriate information?

Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan: I will indeed.

Further Education and Training

4. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in establishing SOLAS; when he expects this process to be complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25610/11]

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: In July the Government announced the establishment of SOLAS as a key element in the development of the further education and training sector. The SOLAS implementation group has been established to implement the changes. It met on 31 August and again yesterday. I am chairing the group and its membership includes officials from the Department of Education and Skills, FÁS and the Irish Vocational Education Association. The group is preparing an action plan and will report soon to the Cabinet committee on economic recovery and jobs. The action plan will be the subject of consultation with stakeholders before finalisation. The group has met twice and made progress on key elements such as the organisational mission, structure, staffing, funding and legislation for the new authority. Given the complex elements involved, including the legislation, it is expected that the process of establishing SOLAS will be completed by the end of 2012.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. I had the opportunity at the committee and elsewhere the welcome the Government decision to establish SOLAS and to give the further education sector a particular entity of its own. Surely urgency is not being attached to the establishment of SOLAS if the implementation group meets at three weekly intervals. I know that constant meetings just for the sake of it are not fruitful, but surely an agenda should be set and achievements arrived at more regularly than every three weeks.

Is the Minister of State satisfied the implementation group is representative enough of all the different interests in the further education sector and SOLAS? Why is there no representation from the CEOs' association? Why is there no representation from the Adult Education Officers' Association? My understanding is that the vast majority of people working in the vocational educational sector at teaching and lecturing level are members of the Teachers Union of Ireland. Why are they not represented? My understanding is that most of the administrative staff in our vocational education sector are members of IMPACT. Surely there is a need to have those particular representative organisations involved in the implementation group.

What I am getting at the moment, from both the people in the VEC sector and people in FÁS, is an amount of uncertainty about the future. None of us wants to see uncertainty develop in an area where there is an urgent need to re-skill and up-skill people and to deal with the very important area of training and preparing people for employment opportunities.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: I want to assure the Deputy there is a serious urgency attached to the national roll out of SOLAS. The summer break was the reason for the three week hiatus between 31 August and yesterday, and we plan to meet every two weeks from now on. We have also established a number of subgroups within the implementation group which will oversee certain elements of the change management process, and these are very considerable indeed.

In respect of representation on the SOLAS implementation group, I have always been an advocate of keeping it small and effective. There are nine people around the table in the group. We are charged with making this happen. I would argue that the VEC sector is well represented on the implementation group by Michael Moriarty of the IVEA and CEO of one of the VECs who is on a rotating basis with fellow CEOs across the country. FÁS is also well represented by its CEO and another senior staff member.

We plan to engage all the organisations mentioned by the Deputy in a comprehensive submission and consultation process. We will first seek written submissions from all those affected, after which we will hold a day of discussion and debate on what exactly SOLAS should set out to achieve. We are anxious that this will be an inclusive process. The message I am receiving from FÁS and the IVEA is that both organisations are extremely happy with the way the process is developing, very much buy into the establishment of SOLAS and are excited about what it hopes to achieve in the coming years.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I did not for one moment suggest that the different interest groups are unhappy with the proposal as it is my understanding that they welcome it. The Minister of State did not mention that a CEO was participating in the group. It is not always the case that a small group can achieve more. It is important that all interests are represented. It is not a matter of deciding that half a dozen or a dozen people will be involved but of ensuring that all interests in the sector are represented. The last thing we want in this process is a lack of information to any of the stakeholders, all of whom must be updated on a constant basis and know that the issue is being treated with the utmost urgency.

A target date must be set. The Minister of State indicated that the process would be complete by the end of 2012. We were informed on Committee Stage of the relevant legislation that it would be largely complete within that timeframe. The use of the word "largely" provides for the typical public service way out should something go wrong. I would prefer if a specific target date was set and met, barring some unforeseen circumstances arising. Those who are unhappy with the current architecture for training and further education want the new architecture put in place as rapidly as possible.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: I reiterate that the Department is treating this matter with extreme urgency. I am an advocate of the motto "small is beautiful" in respect of implementation and committees. I made a presentation to the IVEA conference outlining what SOLAS sets out to achieve and two weeks ago I had a meeting with the board of FÁS at which I also set out what we hope to achieve through SOLAS. I am anxious to be as inclusive as possible and will seek and act on submissions from all interest groups and everybody who will be part of this serious change management process.

The target of the end of 2012 is a tough one. From previous Cabinet experience, the Deputy will be aware of the torturous and lengthy legislative process involved in getting such a change management process through the Houses of the Oireachtas. That will be the slowest part of the process but we will not sit back and wait for it to conclude. In parallel with the legislative programme, we will set in train a serious change management programme, primarily between FÁS and the vocational education committees. We hope to select one reasonably typical VEC and establish a pilot programme to determine how the machinery and architecture of FÁS and the VECs will come together on a practical, day-to-day basis to make the roll-out of SOLAS as streamlined and smooth as possible.

Deputy Brendan Smith: Speaking on behalf of the Fianna Fáil Party, I do not believe the Houses of the Oireachtas will delay the proposals, which I am sure other parties will also support.

School Books

5. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the efforts to introduce a nationwide book lending scheme in primary and post primary schools. [25632/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: As the Deputy will be aware, I am keen to examine if there are ways to encourage schools to establish or maintain book rental schemes, using funding from the book grant scheme. I believe this to be one of the most effective ways of lowering the burden of the cost of school books. I have invited the national parents councils at primary and post-primary levels to provide me with examples of good practice of book rental schemes. Drawing on the experiences and perspectives of both schools and parents, I intend to issue general advice to schools on the operation of book rental schemes. I anticipate that the guidelines for schools will set down some underlying principles, address practical issues for schools and parents and provide examples of good practice in the operation of book rental schemes.

Deputy Seán Crowe: We all support the Minister on this issue. He stated earlier this year that he intended to meet publishers in a bid to have them implement more ethical practices in the area of school book costs. The cost of uniforms is a linked issue. When will the cost of sending a child to school be reduced? As this is September, school books and uniforms have been bought for the school year. People had hoped steps would be taken to address the cost of school books and uniforms prior to the school year commencing. While that may have been an unreasonable expectation, it was widespread. What progress has been made on introducing a nationwide book lending scheme and reducing the cost of school uniforms? What is the timescale for implementing such a scheme? Will it be in place next year? The costs of some books and uniforms are crazy. Parents who have to fork out €50 for a child's jumper tell me they have never spent €50 on a jumper for themselves. Some of them have to spend buy uniforms for two or three kids.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: To the best of my knowledge none of my predecessors took an interest in this matter and no initiative was taken at a political level in Marlborough Street to address it. It was regarded as an issue for schools and parents, which is not a view I share. We must intervene. If a school book rental scheme is in place, the likelihood of individual teachers at post-primary level changing, for example, a geography textbook after five, six or seven years is diminished because the geography teacher would have to persuade the person who is managing the book rental scheme, let us say in the case of a school with three streams, to change 90 books at €10 or €15 per book. There is a double benefit in that parents will participate in the scheme and the likelihood of changeover and additional costs can be diminished. Elements of geography do not change as the shape of Ireland or height of Carrauntohill remain the same.

We want to find what is best practice. We do not know what is the position at primary school level. Every October a type of census letter is sent out to each primary school to gather information which, among other things, determines the allocation of teachers based on pupil numbers. We are writing separately to post-primary schools and including in the census letter a specific question on whether the school has a book rental scheme. As the Deputy will be aware, there are small and large schools in the primary sector. I hope to have the information by Christmas. I will analyse it and I hope to initiate a process to have the scheme established before the end of the academic year, in other words, before June of next year, in the primary and post-primary sectors. We are making informal inquiries as regards what can be done with regard to school uniforms. I recognise that both school books and uniforms, which were items of extreme cost in good times, are a significant burden in these challenged times.

Deputy Seán Crowe: A survey carried out by the Irish Association of Credit Unions found the cost of sending a child to school to be approximately €400 per annum. We no longer have lots of money. Is it possible to fast-track this process? We all accept that parents have been ripped off when buying school uniforms. Cartels are operating in relation to sales of uniforms for many schools. This is wrong and must change. If necessary the Minister should use every

power available to him, including the withholding of funds, to force certain school boards to move into the 21st century.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: As the academic year starts in autumn and finishes in June, we have only one window, as it were, to introduce the change. It cannot be done in mid-term. It is a little like the all-Ireland final. As the people of Kerry know, they will have to wait 12 months before they can have another crack at it. I hope to be in a position to have the two issues the Deputy raises addressed for the next academic year.

Other Questions

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Institutes of Technology

6. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for designating Waterford Institute of Technology as a university in view of the aftermath of the loss of 400 plus jobs in the TalkTalk telecommunications company in Waterford; his views on this as an essential component in order to attract employment to the Southeast. [25112/11]

16. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to establish a technological university in the south east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25208/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I propose to take Questions Nos. 6 and 16 together.

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 lays out a clear development pathway for amalgamated institutes of technology which meet specified performance criteria to seek redesignation as technological universities. I have asked the Higher Education Authority for its formal advice on draft performance criteria, and the authority is currently engaged in a consultation process. I expect to be in a position to publish the criteria before the end of December. As I said earlier to the Deputy, I hope to do that this side of Christmas. Once a process is in place, it will be open to institutes of technology to come together to make applications for consideration for redesignation. All applications will be considered under an independent assessment process.

Waterford Institute of Technology has an excellent reputation for industry collaboration and for its highly skilled graduates. It has strong links with the TalkTalk workforce and is actively working with the other education and training providers and agencies in the region to support those who are losing their jobs.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Waterford city is the only gateway city that does not have a university. I listened to the Minister's point about the consultation process. Would he not accept that there has been a lack of urgency in this regard in the past? Other Ministers have considered this previously. I agree with the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, that this is not the be-all-and-end-all when it comes to solving the problems facing Waterford, but it would be a step in the right direction.

The Government is talking about the possibility of a technological university for Waterford. What does that mean? Would it be on a par with other universities in the State? Would it put Waterford and the south east into the top tier of university provision? Would a technological university have the finance, autonomy and branding of a fully fledged university? There is a credibility gap because the process has taken so long.

[Deputy Seán Crowe.]

The Minister mentioned that the institute has links with TalkTalk. There is also an issue to do with the fact that money was not obtained from the European globalisation adjustment fund. People are angry and upset about the fact that we will not be using this resource. We should look again at this. The general consensus across the political spectrum seems to be that we need to move forward urgently in terms of university status for Waterford Institute of Technology.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: If I may respond to the second part of the Deputy's question, most people would agree that the way in which FÁS, soon to be changed to SOLAS, handled the globalisation adjustment fund was not acceptable. As the Deputy probably heard on the radio, there was a breakdown in communication which meant that front-line staff meeting unemployed workers had not been informed about this opportunity. That is to be deplored. As the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, mentioned, that is one of the reasons we are completely dismantling FÁS and introducing SOLAS. The requirement for access to the globalisation fund is that there must have been more than 500 redundancies within a given period of time in a certain area, and I am not sure what is happening on that front. It is a matter for the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, and his Department.

With regard to the issue of the designation of universities, this is now part of the global world of standards. We have asked Professor Simon Marginson, an Australian academic who is familiar with the Irish third level sector, to consider the criteria that should be essential for a technological university. The designation will mean that a university's primary focus is in the application of technology to industry. The criteria will be clearly set out. The draft criteria were submitted by Professor Marginson earlier this year. They are now being worked on by the HEA and I hope to have them this side of Christmas.

Residential Institutions Redress Board

7. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provision will be made for late applications submitted to the Residential Institutions Redress Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25209/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: In accordance with the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002, applicants had a period of three years in which to submit an application to the redress board, that is, until 15 December 2005, nearly six years ago. However, section 8 of the Act allowed the board to extend the period for receipt of applications in exceptional circumstances. The board considers individually each submission as to why an application was not lodged in time. The recently enacted Residential Institutions Redress (Amendment) Act 2011 removed the board's power to accept late applications received on or after 17 September 2011. It is now over eight and a half years since the board was established and five and half years after the initial closing date, and I am satisfied that sufficient time has been given to potential applicants to apply to the redress board.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Minister for his reply. I think it was in July that we discussed that legislation, which was taken through the House by the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon. What the Minister says is correct; the process has been ongoing for a number of years. When we were discussing that legislation on Second Stage and Committee Stage, I asked whether provision could be made, with the establishment of the statutory fund, that where in exceptional circumstances a late application was received which met the criteria, provision could be made for it to be processed. I envisaged this as a safety valve, a mechanism that would not need to be activated as all applicants who met the criteria would, I hoped, have submitted

their applications by 16 June last. In the meantime, in August and September, I received correspondence and telephone calls from a number of people who have been involved with survivors of the residential schools — people who had unfortunately been abused — and they told me that the trend in the past, when there were deadlines for submitting applications, had been that late applications were typically from people who were the most vulnerable survivors of the industrial school system. That is why I am worried there may still be a small cohort of people who are very vulnerable and who, unfortunately, will not have submitted their applications on time. I ask that some mechanism be established in the forthcoming legislation to ensure such applications, if they are submitted, can be processed.

An Ceann Comhairle: I remind the Minister and Deputies that there is a one minute limit on supplementary questions.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Since this House signed off on that legislation and announced that the scheme would close on 16 September, there have been 2,767 applications, which are being processed. Some have been accepted, some rejected, and so on. In deference to the time restrictions I will offer to write to the Deputy with the details. In all honesty, a reasonable window of time has been provided. The fact is that the announcement of the closing date of 16 September effectively produced nearly 3,000 fresh applications a number of years after the publicity surrounding the board had died down.

Deputy Seán Crowe: We have all talked to different groups and individuals who have been through the process, and many of them do not want to go down the road of seeking redress, but they may at some stage. Mentally, they are not in a position to do so at this stage. It seems so unfair that a person could be entitled to redress on a particular date but not after that. We accept the wrongs done to these people, yet we have decided to close the scheme on an arbitrary date. Many people who have actually been through the process say they regret going down that road. People are still trying to work out in their own heads whether to seek redress. There needs to be a window in which they can do this.

Deputy Brendan Smith: During the discussion on the legislation, I asked the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, if he could ask the officials of the redress board to ensure the final closing date of 16 September would be widely publicised outside our own island. Does the Minister have available to him the number of those applications that came from outside our own jurisdiction?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I do not know but I will communicate that information to the Deputy. A number of legal firms have placed advertisements in Irish journals in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, as Members will be aware. Even if a person was so badly damaged from his or her experience as to be unable to make a proper application there was no shortage of lawyers prepared to do it. It had to be brought to an end. Since we stated the final date to be 16 September, an extra 2,676 applications have been submitted.

Deputy Brendan Smith: At that time, in discussions with the Minister of State, Deputy Cannon, I asked that the Irish network abroad, through the different representative associations, would engage with this because they might know from among their membership people who might be potential applicants. That would be better than depending on lawyers and advertising to propagate the closing date.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I had those discussions. There was a conference in July in the Clock Tower in the Department at which there were representatives from the Federation of Irish Societies.

School Transport

8. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on allowing children who have been attending primary school to continue to avail of the existing transport arrangements. [25097/11]

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: Eligible primary school children who meet the requisite distance criterion of 3.2 kilometres will continue to retain school transport eligibility for the duration of their schooling. The distance criterion of 3.2 km is now being applied nationally to all eligible children availing of transport under the primary school transport scheme. Furthermore, in order to assist families residing in a closed school area, children enrolling in junior infants in September 2011 were considered eligible for school transport to their nearest school, provided they met the distance eligibility criterion.

The changes to the school transport scheme follow on from a detailed value for money review of that scheme. Many of the changes are designed as modernising and efficiency measures. This is aside altogether from the stark reality that the changes are required to enable the delivery of school transport at a reduced cost to the taxpayer, an absolute imperative in the circumstances facing this country.

Deputy Seán Crowe: My understanding is that there are families with children who qualify for the bus but the parent is driving behind. Will there be a review of the implementation of this scheme? In six months will the Minister ask if it is working? An example was given by a Member from his area. There may be low numbers on a bus. I have an example given by a woman who spoke of the school bus passing the house. The child in question has severe difficulties and attends a special school, which the bus actually passes. However, because of a technicality, which I will pass on to the Minister, the child does not qualify for transport.

The system does not work for many families. I ask the Minister to examine this at some stage. It creates a barrier with regard to parents and work, if the mother or father has to bring those children to school. That creates difficulty in itself and, regardless of the extra cost, it is a burden on those individuals. How does one explain that one child can go on the bus but another cannot? It does not make sense.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: I will try to frame a response to that particular case if the Deputy forwards details of that child with special needs.

Deputy Seán Crowe: The parents travel 240 km per day, yet the bus goes by the door.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: Regarding an ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the school transport system, as a result of the value for money review instigated by the last Government a significant number of changes were proposed and are now being implemented. One such change is that the requirement from September 2012 will be that children will be provided with transport to their nearest school. That has the potential to throw up some small anomalies although these are not significant in number.

In its assessment of this provision, Bus Éireann gave us its opinion that approximately 5% of children currently attending school and availing of school transport would be adversely affected. I asked Bus Éireann to return to me with more detailed data on that point. Anecdotally, I am led to believe the number may be significantly greater than 5% and I wish to establish if that is the case and, if so, whether there is a solution we can arrive at that continues to produce the saving but does not impinge negatively on families as it might.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Is there any consultation between Bus Éireann or Bus Átha Cliath, the parents or the schools, in regard to changing bus pick-up points?

Deputy Brendan Smith: Given the implementation of the rule that the child will only be eligible for transport to the nearest school, will siblings be able to avail of transport to a school where older family members are attending? We do not want a situation where the children in a family are going to two different primary schools.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Regarding the rule for next year, do I take it this presumes there is a school place in the school in question? If a rule is rigidly applied the school may well be within the distance but there may not be a place provided. This may not seem a major point but it could prevent a child receiving an entitlement.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: The changes as currently proposed would allow for a situation to arise where there might be one or two siblings who are currently eligible for school transport but younger siblings about to enter the school system are not eligible. The system as envisaged by the last Government would have allowed that to happen. We are trying to work our way in order to ensure that does not occur. It will not be easy or straightforward and must be done in the context of continuing to achieve the saving of €17 million between now and 2014.

A number of anomalies may crop up. We are beginning to hear from schools and parents as to what they are. There is consultation and I have met with a number of parent groups from all over the country, both in my office and in their own locations. I am anxious to address the anomalies . They are few and far between but still exist and must be addressed.

Special Educational Needs

9. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of special needs assistants employed at present; if further approvals will be made for this school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25231/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The National Council for Special Education, NCSE, has advised all mainstream schools of their special needs assistant, SNA, allocations for the 2011-2012 school year. SNA provision in special schools is currently being reviewed. Some 475 of the total 10,575 SNA posts available are being retained in order to allocate them over the coming school year in cases such as emergency, appeals, acquired injuries or new school entrants. Approximately 10,100 whole time equivalent SNA posts have therefore been allocated to date. The NCSE will publish details of the SNA allocations which they have made to schools to date for the 2011-2012 school year. This will be available on the NCSE website shortly at *www.ncse.ie*, a new departure undertaken by the NCSE at my request. The NCSE has capacity to increase SNA allocations for schools from the retained pool of 475 posts. However, as these posts have to cater for demand to the end of the school year school year the NCSE must manage the allocation of any additional posts in a measured and prioritised manner.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Minister for his reply. Do I understand him correctly that the NCSE is reviewing the allocation to all special schools?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Yes.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I presume the remaining approvals that can issue, in total 475, are applicable to all primary schools?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Yes.

Deputy Brendan Smith: As the school year proceeds, can we be sure there will be no inordinate delay in ensuring that SNAs are approved and put in place as soon as possible where the relevant criteria are met?

Deputy Crowe inquired about a school in County Kildare. I am aware of the case in question because I have received correspondence in respect of it. I know the parents involved and also one of the children who requires particular attention. I join Deputy Crowe in requesting that the Minister ask the NCSE to review this very special case as a matter of urgency.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The Deputy is correct in his analysis. Special schools are being reviewed by the NCSE. As I indicated to Deputy Crowe, the school in County Kildare forms part of that review. A decision may well be made to allocate to it an additional resource from the pool of 475 to which I referred. I am not entirely sure what is the practice, but I will inform myself with regard to it. However, there is a precedent and pattern from previous years. There is no intention to retain these posts rather than allocating them. I imagine that a number will be allocated between now and Christmas. A smaller number will be kept in reserve as the school year progresses. As a result of the State's loss of sovereignty in certain areas, we no longer have control over the employment control framework. This means that only a certain number of people can be employed in the public sector. As indicated, in order to be able to respond to a crisis, we need to have some reserves in place. These reserves will drop in number as the school year progresses.

Deputy Brendan Smith: The primary school-going population changes very little after Hallowe'en. If, therefore, the Minister approved appointments in respect of 99.99% of the 475 positions, I do not believe he would be straying outside the terms of the employment control framework. The earlier approvals issue the better. This matter is of the utmost importance to the children and families involved.

Teaching Qualifications

10. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a comprehensive survey will be undertaken of teachers at second level who have the appropriate qualifications for teaching maths; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25223/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Seán Sherlock): The Teaching Council recently carried out a survey of post-primary schools to ascertain the qualifications of maths teachers. The results of the survey show that a significant majority of teachers — 68% — teaching maths in 258 schools are fully qualified to do so, that 29% have pursued some studies in maths and that only 2% have not obtained third level qualifications or pursued studies in maths. The Teaching Council has asked schools which have not completed the earlier survey to do so by 26 September.

Providing for high quality teaching and learning of mathematics is of key strategic importance to the State. As part of the Government's overall strategy to improve the teaching and learning of maths in schools, my Department is making arrangements for the provision of a new training programme for maths teachers. This will provide unqualified maths teachers with the opportunity to upskill their knowledge of mathematics and study the strategies best suited to the new Project Maths syllabuses.

Deputy Brendan Smith: When the results of the survey become available, will the Minister of State be in a position to ensure schools will no longer be able to hire unqualified maths teachers? Will the programme of upskilling and the opportunity to gain additional qualifications be mandatory for maths teachers who do not, *per se*, possess a degree in the subject?

Deputy Sean Sherlock: To give the Deputy a straight answer, I am not in a position to do this. As he is well aware, the boards of management of schools have autonomy in respect of who they hire and fire. There is an issue of governance in that regard. I ask the Deputy to have faith in the process being undertaken. We must obtain the results of the survey and analyse them. As announced on 12 September, a programme that will allow for continuing education and continuing professional development, CPD, for unqualified maths teachers is to be rolled out. The contract in this regard is due to go to tender shortly. I would be cautious with regard to the Department exercising control over decisions made by individual schools. Again, I ask the Deputy to have faith. We will analyse the results of the survey and proceed cautiously. There must be an outcome which ensures teachers are properly qualified and that students obtain good results in their examinations. In that context, we must seek to ensure there is a deeper engagement in this matter. We will not turn the ship around overnight; it is going to take some time to do this.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I accept what the Minister of State said. Does he have faith in this hastily arranged survey undertaken by the Teaching Council? I understand only 30% of schools actually responded to the survey. Does the Minister of State accept evidence from that number of schools as a good snapshot of the overall position? Is it correct that when Project Maths was launched, funding was provided in order that maths teachers might avail of the programmes to which the Minister of State referred? What was the level of take-up in this regard?

Deputy Seán Crowe: On a separate issue, concerns have been expressed by many gaelscoileanna about the competency of certain individuals to teach certain subjects through Irish. It is possible that maths is one of these subjects. Will it be possible to ascertain from the survey whether there is such a lack of competency? Particular concerns have been expressed by gaelscoileanna about teachers who are entering the system and who may not have the requisite competency in teaching certain subjects through Irish.

An Ceann Comhairle: This question relates to maths.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Yes, but the matter to which I refer may be picked up on in the survey.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: Is the Deputy referring to the teaching of maths?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a separate question.

Deputy Seán Crowe: It relates to the survey. Is it possible that the survey may reveal that there are difficulties in certain subjects being taught through Irish?

An Ceann Comhairle: We are running out of time.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I ask that the Deputy table a separate parliamentary question on that matter. This question relates to the teaching of maths.

With regard to Deputy Smith's question, there are no exact figures for the take-up of CPD. However, I will endeavour to come back to him at a later date with additional information on the matter. If he is asking whether I am satisfied with the rate of reply to the survey, the straight answer is that I am not. The schools have until 26 September to provide responses to it. I ask the Deputy to have some forbearance and allow us to assess the position at that point. The Department and the Minister, Deputy Quinn, are extremely conscious of the fact that we must grapple with this issue. We must do so on the basis that we will be provided with a true picture of the actual scenario. In that context, the agencies and stakeholders involved have been given a clear signal to the effect that we require sound data. We cannot make proper

[Deputy Sean Sherlock.]

policy decisions unless such data which must be both qualitative and quantitative are forthcoming. I hope the Deputy will accept my comments on this matter in good faith.

Third Level Education

11. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the remarks made recently by the Provost of Trinity University, who said that the quality of Irish higher education faced a speedy decline unless the funding crisis is addressed by introducing fees for those who can afford to pay. [25116/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The reality of the economic situation and the public expenditure corrections which must be made present challenges to the higher education sector. Future demand for participation growth must be reconciled with limitations on public resources and a need to protect and enhance core quality. The nature of these difficult trade-offs is described in the national strategy for higher education to 2030 which also identifies the need for more detailed analysis. I have asked the Higher Education Authority to undertake further work on the sustainability of the existing funding framework and the intention in this regard is to assess the inter-relationships and tensions between three parameters, namely, growth in student numbers, funding constraints and quality. The work to which I refer will inform consideration by the Government of policy options in respect of the future funding of the sector. I am anxious to ensure any new funding framework will not impact on access for students.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Is Question No. 14 being taken with Question No. 11.

An Ceann Comhairle: No.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I listened to the remarks made by the Provost of Trinity College. He referred to the cuts made and stated we had to give serious consideration to the matter. Are the cuts creating these conditions, as suggested in the Minister's reply? Trinity College has fallen 13 places to 65th in the rankings and University College Dublin has fallen 20 places to 134th. Did that happen as a result of the impact these cuts are having on third level education in this country? If so, it is a serious wake-up call for the Government. If we are serious about producing well-qualified graduates, our universities must be fit for purpose. If funding is the problem, we need to be told.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: These index measurements are being looked at internationally as education becomes a more globalised phenomenon. The further people are from an educational institution like a university, the more likely they are to look at an index or a guidebook when considering that institution, just as they do with all other products and services. There are a number of determining factors in the QS rankings. I do not have them readily to hand. They are partly based on the ratio of academic staff to students. There is no doubt that the reductions in staff numbers associated with the employment control framework have damaged our performance under that index. The rankings are determined by many other things, including the number of academic papers that members of staff have had published internationally. Such factors might not necessarily relate directly to funding or staff numbers. That is the honest answer. There is cause for concern. The positive side of it, which we should keep in the picture, is that there are approximately 15,000 universities in the world and all of our universities are in the top 500.

Deputy Seán Crowe: The worry is that it will be seen as a drop in standards. If it is considered that we are going in the wrong direction, it will send the wrong signal to students from abroad who may be thinking of coming to Irish universities. We have to look at the broader issues. I

presume one of those issues is funding, but there may be other issues, as the Minister has said. I would like a debate to start on this whole area. The Provost of Trinity College has his own view, as we have said. There might be other reasons for these changes. If there are, we need to start hearing about them from the universities.

Deputy Mick Wallace: The Minister has said that one of his priorities, regardless of the system that is in place, will be to maximise the number of students who reach third level. Does he agree with the Provost of Trinity College, who spoke about the notion that those who can really afford to pay for third level education should have to do so once more? Surely that would be a positive move. Most of us accept that, as research has shown, private second level education has mushroomed since third level fees were abolished. It is obvious that parents are using the money they were going to use for their children's third level education to send them to private secondary schools. The Minister will accept that the more private schools, as opposed to State schools, we have at secondary level, the more social division is created in our society. Does he agree that the notion of reintroducing fees for those who can really pay them is a good one?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: There is a big debate in this area. I belong to a political and ideological tradition that believes that all high earners should pay high levels of income tax at the upper level. That system catches everybody. The money can then be redistributed. That is one way of doing it. Participation in third level education has increased, in terms of overall numbers, since fees were abolished in 1996. The current student services charge is a fee, in effect. The minimum fee for undergraduate students is €2,000. The fee for postgraduate work like a master's degree is €5,000. Students are paying.

Professional Development

12. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the parity of support and funding will be provided to Gaelscoileanna as is currently given to Eduate-Together schools and other mainsteam schools. [25111/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I understand this question refers to the professional development service for teachers. The policy pursued when teacher support services are funded by my Department is that services are provided through the medium of Irish to teachers in Irish-medium schools. These services do not differentiate between categories of schools, but they do respond to differentiated need. The professional development service provides bilingual versions of its documentation, materials and resources. When the service engages in face-to-face support with teachers and schools, documentation including presentations and handouts are provided through the language medium of the school. The service has a number of personnel with the necessary Irish language skills to support gaelscoileanna. Although the level of resources available has fallen in recent times in accordance with overall budgetary constraints, the service has recently recruited additional personnel, four of whom have the capacity to service gaelscoileanna. The professional development service for teachers does not provide funding to schools.

Special Educational Needs

13. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to ensure that a child (details supplied) will not lose their place in the local school due to the lack of special needs assistant posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18229/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The National Council for Special Education, NCSE, is responsible, through its network of local special educational needs organisers, for allocating special needs

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assistants to schools. The NCSE has advised all mainstream schools of their special needs assistant allocations for the current school year, taking into account the care needs of qualifying pupils attending the school. It is expected that before they request any review of their allocations, schools will be in a position to demonstrate they have made every effort to manage their allocation of special needs assistant posts to best effect. I understand that in the individual case referred to by the Deputy, the NCSE is engaging with the school concerned regarding a possible special needs assistant allocation for the child in question. The NCSE will take into account the efforts already being made to manage the pupil's behaviour and the existing special needs assistant allocation that has been made to the school.

Deputy Derek Keating: I thank the Minister for his helpful response to this question. The question of whether the Department of Education and Skills is able to maintain its current policy in this area is central in this context. Is it in a position to continue to provide special needs assistance to children with particular needs and abilities, including those with Down's syndrome? I want to refer briefly to an issue regarding special needs assistance that arose during an episode of "Prime Time" this week. I visit schools in my constituency of Dublin Mid-West on a regular basis as part of my work as a Deputy. I have been to a number of schools this week. I met a principal who informed me that he feels the structure of special needs services in this country is working very well. Notwithstanding the particular issues that arise from time to time, I want to tell the House that in my experience, the structure of the service is working very well. I know the Minister is sympathetic about those issues and is looking into them carefully. While emphasising that we have a very good special needs assistance service, I want to mention an issue that arose in the meeting I had earlier this week. I was told by a principal that the cut-off date for applications is causing problems. He said that some officials tend to focus on the numbers rather than the particular issues or circumstances of the children. Perhaps we can look at the cut-off dates as we go along.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I will look into that matter for the Deputy. Public representatives on all sides of the House are petitioned by constituents who have genuine concerns about their children and the allocation of teaching hours. There are just under 10,500 special needs assistants in this country — the number is limited by the reserve — and they service approximately 18,000 pupils. It is a matter for schools to allocate those resources. The allocation of hours can change. It is not the case that there is a special needs assistant for every child with special needs in a school. The needs of such children vary as they develop and mature and their conditions change. That is not always part and parcel of the full picture. I will take into account what the Deputy has said. He has given me the details of the school in question.

Deputy Derek Keating: I thank the Minister.

Third Level Education

14. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the recent QS World University rankings which show a drop in performance of most universities here, including Trinity College, University College Dublin and NUI Galway; and his further views that the drop in standards can be attributed to budget cuts across the third level sector. [25115/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: International league tables need to be interpreted with caution. Their focus on individual institutional performance does not reflect overall system quality. However, I recognise that they are referenced by international investors, employers and students as a marker of quality across systems. As such, they cannot be ignored. It is encouraging that four

Irish institutions are in the top 300 QS ranked universities, out of some 15,000 universities worldwide. The reality of the economic situation poses challenges for the higher education sector. Future demand for participation growth needs to be reconciled with limitations on public resources and a need to protect and enhance core quality. The nature of these difficult trade-offs is described in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, which also identifies the need for more detailed analysis. I have asked the Higher Education Authority to undertake further work on the sustainability of the existing funding framework. This work will inform consideration by the Government of policy options in future funding of the sector.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I think this matter was dealt with when we took Question No. 11.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: It was, in effect. This question should have been taken with the other question about international league tables.

Deputy Brendan Smith: Is it still the case that two of our universities are ranked among the top 100 universities in the world? All of them are within the top 500, but, to my knowledge, at one stage two of them were within the top 100.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Speaking from memory, Trinity is still in the top 100. UCD has slipped just over. It is in 120th place or thereabouts. I would have to check the records.

School Staffing

15. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for future cuts for resources teachers for travellers posts; and his further plans to reinstate any in the incoming year. [25092/11]

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: The decision to withdraw all resource teacher for Travellers was taken by the previous Government in the last budget. The economic situation means that difficult decisions have had to be taken and implemented in order to make expenditure savings and to ensure that teacher numbers remain within the public service employment control framework.

Traveller pupils who are eligible for learning support teaching should receive this tuition through the existing learning support provision in schools. All schools should select students for learning support on the basis of priority of need.

Limited alleviation measures have been provided to assist schools which have high numbers or concentrations of Traveller pupils who were previously supported by resource teacher for Travellers, RTT, posts. The decision to withdraw the resource teachers for Travellers will not be revisited. There are, therefore, no plans to reinstate the RTT posts this year.

Deputy Seán Crowe: It is one of those areas on which I would like a further debate.

The Minister stated the decision was made previously. We all would accept that in the past there were difficulties in Traveller education but there was a section of the Traveller community, particularly involving women, that was moving forwards in leaps and bounds. One of my difficulties is that the Department had targeted two thirds of the cuts at teaching posts for Travellers. Fr. Derek Farrell stated it was staggering that the Department had targeted this area.

The difficulty with the removal of these teachers is what will replace them. The Minister can argue that the service will be mainstreamed, etc., but the Traveller community has special needs. Despite the fact that some of the groups that operate on their behalf would say that Travellers should be mainstreamed, Travellers need extra resources due to their lifestyle, the conditions in which they live and what happens within that community.

[Deputy Seán Crowe.]

The Department has done away with these posts. What will replace teaching within the Traveller community? That is the debate that needs to take place and it will not happen in two or three minutes here. It is the big debate in this area. In my view, it is like throwing the baby out with the bath water. The Department has put them all out and that is it, as if it is now resolved. It is not resolved. In fact, rather than improving matters, it will disimprove them. Rather than the position getting better, it will get worse in those schools not only for the Traveller children, but also for the other children.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I accept what Deputy Crowe stated and the spirit in which he has articulated it. We need to have a discussion on this because at a time when there were plenty of resources, money going in that direction was not having the necessary outcomes, in other words, the retention of Travellers on the scale necessary going through the secondary school system. I encountered this in Galway in February or March last, where one of the secondary schools in the city had a very high concentration of Traveller children and the completion levels were very unsatisfactory even though there were resources.

We all must learn how to achieve more with less. Sometimes in the past simply adding extra resources was seen as solving the problem when, in fact, it did not solve the problem. I agree with Deputy Crowe. I would be happy to come back to this House when we have time for a more considered discussion on this issue. The Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education might invite in some of those in this area to talk about what is happening out there.

Deputy Brendan Smith: Is there any evidence available that there has been progress, from the point of view of the children, where mainstreaming has occurred? Earlier in the summer the issue arose in regard to transport to specific schools for children from the Traveller community and the Department replied that efforts had been made to achieve more mainstreaming of the children in terms of attending their local secondary school instead of being transported to centres some distance away. Does the Minister agree that there is potential in mainstreaming that would benefit the children and ensure the retention rate is improved?

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I do not have that information to hand. I will look into it and I will be in touch with Deputy Smith.

Written Answers follow Adjournment.

Message from Seanad

An Ceann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Thirtieth Amendment of the Constitution (Houses of the Oireachtas Inquiries) Bill 2011, without amendment.

The Dáil adjourned at 5.45 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 27 September 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 16, inclusive, answered orally.

School Accommodation

17. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the accommodation needs of a primary school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25333/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm to the Deputy that I am aware of the accommodation needs of the school to which he refers.

My Department is in the process of acquiring, subject to planning, a site in Midleton which is suitable for the construction of a new school building.

Last June, planning permission was received for a school building on the site. However, the grant has been appealed to An Bord Pleanála and the appeal's outcome is awaited.

The Deputy will understand that it would not be appropriate for me to anticipate a decision being made by An Bord Pleanála. However, whatever the outcome of the planning process, my Department will continue to work to provide a permanent accommodation solution for the school in question.

School Curriculum

18. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the concerns expressed regarding the teaching of maths and the standards achieved in the State examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25220/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Sean Sherlock): In relation to concerns regarding the teaching of mathematics, I expect to receive shortly full figures from a Teaching Council survey of the qualifications of mathematics teachers in second level schools. Initial indications from the schools which have responded, approximately one third, are that some 68% of maths teachers are fully qualified to do so, 29% have undergone some studies in maths and 2% have no third level qualifications/studies in maths. A tender to provide a post-graduate course to the last two groups is due to issue shortly.

[Deputy Sean Sherlock.]

On the question of standards, I am not happy with the level of uptake at higher level mathematics. Project Maths which was introduced in all schools in September 2010 aims, inter alia, to increase uptake at higher level. I note that the uptake of higher level at junior certificate level was 52% among candidates who sat Project Maths in the Project school as opposed to 45.6% nationally. This is a positive trend.

School Textbooks

19. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the discussions he has had with the publishers of school text books; and the measures that are being implemented to reduce the cost of books for parents of children attending primary and post primary schools. [25101/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I recently met with educational book publishers, representatives of parents' organisations and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul regarding the cost of textbooks. Subsequently, the publishers devised a voluntary Code of Practice and, while I welcome the Code, I believe that more should be done to reduce the price of textbooks.

Accordingly, I have proposed to the publishers: that the price of the most popular textbooks should be reduced; that a significant discount should be given to schools which purchase in bulk; that the practice of combining a textbook and workbook in a single volume should be ended; that support materials should be provided to teachers online; and that unnecessary revisions to textbooks should be avoided.

While respecting that the publishers are private companies not under the control of my Department, I intend to meet with them again to progress these issues.

Departmental Agency

20. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in relation to the establishment of SOLAS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25235/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): In July the Government announced the establishment of SOLAS as one of the key elements in the future development of the Further Education and Training sector. The SOLAS Implementation Group has been established to implement the announced changes in the sector. I am chairing the Group and its membership includes the Department of Education and Skills, FÁS and the Irish Vocational Education Association.

The group has met twice and progress has been made in discussions on the key elements of the Action Plan including the Organisational Mission, Structure, Staffing, Funding and Legislation for the new authority.

The SOLAS Implementation Group will prepare an Action Plan to implement the changes required and report to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs on progress in the Autumn. The draft Action Plan will also be the subject of consultation with interested stakeholders before being finalised and published.

Educational Projects

21. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in relation to Project Maths; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25217/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Sean Sherlock): As the deputy is aware, Project Maths is a major programme of reform in mathematics in second level schools, which is designed to encourage better understanding of mathematics.

Project Maths began in 24 project schools in September 2008. Strands 1 and 2 began in all schools in September 2010 for first examination in 2012 at Leaving Certificate and 2013 at Junior Certificate. Strands 3 and 4 will begin in 2011, and strand 5 will start in 2012.

In Leaving Certificate 2011 candidates in the Project schools had, at ordinary and higher levels, a higher proportion at A/B/C grades, and a lower proportion at E/F/NG. Trends in relation to candidates who sat Project Maths at Junior Cycle in 2011 broadly mirror those of the Leaving Certificate Project Maths candidates.

I am heartened to note a higher level take up rate of 52% among Project School candidates which compares favourably to the national rate of take up of 45.6% at Junior Certificate.

Vocational Education Committees

22. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in relation to the rationalisation of vocational education committees; the likely timescale for the implementation of the necessary legislation; when the new headquarters for each new VEC entity will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25213/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Earlier this year, the Government decided to maintain the reduction in the overall number of VECs from 33 to 16 decided by the previous government, to revise the configuration of VECs and to approve in principle the consolidation of the existing VEC legislation.

I hope to have the approval of the Government within a matter of weeks for the publication of the General Scheme of an Education and Training Boards Bill and its referral the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education. I believe the Committee can perform a very useful role in relation to this important piece of legislation. When the Committee has finished its work drafting of the bill can be finalised with a view to having it introduced to the Dáil and Seanad early in 2012.

I am currently giving consideration to the question of where the headquarters of the new entities will be located. The outcome of these deliberations will be announced in the coming period.

School Curriculum

23. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views that the teaching of history plays a vital part in the literacy and numeracy strategy currently being implemented as part of the school curriculum and that it is essential in developing critical and analytical based independent thinking. [25108/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The literacy and numeracy strategy acknowledges the importance of applying literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, including in learning history which, I agree, promotes both critical and analytical thinking.

The deputy's question may arise in the context of debate in relation to junior cycle reform. The NCCA's mandate includes reviewing the current junior certificate and advising on the scope for reform which would provide for a more active learning experience for students, the promotion of deeper understanding, creativity and innovation. I hope to receive the Council's advice shortly on how all aspects of students' learning can be improved at junior cycle including the critical and analytical skills identified by the deputy. I am determined that we will use these

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

reforms as a blueprint for improvement, not least in literacy and numeracy, and I believe that teaching and learning history will continue to play a very important role in our schools, both primary and post-primary.

School Accommodation

24. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposals, if any, being considered by him to improve primary and second level school accommodation in Carrigtwohill, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25332/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As the Deputy will be aware, the Carrigtwohill/Midleton area has been identified by my Department as one of the areas where, due to demographic changes, it is projected that there will be a requirement for significant additional school provision at both primary and post-primary levels over the coming years.

In this context, I have recently announced that 20 new primary and 20 new post primary schools are to be established nationally in the next six years to meet the needs of our growing population. Of these new schools one primary and one post primary will be established in the Carrigtwohill/Midleton area.

In addition to these new schools, it may be necessary to extend the capacity of many existing schools to meet the demand for increased pupil places. In that regard, my Department has been in contact with both primary schools and the post-primary school in the Carrigtwohill area concerning their accommodation position.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

25. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the statutory fund will be accessible to persons who did not receive compensation from the redress fund; and if not, the measures that he will put in place to provide supports and services to those abused in State owned or supported institutions but did not seek or receive moneys from the Redress Board due to ill health, inability to travel or trauma. [25098/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Statutory Fund will focus solely on victims of residential institutional abuse, with eligibility being confined to those who received an award from the Redress Board or an award following a court decision or settlement who would otherwise have received an award from the Redress Board. Over 13,000 victims have received awards from the Redress Board to date and the Board has a further 530 applications to process and some 1,740 late applications to consider.

Those who did not apply to the Redress Board or who applied and did not receive an award will not be eligible for assistance from the Fund. Having considered this matter carefully I am satisfied that it is the correct approach, with the focus of the Statutory Fund being on those former residents who have successfully completed the redress process.

Those former residents not eligible for assistance from the Fund can continue to avail of the National Counselling Service and the Family Tracing Service.

School Curriculum

26. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to concerns in relation to the status of history as a subject for the junior certificate curriculum in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25212/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The NCCA has been asked to review the junior certificate and advise on the scope for reform designed to strengthen literacy and numeracy, embed key skills, promote active learning and enhanced creativity and innovation, and ensure appropriate ways of generating evidence of learning. Concerns have also been raised about curriculum overload, and rote learning.

I am aware that teachers of history have raised concerns that their subjects will no longer be compulsory. I believe that students should have as wide a choice as is feasible in their schools given the overall level of student demand and interest, the teaching resources available, and the qualifications profile of staff. They should also acquire a range of knowledge, essential skills and values which will contribute to lifelong learning, and effective social and economic participation. The importance of history in promoting critical analysis skills, interculturalism, an understanding of human development, democracy, past and current world issues, and the skills for an environmentally sustainable life are fully appreciated. I will be guided by the NCCA's advice in this matter.

Education Sector

27. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has examined and identified the quality, scale and skills requirement at all levels in the education sector in the future; if discussions have taken place with industry and academia with a view to identifying how best to meet any such requirements emerging; his proposals to meet such requirements in the short, medium to long term with particular reference to the recognition of the major role to be played by education towards economic recovery and future development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25252/11]

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has consulted with business sectors with a view to ensuring the availability of an ongoing supply of graduates with appropriate skills with particular reference to targeting the areas most likely to be affected by competition from other jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25600/11]

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has had discussions with primary, second level and third level authorities with the object of ensuring that the current educational focus is sufficiently progressive to provide for the requirements of industry and commercial sectors in both manufacturing and services in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25601/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 27, 122 and 123 together.

The education and training system has a central role to play in the development of workforce and entrepreneurship skills and through the provision of the research and innovation system which will foster economic growth, enterprise development and the creation of future employment opportunities.

The enterprise sector is represented on the statutory agencies responsible for curriculum reform and assessment, quality assurance and policy advice across the education system and on the boards of VECs, Institutes of Technology and FAS. Direct advice and input from industry also informs the development of education policy on an ongoing basis. Examples include the NCCA consultation processes on curriculum reform and assessment, and the process to develop the new national strategy on higher education.

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) also plays a key role in advising on the future skills needs of enterprise. Its reports are disseminated directly to education and training providers and provide a valuable input to the development and amendment of course curricula. EGFSN research and engagement between higher education providers and industry informed the development and selection of part-time higher education programmes for unemployed people being funded through the Springboard programme launched as part of the Governments Jobs Initiative. My Department and the Higher Education Authority, in collaboration with the Secretariat to the EGFSN are also working closely with representatives of the ICT industry to develop further responses to specific skills needs that have been identified by that sector.

State Examinations

28. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that there has been a 16% increase in the number of students studying history at leaving certificate level since 2006; and if making the subject optional at junior certificate will only undermine this development. [25107/11]

32. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on making history and geography optional for students aged 12 years as part of proposals to reform the junior certificate examination. [25106/11]

33. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that his Department carried out a proper consultation process with subject associations, particularly in relation to home economics, which is specifically referred to the NCCA process report. [25109/11]

45. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consult with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government about the long-term implications, both financially and culturally, should reform of the junior certificate lead to a reduction in the number of history and geography students graduating from schools and third level institutions. [25091/11]

48. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding and the projected timeframe for changes that are being considered for the reform of the junior certificate examination. [25105/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 28, 32, 33, 45 and 48 together.

The NCCA has been asked to review the junior certificate and advise on the scope for reform designed to strengthen literacy and numeracy, embed key skills, promote active learning and enhanced creativity and innovation, and ensure appropriate ways of generating evidence of learning. Concerns have also been raised about curriculum overload, and rote learning.

The Council has completed a public consultation process and has published a report on the consultation findings on its website *www.ncca.ie*. The consultation was conducted by the NCCA on foot of the publication of a discussion paper Innovation and Identity: Ideas for a new junior Cycle. There were several strands to the consultation and a high level of response was received. As the ideas discussed in the paper pertained to the junior cycle as a whole, the extent to which the consultation focused on subjects, the contents of subjects, and the work of subject associations was limited.

The Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE) took a commendable and particular interest in the junior cycle developments. The Deputy CEO of the NCCA addressed their Annual Conference on the matter and encouraged the drafting of a submission to the consultation representing the views of the ATHE. That extensive submission was received and aspects of it are referred to directly in the NCCA's Consultation Report. In addition, a further submission was received from St. Angela's College, Sligo, which is the institution charged with the initial preparation of teachers of Home Economics.

The Council is currently finalising its advice to me on the direction of reform, in consultation with the partners in education. I understand that the Council is considering its advice at its meeting today. Following receipt of the detailed advice from the NCCA, the timeframe for reform will be clearer but I have already indicated that I want to see a cap put on the number of subjects examined from 2012.

I am aware that teachers of history have raised concerns that their subjects will no longer be compulsory in voluntary secondary schools. I believe that students should have as wide a choice as is feasible in their schools given the overall level of student demand and interest, the teaching resources available, and the qualifications profile of staff. The importance of history in promoting critical analysis skills, interculturalism, an understanding of human development, democracy, past and current world issues, and the skills for an environmentally sustainable life are fully appreciated. I will be guided by the NCCA's advice in this matter.

Education Sector Funding

29. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will increase funding for the education sector to the level of the OECD average of 6% of GDP. [25110/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The funding allocation for the Education Sector for 2012 and for future years will be determined in the context of the overall Estimates and Budgetary process, a key element of which will be the results of the Comprehensive Reviews of Expenditure (CRE) undertaken by all Government Departments. It is not, therefore, possible at this stage to predict what the allocation for my Department, and its relationship to GDP, will be.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

30. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consultations with all interested groups are complete in relation to the establishment of a statutory fund to support the needs of former residents of residential institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25240/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I had a very constructive meeting with groups representing survivors of residential institutional abuse on 22nd July last, when we discussed the Government's approach to the proposed Statutory Fund to support the needs of victims of residential institutional abuse. The Government is proceeding with the drafting of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Bill on the basis of the General Scheme prepared by my Department, which followed extensive consultations with survivors of residential abuse and the groups which support them, together with a public consultation process. The General Scheme of the Bill and a Report on the Consultation Process are available on my Department's website as is a copy of the minutes of the meeting of 22 July.

At that meeting I invited submissions in relation to the proposals set out in the General Scheme. A number of responses have been received which are being considered as the drafting of the Bill continues.

Proposed Legislation

31. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the safeguards to be included in the legislation governing the implementation of the statutory trust fund that will ensure transparency and openness in its implementation; and his views that lessons can be learnt from the operation of the redress fund in which a number of victims' groups and survivors of abuse raised important concerns about a perceived lack of accountability. [25095/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The General Scheme of the Bill to establish the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund proposes the objects of the Statutory Fund to include the optimal disbursement of the available resources to meet the needs of survivors having regard to the principles of equity, consistency and transparency. While the General Scheme specifies the approved services for the purposes of the Fund, it provides that the Fund will determine the extent of, and conditions attaching to, the provision of these approved services. The Fund will determine and publish the criteria by reference to which it will make decisions on applications to it.

It is proposed that the Fund will be a corporate body whose Board shall comprise 7 members, including 2 former residents and which will publish an annual report. Its accounts will be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General while its chief executive will be accountable to the Public Accounts Committee and other Oireachtas Committees. It is also proposed that the Fund will be subject to the Freedom of Information and Ombudsman legislation.

I am satisfied that the proposed arrangements will ensure transparency and openness.

The Redress Board operates pursuant to the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002 to provide fair and reasonable awards to persons who suffered abuse as children while resident in scheduled institutions, on an ex-gratia basis, involving no finding of fault or declaration of liability. The Board, which is wholly independent in the performance of its functions, makes awards in accordance with the framework set out in Towards Redress and Recovery, the report of the independent Compensation Advisory Committee which advised on the appropriate levels of compensation. Independent legal advice is available to applicants and the vast majority chose to avail of this. It is open to each applicant to accept or reject an award made by the Board and the Review Committee provides an appeal mechanism by which an applicant can seek to have his/her award reviewed.

Questions Nos. 32 and 33 answered with Question No. 28.

Special Educational Needs

34. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when it is intended to allocate the remaining special needs assistants; the number of requests from schools seeking SNA support; the number already allocated to primary and second level schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25331/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. This now includes a requirement for the NCSE to have regard to an overall cap on the number of SNA posts.

Having considered all of the applications for SNA support which have been received from mainstream primary and post primary schools, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has now advised all mainstream schools of their SNA allocations for the 2011/12 school

year, taking into account the number of valid applications for SNA support and the assessed care needs of the children concerned. SNA provision in special schools is currently being reviewed.

As not all applications for SNA support can be made in advance of the school year, in order to prudently manage this valuable but limited resource, the NCSE and my Department decided that 475 of the 10,575 posts should be retained in order to allocate them over the coming school year in cases such as emergency, appeals, acquired injuries or new school entrants with special needs care. Approximately 10,100 whole time equivalent (WTE) SNA posts have therefore been allocated to date.

6,030 WTE posts have been allocated to primary schools, 1,974 to post primary schools and 2,028 to special schools (including special schools for autism). In addition, there are 60 early child care workers posts which are included under the cap on SNA posts. The NCSE intends to publish details of all of the Special Needs Assistant allocations which they have made to schools to date, for the 2011/12 school year. This will be available on the NCSE website shortly at *www.ncse.ie*.

The NCSE has capacity to increase SNA allocations for schools from the retained pool of 475 posts. However, as these posts have to last for the school year the NCSE must manage the allocation of any additional posts in a measured and prioritised manner. The care needs of pupils for whom any new applications are being made must be assessed in the context of the existing levels of SNA support available to the school.

It is expected that schools, before requesting any review of their SNA provision, will be in a position to demonstrate that they have made every effort to manage their allocation of SNA posts to best effect.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund

35. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will give assurances that the statutory trust fund will not be used to replicate existing services that are in place to deal with persons seeking assistance on housing, welfare, and other social issues. [25096/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The proposals contained in the General Scheme of the proposed Residential Institutions Statutory Fund, which has been published on my Department's website, have been drawn up following extensive consultation with survivors of residential institutional abuse and the groups which support them, together with a public consultation process. The Government has decided that the Fund should target resources at services to support survivors' needs and as drafted the General Scheme provides for approved services to include, counselling, psychological support services and mental health services together with such health and personal social services, educational services and housing services as the Fund may determine. Further services can be prescribed as appropriate.

It is intended that the services supported by the Fund will be complementary to survivors' statutory entitlements. The Fund will work closely with public authorities so as to ensure that former residents can access publicly available services.

Departmental Expenditure

36. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expenditure profile, both current and capital, for his Department for 2011 up to the end of August; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25228/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Overall expenditure on the Education & Skills Vote of €5,251 million to end-August 2011 was running €66 million, or less than 1.2%, behind Profile. Current Expenditure of €4,977 million was running €71 million behind profile while Capital Expenditure of €274 million was €5 million ahead of profile. At the same time last year overall expenditure was also running some 1.2% (€65 million) behind Profile.

The situation regarding expenditure will be monitored very closely by my Department over the remaining months of this year.

Third-level Sector Staff

37. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reverse the controls imposed on universities and third-level colleges under the revised employment control framework that applies absolute limits to the numbers and grades of staff in teaching, research and administration that is impeding the development and search for knowledge in a modern and diverse society. [25113/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The economic circumstances of the country are such that the staffing moratorium introduced across the public sector by the previous Government in 2009 has to be maintained.

The higher education sector has been given significant latitude within this moratorium relative to other areas of public expenditure. The Employment Control Framework introduced for the sector aims to provide institutions with a greater flexibility around recruitment, on the basis of meeting a required overall reduction in posts.

A 6% reduction in numbers was required over the 2009-2010 period, and this was achieved. A renewed framework covering the 2011 to 2014 period was agreed earlier this year and requires a significantly smaller reduction in posts funded out of core Exchequer grants over this period. It provides institutions with considerable flexibility to fill vacancies, recruit additional staff and make promotions, subject to the requirements of the Framework. Furthermore, the Framework allows for significant increases in the number of fully funded research posts, in recognition of the importance of research activity to future economic development. Institutions are also free to recruit into other posts that are fully funded from external revenue streams.

It should also be noted that the framework for the current period was reviewed by myself and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on taking office following representations from the sector. A number of clarifications and changes were agreed, including the removal of a ceiling on research and non-exchequer funded posts, and a revised ECF issued in June.

School Staffing

38. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to relax the public service embargo to employ qualified mathematics teachers when it is shown that schools are not adequately resourced to teach higher level mathematics; if not, the arrangements that will be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25206/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Teaching Council has recently carried out a survey of post-primary schools to ascertain the qualifications of maths teachers. The results of the survey shows that a significant majority, 68%, of teachers teaching maths in 258 schools are fully qualified to do so, that 29% have undergone some studies in maths and only 2% have no third level qualifications/studies in maths.

The Teaching Council has now asked schools which have not completed the earlier survey to do so by 26th September.

Providing for high quality teaching and learning of mathematics is of key strategic importance to the State. As part of the Government's overall strategy to improve the teaching and learning of maths in schools, my Department is currently making arrangements for the provision of a new training programme for maths teachers. It will provide unqualified maths teachers with the opportunity to upskill their knowledge of mathematics and study the strategies best suited to the new Project Maths syllabuses.

Despite the current restrictions on recruitment to the public sector, teacher vacancies are continuing to be filled. Recruitment of teachers is a matter for individual schools and schools have been directed by my Department, as far as practicable, to appoint only appropriately qualified and registered teachers.

The appointment and deployment of teachers within schools is also a matter for schools themselves.

Special Educational Needs

39. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider the needs of a person (details supplied) in County Cork to enable their child to have access to a special needs assistant for the full working hours of the school day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25201/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. This now includes a requirement for the NCSE to have regard to an overall cap on the number of SNA posts.

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, 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.

The NCSE issued a circular to all schools advising of the allocation process for the 2011/2012 school year. A key feature of the amended scheme is to provide for an annual allocation of Special Needs Assistant support to eligible schools.

The NCSE has now advised all mainstream schools, including the school referred to by the Deputy in Bantry, of their SNA allocation for the current school year, taking into account the care needs of qualifying pupils attending the school.

I wish to clarify that the recruitment and deployment of SNAs within schools are matters for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

The NCSE will advise schools early in the new school year of a process to review allocation decisions to ensure that correct procedures were followed and that they comply with my Department's policy. The merits of individual allocation decisions will not be open to appeal under this mechanism.

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

It will be expected that schools, before requesting a review, will be in a position to demonstrate that they have made every effort to manage their allocation of SNA posts to best effect.

Departmental Reviews

40. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the review of small rural schools; the number of submissions that have been received to date in 2011; when the review is expected to conclude; and the list of schools on a county basis which are listed for closure. [25118/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): A value for money review on small primary schools is currently under way in my Department. This review is part of the normal review processes undertaken by all Departments on an annual basis on selected areas of expenditure and is being conducted in line with the standard procedure for value for money reviews. These procedures require that the views of stakeholders be obtained. In this regard, public consultations were conducted earlier this year and a total of 1,065 responses were received. The review is expected to be completed by the end of the year and a report should be available to me then. At that stage I will consider the outcomes and proposals of the review.

Special Educational Needs

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to meet in full or in part the ongoing educational requirements of children with special needs in view of the importance of ensuring that such children have ready access to education facilities in line with their requirements in order that they, in the future, can have a reasonable chance of contributing to the economy and their own independence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25253/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Firstly, I wish to reiterate this Government's commitment to the provision of resources for children with special educational needs.

The Programme for Government sets out that education will be a priority for this Government and that we will endeavour to protect and enhance the educational experience of children, young people and students.

Approximately 15% of the entire budget of my Department — some €1.3 billion — will be spent in support of children with Special Educational Needs this year. This provision is in line with expenditure in 2010 and shows that despite the current economic difficulties, funding for special education has not been cut.

This Government is committed to the protection of frontline services for pupils with special educational needs. 10,575 whole time equivalent (wte) Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts are being provided for primary, post-primary and special schools for the coming school year in order to support the care needs of pupils with disabilities. This represents an increase over the December 2010 position where 10,543 posts were provided. Unlike other areas of the public sector SNA vacancies can be filled up to the approved number.

Approximately 9,950 learning support/resource teacher posts, including those provided under the General Allocation Model, are also being provided in primary & post primary schools in order to provide additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs. This represents an increase of approximately 350 whole time equivalent posts over last year's allocation.

Over 1,000 teachers are also being provided for in special schools providing teaching to pupils with various disabilities at much reduced pupil: teacher ratios, for example the autism PTR is 6:1 and the moderate general learning disability PTR is 8:1.

Enhanced levels of school capitation are payable to most special schools and special classes and special School Transport arrangements for pupils with disabilities are provided at a cost of over €60m per year.

Approximately €1.3m is also provided annually to schools for assistive technology support.

Early educational intervention is provided for children with autism from $2\frac{1}{2}$ years of age. There are now 56 early intervention classes for children with autism attached to mainstream schools that are funded by the Department. Funding is also provided through the home tuition programme for children with autism aged from $2\frac{1}{2}$ years to 5 who are unable to access an early intervention class.

An extended school year is also currently available for pupils who have either a severe/profound general learning disability or who have autism.

The continued commitment of this Government to special education provision, at a time when savings are being required across a range of expenditure areas, will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to have access to educational facilities in line with their requirements.

National Literacy Strategy

42. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the national literacy strategy for children and young persons; if every school will be required to have a literacy action plan in place for the new school term; and the supports that have been made available to teaching staff to help them deliver the action plan. [25117/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I published Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life, the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, on 8 July. Good progress has already been made on implementing the early actions identified in the Strategy.

One of the key actions in the Strategy is to require all schools to engage in robust self evaluation and put in place a three-year school improvement plan which includes specific targets for the promotion and improvement of literacy and numeracy. Schools will be required to put these plans in place by the end of the 2012-13 school year as outlined in the Strategy. Robust school self-evaluation will enable schools to identify strengths and areas for development in their own work and will focus particularly on literacy and numeracy. Arising from school self-evaluation, schools will be enabled to draw up targets and actions for improvement which will be included in their School Improvement Plans.

The Inspectorate of my Department is finalising draft materials to support the implementation of school self-evaluation. These materials will be in addition to Looking at Our School — Primary and Looking at Our School — Post-primary which are already available on the website of my Department. The additional new sample materials will be in pilot use in a selected sample of primary and post-primary schools later this year. Inspectors will be working with the staffs of these schools to refine the materials and develop self-evaluation practices in the schools. In addition, members of the Inspectorate and staff from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) will be providing inputs on school self-evaluation to teachers and school leaders at various professional development networks during this school year.

A range of professional development courses in literacy and numeracy were provided to teachers over the summer vacation period. Over 10,400 teachers completed summer in-service courses in literacy, over 1,270 teachers completed courses in numeracy and mathematics and a

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further 1,230 teachers completed courses in Irish. The PDST will be providing further courses to teachers in these areas in the course of this school year.

Schools Building Projects

43. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Kerry is a priority for the Department; if he will proceed to construction without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25205/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school to which the Deputy refers was included in the Ministerial announcement of January 2011. This school project is one where a brief will be formulated and the appointment of a Design Team will commence in 2011.

The project brief for this particular school has been reviewed and agreed with the School Authorities. The next step will entail the appointment of a Design Team and this process is expected to commence shortly.

All large scale building projects, including this project, will be considered within the context of my Department's multi-annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. In light of current competing demands on the capital budget of my Department, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the provision of permanent accommodation for this school at this time.

The current status of all projects on the school building programme, including this project, may be viewed on my Department's website at *www.education.ie* and this will be updated regularly throughout the year.

Adult Education

44. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention will be drawn to the problems being experienced by persons participating in the apprentice finishing scheme and who are being prevented from finishing their training in a trade. [25114/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I understand that, in order to qualify for the award of the FETAC Advanced Certificate — Craft, apprentices are required to: —

- Be registered as an apprentice for a period of at least four years? Have successfully completed Phase 1 to Phase 7 of their apprenticeships
- Have completed a statutory period of 4 years (208 weeks) in employment since date of registration, as apprentices in their registered trade with FÁS-approved employers.

In order to ensure that apprentices are given as many opportunities as possible to support the timely completion of their apprenticeship, FÁS has taken a number of initiatives to enable registered redundant apprentices to progress and finish their apprenticeships: —

- Change in Progression Rules — Redundant apprentices are now permitted to progress to their next Off-the-Job Phase of their apprenticeships even though they have not yet completed their previous on-the-job Phase.
- Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme 2011 — FÁS is providing a temporary Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme whereby FÁS approved employers in the public and private sectors will provide redundant apprentices with training and assessment on-the-job at Phase 3, Phase 5 and Phase 7 of their apprenticeships. The maximum period of placement is 26 weeks at Phase 3 or 26 weeks at Phase 5 or 12 weeks at Phase 7.

- Competency Determination Mechanism — FÁS will be introducing shortly a Competency Determination Scheme for the trades of Brick & Stonelaying, Carpentry & Joinery, Electrical, Plastering and Plumbing. This scheme is for redundant apprentices who have successfully completed Phases 1 to 7 of their apprenticeships, but who do not meet the requirement of having completed the statutory 4 years (208 weeks) in employment.

Redundant apprentices who pass the competency assessment will receive an exemption from this requirement thereby enabling them to complete their apprenticeships and qualify for the award of the FETAC Advanced Certificate — Craft. Competency assessments are being scheduled in September 2011.

- Recognition of Prior Learning Scheme Redundant apprentices who have successfully completed Phase 1 to Phase 7 (or Phase 7 Equivalent assessments) of their apprenticeships excluding the trades of Brick & Stonelaying, Carpentry & Joinery, Electrical, Plastering and Plumbing but who have not completed the statutory 4 years in employment as apprentices may be granted an exemption from this requirement by validating their competence under the Recognition of Prior Learning Scheme. FÁS will invite eligible redundant apprentices to submit a portfolio of evidence of trade related work experience gained at home and/or abroad and/or trade related further training and/or education undertaken during periods of redundancy. The granting of exemptions is based solely on the portfolios of evidence submitted to the Redundant Apprentice Accreditation Committee. Redundant apprentices who re granted an exemption will be considered to have completed their Apprenticeships and thereby qualify for the award of the FETAC Advanced Certificate — Craft.
- Certificate in Craft Transferable Skills — FÁS and the HEA with the Institutes of Technology have developed a post Phase 6 programme for redundant apprentices who wish to access a programme at 3rd level in the Institutes of Technology. Redundant Apprentices who successfully complete this programme will receive a HETAC Special Award Level 3, 30 ECTS Credits. This award should entitle apprentices to enter year 2 of a relevant Higher Certificate (level 6) and in some particular cases may gain entry to Ordinary Degree Programmes Level 7. Redundant Apprentices will be required to complete the Phase 7 equivalence and can submit in their portfolio of evidence for the Award of the Advanced Certificate Craft. The Certificate in Craft Transferable Skills (optional) will be offered by the Institutes of Technology in Term 1 — 2011/2012.
- Refresher Programme for Redundant Referred Apprentices — To assist referred apprentices who wish to progress, FÁS and the Institutes of Technology have developed a short duration programme to prepare redundant apprentices to repeat their outstanding assessments, and this programme will be offered by the Institutes of Technology in Term 1 — 2011/2012.
- Léargas has provided support to FÁS for apprentices to complete on-the-job training with assessment with employers in Germany and Finland. In the period 2009/2010, over 100 apprentices have undertaken this programme and FÁS has received approval for a further 43 redundant apprentice placement in 2011/2012
- Conversion Programme — Electrical / Plumbing — FÁS has developed a Conversion Programme for redundant Electrical and Plumbing apprentices who have worked primarily in the Construction Sector to undertake additional training in modules associated with the Manufacturing and Facility Maintenance Sectors. The pilot programme provides a combination of off and on-the-job training in a FÁS Training Centre with work experience in the Manufacturing and Facility Maintenance Sectors

My Department along with FÁS will continue to explore ways to support and assist apprentices progress and finish their apprenticeships.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 28.

Special Educational Needs

46. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will implement the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act in order to ensure inclusive education practices that are underpinned by a series of statutory rights in order that children with special education needs receive an education in an inclusive environment and achieve outcomes in accordance with their abilities. [25104/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that a number of sections of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act have already been commenced.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) made recommendations which suggested that additional investment over a period of years of up to €235m per annum, across the education and health sectors, would be required to fully implement the EPSEN Act. My Department's opinion is that the level of investment required would be greater than that envisaged in the NCSE report.

In the light of the very difficult economic situation, and these significant costs, the previous Government deferred the full implementation of EPSEN.

Given the costs involved and current fiscal constraints, addressing this issue will be very challenging. I will be considering how we can develop a plan to implement the objectives of the EPSEN Act so as to deliver improved educational outcomes for students with special needs.

Departmental Reports

47. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the name and number of external reports that were commissioned by his Department from 1997 to 2000 in tabular form; the cost of each one of these external reports; if these external reports were given out to tender; the name of the person or company who was commissioned for these external reports; his views of the benefits that these external reports served the public interest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21414/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): For the Deputy's information, the list below of reports for the years in question (1997-2000) was compiled in response to previous parliamentary questions tabled some years ago. Of the fifty two reports commissioned during this timeframe, thirty four were implemented in full, a further 7 were partially implemented and some others were noted as project specific. Accordingly it would be reasonable to assume that the advice and recommendations provided by the reports assisted the Department in the development of policies and procedures for the benefit of the Department and the wider education sector.

Note: The totals for 1997-2000 inclusive are given in Irish Punts £

Year 1997

	Purpose	Cost
Commission on Points System	Examination of Points System	£108,709.00
Coopers & Lybrand	Review of Financial Guidelines, Accounting & Auditing Practices in Primary & Voluntary Secondary Schools	£22,796.00
Dermot Rochford	Review of functions and administrative staffing/organisational structures in amalgamating vocational education committees	£10,229.00

	Purpose	Cost
Dr. Maurice Bric	Humanities and Social Sciences Research: A Case for a Research Council	£4,500.00
Hay Management	Preparation of Competency Model for Director, National Centre for Technology in Education	£1,815.00
The Learning Organisation	Schools IT 2000 Project	£14,228.00
West Dublin Education Centre	Report on the future development of Primary Education in Mallow	£2,929.00
	Total	£165,206.00

Year 1998

	Purpose	Cost
Ad-hoc Advisory Group	Report on Task Force on the Supply of Technicians	£254,640.00
ARCLINE	Archival Work — EDP & An Gum	£26,620.00
CIRCA Group	Implementation of Public Services Mngt Act, 1997	£20,631.00
Dermot Rochford	KVEC Amalgamation	£9,190.00
Dr. Seamus O hUallachain	Expenditure Review of Instituid Teangeolaiochta Eireann	£2,500.00
Frank Pignatelli	Schools Points Based System of Priority	£23,782.60
NUI — Maynooth	Adult Education — Green Paper	£34,000.00
Price Waterhouse	Value for Money Assignment	£6,504.00
Prospectus	Business Planning Process	£6,045.00
Sean Nolan	Irish Academy for the Performing Arts	£2,500.00
WRC Social & Economic Consultants	Women's Education Initiative	£20,100.00
	Total	£406,512.60

Year 1999

	Purpose	Cost
ARCLINE	Archival Records — EDP & An Gum	£70,210.00
Deloitte & Touche	Organisational Review of the Department	£25,477.00
Economics Dept -UCD	To assess both quantitatively and qualitatively the social and economic contribution of the proposals contained in the Department of Education & Science's initial outline of priority needs for the National Development Plan and Community Support Framework for the period 2000 — 2006	£4,750.00
Ernst & Young	Review of Structures in the Building Unit	£10,605.00
Prospectus	Business Planning — Review of Special Education Unit	£69,824.00
WRC Social & Economic Consultants	Review of VTOS	£17,480.00
WRC Social & Economic Consultants	Women's Education Initiative	£20,100.00
	Total	£218,446.00

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Year 2000

	Purpose	Cost
C.Sheffield	Employee Assistance Service Review	£4,090.00
CRC, Trinity College	Evaluation of Early School Leavers Initiative	£52,810.89
CRC, Trinity College	Preparation of National Youth Work Development Plan	£54,300.00
Crowleys — DFK	ESF verification report	£70,654.81
Deloitte & Touche	Organisational review	£35,214.00
Dermot Rochford	Staffing resource and organisational needs of NQAI, HETAC and FETAC	£14,336.08
Dermot Rochford	Staffing needs of admin office in Tourism College, Killybegs	£4,089.90
Eileen Costello	Consultancy — Inventory System	£1,625.00
ERC, St. Pat's Drumcondra	Research on 8 — 15 Early School Leaver Initiative	£111,117.00
Ernst & Young	Review of Work in the Building Unit DES	£15,137.00
Eustace Patterson Ltd	Review of Gaisce	£15,157.00
Farrell Grant Sparks	Report on Tralee IT under Section 20 of RTC Act 1992	£32,017.18
Farrell Grant Sparks/ A & L Goodbody	Pilot PPP Education Projects (Five PPP Schools and Cork School of Music)	£103,665.99
Lesley Dee	Orchard Cope Foundation	£5,075.00
Noel Lindsay	Saving & loan fund for adult & continuing education	£2,000.00
NUI — Maynooth	Adult Education — Green & White Papers	£35,000.00
Oliver Freaney & Co	3rd Level Finance accountancy	£19,950.00
Philip Lee Solicitors	Consultancy -Vet School	£2,934.25
Prospectus	Business Planning and Partnership in DES	£17,949.00
Prospectus	Review of Special Education	£26,645.00
Prospectus	Staff survey on internal communications	£23,262.00
Sean Cromien	Review of Department of Education operations & structures	£16,500.00
Todd Architects	Masterplan — Portlaoise	£59,508.00
Tony Bromwell	Review of Safety Procedures in Lisnagry, Co.Limerick	£3,534.00
WRC Social & Economic Consultants	Review of VTOS	£11,654.00
WRC Social & Economic Consultants	Women's Education Initiative	£20,100.00
WRC Social & Economic Consultants	Improving Effectiveness of VTOS	£29,140.00
	Total	£787,466.10

Question No. 48 answered with Question No. 28.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

49. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding his efforts to ensure religious institutions meet half the compensation costs to victims of abuse in residential institutions, the cost of which is estimated at €1.36 billion; and the measures that are in place to deal with religious orders that have placed 47 religious schools under the management and operation of the Le Chéile Schools Trust. [25093/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): On 22nd July last I met with representatives of many of the 18 congregations who were party to the 2002 Indemnity Agreement. At that meeting I expressed my disappointment that their offers fall well short of the €680m contribution required to realise a 50:50 share of the costs of the response to residential institutional abuse. I sought their agreement to a legal mechanism which would ensure that title to school infrastructure properties would be transferred to the State, at the State's request, and that title to such properties could not be altered, whether by sale on the open market or by transfer into any Trust arrangement, without the prior consent of my Department. I will shortly be meeting with some individual congregations and I will continue to pursue the realisation of the 50:50 target contribution with the congregations involved.

School Uniforms

50. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures that are being implemented to reduce the cost of school uniforms; and if proposals to allow parents the opportunity to buy generic uniforms and sew on crests are being implemented. [25102/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

Individual school authorities are responsible for the drawing up of a school policy in relation to the wearing of school uniforms. However, my Department recommends that the formulation of such a school policy should allow for prior consultation with teachers, parents and pupils where appropriate and enable any concerns about the issue of cost to be raised and considered. In this regard, I would support the type of proposal suggested by the Deputy as a means of reducing the cost for parents of school uniforms.

Middle East Peace Process

51. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views in the event of a UN vote on statehood for Palestine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25350/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): President Abbas last week announced his intention to apply to the Security Council for full membership of the UN. The decision to grant full entry as a UN member state is solely a decision for the Security Council, of which Ireland is not currently a member. The Palestinian decision to seek some form of recognition at the UN is understandable, borne as it is out of frustration at the complete inertia in the peace process over the past twelve months — and, indeed, for many years. I believe that the Palestinians are fully entitled to make their case at the UN, given that the UN has been centrally involved for many years in efforts to promote a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The Government supports the basic right of the Palestinian people to the establishment of a sovereign State. Indeed, this has been the position of successive Irish Governments for three decades. I will obviously consider carefully the terms of any draft Resolution which may eventually be presented to the General Assembly by the Palestinians, though this is unlikely to be for some weeks yet. I can say at this stage that, in line with our long established and principled position on the Middle East Peace Process, we would be favourably disposed towards any reasonably worded proposal eventually tabled which kept open a clear perspective towards the resumption of substantive negotiations while also seeking to enhance Palestinian status at the UN through the granting of Observer State status.

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Regardless of the outcome of discussions at the UN this week which still remains to be determined, the reality is that Palestinians will still have to negotiate with Israel to achieve a state on the ground. President Abbas has made clear his willingness to engage in serious negotiations with Israel to achieve the objective of statehood through a comprehensive agreement. In my discussions this week in New York with a range of partners, I have stressed that the essential priority must remain the resumption of direct negotiations.

Overseas Development Aid

52. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount of money given by Irish Aid to each Irish non-governmental organisation for the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2010 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25390/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Government's aid programme, which is managed by Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is sharply focused on the fight against global poverty and hunger. Cooperation with development Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) represents a very important element of the aid programme. Ireland has consistently channelled a higher proportion of its overall development assistance through NGOs than most other international donors, reflecting the longstanding strong support of the Irish people for the work of Irish aid agencies and missionaries. In 2010, the Government, through Irish Aid, provided over €111 million in funding to Irish development NGOs. In 2007, over €126 million was provided;in 2006, over €109 million;and in 2005, over €74 million.Funding to the NGOs is provided to support their long term development work and for emergency and humanitarian assistance, and work on development education.

The following is an outline of all Irish Aid funding provided to Irish NGOs in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2010.

NGO	2005	2006	2007	2010
80:20 Educating & Acting for a better world	€167,517	€195,000	€354,540	€380,234
Action Aid	€936,000	€1,107,486	€1,526,553	€850,000
AFRI Ltd — Action from Ireland	€33,400	€93,000	€113,254	€63,700
Africa Solidarity Centre	€21,200	€28,600	€42,000	€9,000
AIDLINK	€43,864	€853,184	€894,440	€960,000
AIDS Partnership Africa	€51,300	€30,000	€473,098	€127,191
AKIDWA		€24,000		
Amawele Ltd				€14,000
Amnesty International Irish Section	€74,020	€74,000	€112,000	€116,200
ASHA Community Health & Development Society		€69,358		
ASTI General Fund		€10,619		€9,600
Ballyfermot Travellers' Action				€12,000
Banúlacht	€95,672	€95,000	€147,000	€101,849
Bawnogue Womens Development Group		€8,000		
Bóthar Ltd.	€66,000			€100,000

NGO	2005	2006	2007	2010
Burma Action Ireland	€21,310	€10,800	€79,619	€2,800
Camara Education Ltd.		€50,000	€208,640	€400,000
Centre for Global Education		€107,000	€83,000	€99,682
Child Aid Ireland		€6,818		
Childfund Ireland	€202,500	€592,350	€1,054,510	€692,000
Children in Crossfire	€1,166,405	€1,138,244	€1,006,968	
Christian Aid Ireland	€3,083,982	€2,856,600	€3,411,483	€3,302,134
Christian Blind Mission Ireland		€765,310	€581,013	€778,594
Church Mission Society Ireland	€115,000	€330,358	€447,583	€495,856
Comber Romanian Orphange Appeal		€135,000	€200,000	
Comhlámh	€395,819	€771,940	€782,511	€674,813
Concern Worldwide	€22,403,956	€27,271,990	€29,493,559	€24,227,880
Cork Omdurman Partnership				€25,000
Cradle Ltd			€9,602	
Crosslinks	€235,000		€263,989	€101,899
Debt & Development Coalition		€42,000	€49,000	€33,600
Dóchas	€129,558	€199,320	€240,000	€242,964
ECO-UNESCO	€10,400	€6,822	€50,000	€45,000
Edith Wilkins Foundation	€30,000	€123,000	€40,000	€51,000
EILInterculteral Learning			€33,400	€24,000
Electric Aid			€50,950	
Ethical Development Action				€8,000
Foundation Romanian Children's		€190,650		
Friends in Ireland			€192,598	€171,639
Friends of Hospice Uganda (Ireland)	€57,500	€191,500	€170,500	€298,368
Friends of Londiani Ireland		€62,025	€77,531	€193,400
Friends of the Earth Ireland			€40,000	€18,400
Front Line	€116,500	€393,078	€383,986	€450,000
Galway One World Centre	€89,200	€110,000	€120,000	€117,853
Galway Youth Federation		€18,384		
Glencree Centre for Reconciliation	€12,000	€38,500	€48,000	€250,000
GOAL	€16,434,291	€17,487,885	€18,689,700	€17,378,321
Gorta	€126,519			€150,000
Habitat for Humanity Ireland	€258,500		€188,345	€175,836
Haven Community Foundation				€100,000
Hope Foundation	€260,000	€260,000	€69,994	
Housing for Boaco		€50,000		
ICTU Irish Congress of Trade Unions (Global Solidarity Campaign)	€75,000		€75,000	€93,000
IDEA — Irish Development Education Association		€44,000	€94,830	€180,000
International Service Ireland		€404,257	€572,776	
Interserve Ireland		€405,257	€302,000	€25,586
Irish Fair Trade Network		€1,143,189	€1,400,000	€3,920,000
Irish Family Planning Association		€21,064	€41,266	€208,876
Irish Friends of Albania		€175,000	€162,000	€54,720

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NGO	2005	2006	2007	2010
Irish Sudanese Solidarity Group	€5,000	€5,000		
Jampa Ling Trust	€30,751			
KADE -Kerry Action for Development Education	€144,800	€107,600	€100,400	€113,000
Latin America Solidarity Centre	€41,600	€76,420	€72,420	€88,000
Latin American Street Children Organisation	€105,000	€105,000	€80,360	
Law Society of Ireland		€56,395		€70,500
LEPRA Ireland		€109,877	€223,776	€87,567
Leprosy Mission Ireland	€150,000	€392,705	€516,990	€587,778
Link Community Development		€77,619	€328,287	€156,381
Livability Ireland/John Grooms	€66,250		€189,206	
LORETO Education Trust Co. Ltd				€20,000
Louisburgh Community Project	€7,958	€7,489	€7,500	€10,000
Lourdes Youth & Community Services	€145,000	€135,000		€164,826
Louth Youth Federation		€12,000	€19,472	
Mayfield Community Arts Centre	€40,000	€62,000	€60,000	€80,000
Medecins Sans Frontiers	€1,005,000	€2,028,289	€1,900,010	€1,325,000
Mermaid Country Wicklow Arts Centre				€2,500
Methodist Missionary Society			€162,800	€174,680
Misean cara -formerly Irish Missionary Resource Services	€1,200,000	€14,007,500	€16,000,000	€16,000,000
National Council YMCA Irl	€50,000	€50,000	€50,000	€85,000
National Youth Council of Ireland	€217,850		€290,366	€205,000
National Youth Federation		€16,000		
Nepal Leprosy Trust	€30,000	€129,346	€19,500	
Niall Mellon Township Challenge			€2,500,000	
Northside Learning Hub				€3,000
ORBIS			€200,000	€200,000
Oxfam Ireland	€2,205,200	€435,000	€3,605,426	€2,277,503
Pavee Point Youth Project		€18,233		
People in Aid	€50,000	€50,000		
Peru Solidarity Forum	€128,270			
PLAN International Ireland	€282,080	€365,579	€1,359,370	€1,839,992
Playing for Life Ltd				€134,900
Poetry Ireland	€29,407		€34,000	€18,400
Power4good Ireland Ltd			€145,565	€125,827
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	€111,250	€67,975	€143,650	
Progressio Ireland	€258,400	€851,430	€672,636	€700,000
Protea Education Development Programme		€48,510	€15,000	€114,732
Realt Africa Teaching Programme			€4,800	
Realta Global AIDS Foundation		€60,300		
Right to Sight			€35,060	€100,000
Samaritan's Purse Ireland			€163,056	
Schools Across Borders				€70,900

NGO	2005	2006	2007	2010
Self Help Africa (SHA)	€2,565,000	€3,062,192	€4,001,900	€2,802,500
SERVE in Solidarity Ireland		€264,923	€288,623	€147,336
Shanty Educational Project Ltd		€62,500	€65,000	€45,500
Sight Savers International		€399,247	€400,000	€780,000
Skillshare International Ireland	€232,711	€172,000	€646,186	€16,000
Social + Health Education Project			€103,868	€113,822
Social Innovations Foundation		€25,000	€55,000	
South Inner City Community			€82,200	
Special Olympics Ireland			€6,000	€77,000
Sponsor an African Scholar			€15,000	
Street Children of Bucharest		€193,752		
SUAS Educational Development	€278,939	€90,000	€300,000	€110,000
Sustainable Ireland Co-operation		€27,800		
Teachers for China		€45,000		
The Mary Robinson Foundation				€80,000
The Rose Project		€115,000	€231,868	€200,000
The Support Africa Foundation				€100,000
The West Cork Scrapstore	€8,000	€10,666	€18,400	€16,000
To Russia with Love			€96,000	
Tools for Solidarity			€55,720	€11,653
TRAIDLINKS		€784,000	€400,000	€450,000
Transparency Int. Ireland		€3,200	€22,000	€10,000
Trócaire	€15,228,005	€22,258,791	€19,777,967	€18,851,727
Twinning the Kingdoms Ltd				€10,000
Valid Nutrition			€425,000	€525,000
Value Added In Africa				€15,800
VITA-Refugee Trust International		€400,000	€595,000	€700,000
Voluntary Service International	€13,800	€20,632	€24,408	€21,320
Volunteer Missionary Movement			€4,000	
Volunteers in Irish Veterinary Assistance — VIVA	€2,500			€32,340
VSO Ireland Limited	€996,585	€1,133,805	€812,873	€960,000
War On Want NI	€30,000	€411,596	€400,000	€400,000
Waterford One World Centre		€95,000	€105,000	€126,500
Waterford Youth Arts		€9,600		€12,752
WEST PAPUA ACTION	€10,800	€11,560		
Wingspread	€39,000			
World Vision Ireland	€1,962,158	€2,335,887	€3,922,806	€2,292,519
TOTAL	€74,383,727	€109,198,006	€126,131,707	€111,398,250

Ministerial Staff

53. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every Cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26119/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Three Special Advisers have been appointed to advise me in my capacity as Tánaiste and also as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, as follows:

Name	Office	Annual salary	Date of appointment
Mark Garrett	Office of the Tánaiste	€168,000	10 March 2011
Colm O'Reardon	Office of the Tánaiste	€155,000	10 March 2011
Jean O'Mahony	Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade	€80,051	10 March 2011

Neither of the two Ministers of State appointed to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has appointed a Special Adviser.

Motor Vehicle Registration

54. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a delay of 12 days is occurring at the Applus centre in Cork to process VRT payments thus putting substantial numbers of car sales at risk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25422/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they have been assured by Applus that there are no delays in processing VRT payments at their centres in Cork. In order to register an unregistered vehicle (or one previously registered outside the State) an appointment must be made with the NCTS (Applus), within 7 days of its entry into the State, to have a pre-registration examination of the vehicle carried out. The registration process must be completed and VRT paid at the NCTS (Applus) Centre within 30 days of the arrival of the vehicle in the State. Once the vehicle is registered within the 30 day period there are no liabilities to any late charges that may arise.

In the case of motor dealers the Revenue Commissioners introduced a pre- inspection system in March 2011 whereby authorised motor dealers can register vehicles previously registered outside the State via ROS (Revenue's online service). This allows for vehicles to be pre-inspected by the NCTS prior to being sold by the motor dealer. Following an examination of the vehicle's documentation by NCTS the vehicle details are recorded on ROS and the dealer can then register the vehicle and pay the VRT at the point of sale of the vehicle. Information on this system is available at: *http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/information-for-traders.html.*

To avail of this service a motor dealer must register for ROS. Assistance on this is available from the ROS Helpdesk at 1890 201 106 or email: roshelp@revenue.ie.

Credit Union Sector

55. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will give details of the strategy to underpin the solvency and viability of the credit union sector that was presented to the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF; the further discussions with the staff of the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF that will be necessary to clarify some aspects of the restructuring of credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25442/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The strategy to which the Deputy refers was prepared in line with Ireland's targets under the EU/ECB/IMF Programme of Support for Ireland and presented to the EU Authorities and the IMF on 30 May 2011. This strategy continues to be subject to further discussion with the Troika and as a result it has not been presented to Government and will, for the time being, remain a confidential document. The

Government recognises the importance of credit unions as a volunteer cooperative movement and the distinction between them and other financial institutions. The Terms of Reference for the Commission on Credit Unions is to review the future of the movement and make recommendations in relation to the most effective regulatory structure for it. This will take into account its not-for-profit mandate, its volunteer ethos and community focus, while paying due regard to the need to fully protect depositors' savings and financial stability. The Commission will be providing me, as Minister for Finance, with its final report by the end of March 2012.

Any restructuring process will take account of the interim report of the Commission on Credit Unions. The Commission is on target to present its Interim Report me by end-September 2011. It is anticipated that this will feed into the legislation to be submitted by end-December 2011.

State Banking Sector

56. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Finance if a person is legally entitled to be provided with the full details of all repayments they have made on their mortgage for the past 30 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25446/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The duties of a mortgage lender to supply documents and information to a borrower are set out in section 130 of the Consumer Credit Act 1995. That section provides that ' *a mortgage lender shall, in respect of a housing loan, issue to the borrower:*

(a) at the time the loan is made, or as soon as may be practicable thereafter a copy of the mortgage deed (including any contract relating thereto) which copy shall be additional to any copy of such mortgage deed issued to his legal representative, and

(b) a statement of the total amount outstanding on the loan on a specified date occurring not more than one year after the making of the loan and at intervals of not more than one year thereafter until the loan is fully repaid, such statement being issued as soon as practicable after the date specified.

In addition, under Data Protection legislation, a person is entitled to receive a copy of all personal data held on him/her. If a lending institution holds the details of repayments made on a loan in an accessible format, then the borrower is entitled to seek and receive such data. There is no obligation, however, on the lending institution to hold such data for a period longer than 6 years.

Tax Code

57. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Finance the time limit that applies to claim back VAT for business purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25449/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a claim for a refund or repayment of VAT must be made within 4 years after the end of the taxable period to which it relates.

58. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider a reduction in the VAT rate from 21% to 9% in budget 2012 for labour intensive crafts as requested by the Irish musical instrument makers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25472/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. Under

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the VAT Directive Member States may only apply the reduced VAT rate to those goods and services which are listed under Annex III of the VAT Directive. I understand that the major sectors within the Irish craft industry are pottery, glass, jewellery, textiles and furniture. Annex III does not provide for a reduced rate of VAT to be applied to these goods, or to musical instruments, which are consequentially subject to the standard VAT rate of 21%.

Fiscal Policy

59. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the expected deficit on the current side of budget 2012 net of bank bailout and interest payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25479/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The majority of the banking-related expenditure, including Promissory Note payments and the recapitalisations undertaken in July, is classified as non-voted capital expenditure and does not therefore impact upon the current budget balance. However, the cost of borrowing to fund these payments is captured under debt interest costs which are classified as non-voted current expenditure. The most recently published forecasts in respect of budgetary aggregates were those contained in April's Stability Programme Update (SPU). The projected current budget deficit for 2011 published in the SPU was just over €12 billion. If projected Exchequer debt interest costs of €4.6 billion are factored out, the projected current budget deficit would have been forecast at approximately €7.4 billion. If the forecast receipts from the bank guarantee scheme, which are collected under non-tax revenue as a current receipt, were also stripped out, then the current budget deficit would have been projected at €8.2 billion.

Revised economic and fiscal forecasts, taking account of the most recent data including the recently agreed reductions in our Programme borrowing costs, will be published in the Pre-Budget Outlook next month.

Banks Recapitalisation

60. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his intentions on the paying down of promissory notes for Anglo Irish Bank; the steps he is taking to significantly decrease these payments and the burden on the national budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25480/11]

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the current promissory note structure in respect of the recapitalisation of Anglo Irish Bank; if he will provide details of the changes he is seeking; the steps he has taken in that regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25516/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 82 together.

Promissory notes were provided as consideration for the capital introduced by the State into Anglo. Under the terms of the Anglo (including INBS) promissory notes the State has an obligation to make annual repayments of €3.1 billion per annum. Furthermore the interest rates on the promissory notes, which were set by reference to government yields at the time of issue, are relatively high with a weighted interest rate, after the interest holiday, of circa 8%. While the State has budgeted to meet both the interest and cash requirements I keep the Promissory Notes under review to see if they can be re-engineered in a better way for the

State. Any re-engineering would have to be completed in a manner which does not impact on the capital position of Anglo. This may or may not be feasible.

I had the opportunity to meet with President Trichet on the margins of the Ecofin meeting in Poland on Saturday, 17th September. President Trichet was very complimentary of the progress being made by Ireland and he noted the narrowing of bond spreads that had taken place, which he would not wish to see put at risk.

I mentioned to President Trichet, and in a separate meeting with Commissioner Rehn, the situation in relation to the Promissory Notes. I proposed that our technical experts get together to examine the technical aspects and the implications of any potential changes. They were agreeable to this on the basis that there is clearly no commitment on their part upfront. We are now proceeding on that basis.

Irish Bank Resolution Corporation

61. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of legal actions, and the purpose of each legal action, currently being undertaken by the new Irish Bank Resolution Corporation comprised of the former Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society in Ireland, the UK and the US; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25481/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware the Board of the bank is responsible for the day to day operation of the bank including legal proceedings in normal course. Notwithstanding this the bank has informed me that there are a significant number of legal proceedings in existence that have been initiated by and issued across the recently combined entity, including legal proceedings in Ireland, the UK, and the US. At present, there are approximately 800sets of proceedings issued by the Bank, a large number of which relate to proceedings in connection with the former INBS residential mortgage portfolio. The remainder relate primarily to commercial and personal debt recovery and enforcement, and proceedings against solicitors for breach of undertakings.

The bank has emphasised, in relation to residential mortgage portfolio, that the number of proceedings represents a mix of primary residential and buy to let properties and that it is expected that only a small proportion of such cases will result in repossession. Many of these proceedings are ongoing for some time and there is a marked slowdown in the number of new proceedings since the introduction of the Code of Practice for Mortgage Lenders.

Banking Sector

62. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the bankers salary cap in relation to the search for a new chief executive officer for the Allied Irish Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25482/11]

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of his contacts in recent weeks with AIB in relation to the appointment of a new chief executive; if the bank has requested permission to award a salary in excess of €500,000 to the new chief executive; and his views on the appropriate salary that should be paid. [25499/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 70 together.

As I have stated in reply to previous questions on this subject, I am keen that a successful outcome regarding the appointment of a new CEO at AIB is achieved shortly as that bank is a fundamental part of the announced Government strategy to restructure the banking sector

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and any proposed appointee would play a pivotal part in this process. Additionally, I am anxious that the situation whereby the Executive Chairman of AIB combines both positions of Chairman and CEO is resolved.

The Executive Chairman of AIB has kept my Department apprised of developments in the search for a new appointment.

I have, within the last few days, received a formal proposal from AIB for a remuneration package for the post of CEO which includes a request for a base salary to be paid in excess of the Government agreed cap of €500,000.

However, it is the view of the Government that a compelling case would have to be made for the Government to consider setting aside this cap taking account of the recent decision on the pay ceilings for CEOs of Semi States and Senior Public Sector posts and the need for social solidarity to be shown by all individuals and sectors for the good of the nation and its recovery from the present challenging circumstances.

I will examine the AIB request in that context.

63. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the ongoing merger between EBS and AIB; if EBS corporate governance structures and culture are going to be maintained after the merger has fully taken place; if he is concerned about the significant reduction in the mutual model in Irish banking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25483/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legal merger of AIB and EBS was completed on 1st July 2011. Since then, AIB and EBS have been working in close collaboration to gain a fuller understanding of the EBS business operating model, its products and services, its technology infrastructure, the capabilities of its people and its culture. The two institutions, in discussion with my officials, are also in the process of considering the various options for integrating the two businesses, with a particular emphasis on sustaining the current customer proposition and ensuring the retention and growth of customer deposits in light of the commitments of both AIB and EBS to reduce their loan to deposit ratios significantly over time. These discussions are still ongoing and will be communicated publicly by the banks in due course, once the respective boards and executive management teams have concluded their strategic review. EBS is operating under a separate banking licence from the Central Bank of Ireland and all of the necessary governance structures required by that licence are being maintained. In terms of culture, EBS maintains significant expertise, practices and processes from which the wider AIB organisation can learn. AIB have informed me that they will look to harness these capabilities across the bank as they develop their integration plans for the two businesses.

The banking crisis has clearly demonstrated that the legacy banking model in Ireland was fundamentally flawed and was not fit for purpose. The radical restructuring of the banking system I announced on 31 March 2011 was designed to create, over both the short and long term, a banking system which can facilitate the needs to the Irish economy as the country emerges from this unprecedented period of turbulence. The merger of EBS with AIB to form one of the two pillar banks in the domestic economy is a vital part of this restructuring process and was necessary to stabilise the financial system. As the Irish economy returns to growth it is imperative that a right sized and competitive banking system emerges which is able to meet the demands of the economy. In time, there would appear to be no reason why the traditional mutual model could not play a role in this system provided such institutions are appropriately managed and controlled.

Banking Sector Regulation

64. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the current mortgage lending rules in terms of allowing potentially viable mortgage holders to buy their own homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25484/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The decision on whether or not to grant a mortgage to a borrower must remain a commercial decision for the lending institution concerned. It is important that each lending institution is allowed to assess properly and independently the risks that it is considering when deciding whether or not to approve a mortgage. Mortgage lending must be undertaken on a sustainable and prudential basis by financial institutions and conform fully with the regulatory requirements, both in relation to the financial institution itself and also the safeguarding of the borrower's interests. When providing a product or service to a customer, a financial institution must comply with the '*Knowing the Customer*' and '*Suitability Provisions*' of the Consumer Protection Code, issued by the Central Bank. This process involves, inter alia, gathering relevant information from the customer about his/her financial situation, individual circumstances and needs.

Based on this information, the financial institution is required to complete a '*Suitability Process*', where only products suitable to that particular customer are offered. While affordability is a prime component of suitability, a fuller consideration of a customer's individual circumstances and needs would be required in order to comply with the suitability provisions of the Code.

In this regard, when assessing suitability — in relation to mortgage products — the Central Bank is of the opinion that factors such as employment, income and repayment capacity, purpose of borrowing, type and length of loan, plans for early redemption, attitude to fixed/variable interest, age, savings track record should be considered. As suitability is specific to the circumstances and needs of each individual customer, financial institutions should be satisfied that written statements reflect an assessment of each customer's specific circumstances and needs, thereby meeting the '*Knowing the Customer*' requirements of the Consumer Protection Code.

The Consumer Protection Code may be accessed at *www.centralbank.ie.*

Industrial Relations

65. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the consultation taking place with AIB staff and their representatives in relation to the proposed programme of job cuts that have been proposed by AIB management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25485/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that the issue he seeks information on is an operational matter for the board and management of the bank. I am informed by the bank they have been in discussions with staff representatives since November 2010 on a range of issues including contractual pay and job security/severance terms. These negotiations have been conducted in both the UK and Republic of Ireland and were the subject of recommendations from two mediators in April 2011.

Discussions following the Mediators' recommendation failed to resolve outstanding issues and matters were referred to the Labour Relations Commission in July 2011. Failure to agree was recorded and the parties were encouraged to consider moving to the next stage of the agreed procedures, an independent third party. However, the formal consultation process with the unions in relation to redundancies has not yet commenced. I am informed by the bank that

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they will engage with the unions when it has finalised its plans and can provide detailed information on the timing and numbers involved.

Banking Sector Regulation

66. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he is taking any steps to ensure that the national pillar banks are sufficiently lending to small and medium businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25486/11]

97. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Finance the way he proposes to boost demand for credit among small and medium enterprises following the recent reports from the Credit Review Office and the euro area bank lending survey which highlight a continuing weakness in credit demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25611/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 and 97 together.

The restructuring of the domestic banking sector creates capacity for the pillar banks to lend in excess of €30 billion over the next three years in SME and other important sectors. This is in excess of Central Bank estimates of the likely demand for SME and mortgage credit over this period. Both pillar banks are concentrating on the Irish economy and need to issue credit to make profits and rebuild their balance sheets.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Government has imposed lending targets on the two domestic pillar banks for the three calendar years, 2011 to 2013. Both banks will be required to sanction lending of at least €3 billion this year, €3.5 billion next year and €4 billion in 2013 for new or increased credit facilities to SMEs.

I have written to both pillar banks asking them to provide me with their plans to ensure that the 2011 target is achieved. This is particularly relevant given the comments contained in the fifth quarterly report of the Credit Review Office, which stated that "it will be a challenge for each of the banks to reach their €3bn sanction target for new and restructured facilities in the current year." On the issue more generally of the demand for credit, my Department is in the process of commissioning an independent survey of the demand for credit within the SME sector. The outcome will provide the necessary information to better inform Government policy in this important sector of the Irish economy.

It is vital that the banks continue to make credit available to support economic recovery. However, it is not in the interest of the banks, businesses or the economy for finance to be provided unless the business is viable and has the capacity to meet the interest payments and repay the sum borrowed.

Customs and Excise Operations

67. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the quantity of illegal cigarettes that have been seized by Revenue so far this year by weight and value; the steps being taken to address the ongoing problem of illegal smuggling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25487/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that for the period January to August 2011 a total of 77.9m cigarettes with a retail value of approximately €32.8m and 6,683 kgs of tobacco with a retail value of approximately €2.4m have been seized. I am further informed by the Revenue Commissioners, who are responsible for the collection of tobacco products tax, and for tackling the illicit trade in cigarettes and

tobacco products, that the strategies employed by Revenue to tackle this illicit trade are multi-faceted. They include ongoing analysis of the nature and extent of the problem, developing and sharing intelligence on a national, EU and international basis, ongoing review of operational policies, development of analytics and deployment of detection technologies, optimum deployment of resources at point of importation and internally to intercept the contraband product and to prosecute those involved.

Interception at the point of importation is achieved through a combination of risk analysis, profiling, intelligence, and the screening of cargo, vehicles, baggage and postal packages. Revenue enforcement officers also target this illicit trade at the post-importation level by carrying out intelligence-based operations and random checks at retail outlets, markets and private and commercial premises. Revenue also carries out regular multi-agency operations, particularly in relation to large maritime importations and in checks at inland markets.

They have established a high level internal group, chaired at Commissioner level, to examine the risks related to tobacco products tax and to oversee and optimise the detection of counterfeit and contraband tobacco products. This group has promoted a number of initiatives aimed at counteracting the illicit trade in tobacco. These include adoption of a comprehensive tobacco strategy and action plan.

Revenue continually reviews and updates their strategies and in July 2010, Revenue launched a series of nationwide tobacco 'blitz'- type operations, which concentrated additional Revenue resources at ports, airports and at various inland retail points, including markets for the purpose of identifying illicit tobacco products. To date, Revenue has conducted seven tobacco 'blitz' operations that have resulted in the seizure of in excess of 33.2m cigarettes. Another two large-scale nationwide operations are scheduled to take place during the last quarter of 2011. In addition to this, there is a programme of Regional level 'blitz'-type operations that target markets and other distribution points.

Exchequer Savings

68. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated savings for Ireland, for each of the years 2012, 2013 and 2014, arising from the anticipated reduction in the interest rate on funds available from the European Financial Stability Fund, European Financial Stability Mechanism and the bilateral loans; the interest rates he expects Ireland will now be charged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25497/11]

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the interest rate reductions on funds drawn down under the European Financial Stability Facility and the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism will take effect; the date to which they will be backdated; the estimated saving for Ireland in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25498/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 68 and 69 together.

Not all the details are finalised yet, so the following figures could change. However, I am informed by the NTMA that, on reasonable assumptions, projected estimated savings from the EFSF and EFSM, including the bilateral loan from the UK, from 2011 to 2014 on a General Government Balance basis are as follows:

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014
€m	365	875	1,110	1,180

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In general, for the EFSF and EFSM, the actual interest rates charged will be based on the cost of funds which they experience in the capital markets and are subsequently passed on to borrowing Member States.

All of the details governing the reductions in the various interest rates have not been finalised. The European Commission has adopted proposals that the maturity of the loans Ireland will receive from the EFSM will be increased from the current weighted average life of $7\frac{1}{2}$ years to $12\frac{1}{2}$ years. Loans from the EFSF are expected to have a minimum maturity of at least 15 years and the details of how this will be achieved have not yet been agreed. These longer maturities will, on balance, have significant benefits for Ireland but the change in maturities will also affect the interest rate charged.

As regards the effective date for the reductions and the issue of backdating, the position by funding source is set out below:

- EFSM — The Commission has adopted a proposal to amend the Implementing Decision 2011/77/EU on granting Union financial assistance to Ireland that would reduce the margin of 292.5 basis points to zero and apply it to all loans. It is expected that this proposal will be presented for approval at the ECOFIN meeting on 4 October 2011.
- EFSF —In the first instance, the Amendment to the EFSF Framework Agreement must be ratified by all euro-area Member States. The European Financial Stability Facility and Euro Area Loan Facility (Amendment) Bill 2011 was before the Dáil on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week and scheduled to be considered by the Seanad today. When it is enacted, Ireland will confirm its ratification of the Amendment to the EFSF Framework Agreement. Several other Member States have already ratified it and the rest have agreed to complete their national procedures by early to mid October. Once it has been ratified by all Member States, our Loan Facility Agreement will be amended to implement the interest rate reduction and provide for longer maturities. This requires the unanimous consent of all Guarantor Member States.

The issue of whether or not the reduction in the interest rate on EFSF loans would apply to tranches already disbursed was discussed during the recent informal meeting of Finance Ministers in Poland. Following that discussion, I announced that it would apply to all loans including the one already disbursed to us in February 2011. However, I also explained that the prepaid margin we had to incur upfront could not be returned to us until the loan matures in July 2016. It should be noted that the Amendment to the EFSF Framework Agreement does away with the need for prepaid margins on future loans.

Bilateral loans:

- The UK has already announced that it will reduce the margin on its loan to Ireland to be in line with that of the EFSF. It is expected that this will be implemented at around the same time as the other reductions take place. The first drawdown under our bilateral loan agreement with the UK will take place shortly
- Sweden and Denmark — the loan agreements are yet to be finalised.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 62.

Eligible Liabilities Guarantee Scheme

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the future of the eligible liabilities guarantee scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25500/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The issuance window under the Eligible Liabilities Guarantee or ELG Scheme currently runs until 31 December 2011. The guarantee covers both eligible debt and deposits and facilitates access to funding for the ELG banks. The state authorities are examining market conditions and bank funding and will assess the necessity for the continuation of the guarantee.

If I am advised that an extension of the issuance window is warranted I will seek state aid approval from the EU Commission. I would also need to consult with the ECB on any proposal for amendments to the ELG Scheme. Thereafter, I would place a draft statutory instrument before both Houses of the Oireachtas for approval well in advance of 31 December to enable the issuance period in the Scheme to be extended.

I want to reaffirm that debt and fixed term deposits issued during the relevant issuance windows continue to be guaranteed for the duration of the term of the debt or deposits regardless of what happens to the ELG issuance window in the future. Finally, I wish to clarify that customer deposits up to Eur 100,000 are guaranteed under a different guarantee scheme called the Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) and there is no end date on that guarantee.

Consultancy Contracts

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details, including the value and the name of the beneficiary, of any contract awarded by him or any public body directly under his control for public relations, communications and consultancy services from 9 March 2011 to date in 2011. [25501/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I take it that the Deputy is referring solely to public relations costs and not to advertising costs that would be incurred by my Department in the normal course of business, such as entries into telephone directories, the placing of advertisements in national newspapers, recruitment advertising, advertising associated with the national development plans, e-tenders etc. In the period in question my Department, the Appeals Commissioners and Revenue have awarded no contracts in relation to public relations, communications or consultancy services. The table below details the spend for public relations, communications and consultancy services from 9 March 2011 to date, for the agencies under my aegis:—

Comptroller & Auditor General

Date of Award	Name of Company	Value of Contract	Brief Description of Contract
11 March 2011	David Rainey	€31,601	Property Valuation Consultancy in respect of NAMA
20 April 2011	Mr Tom Walsh, Broadband Consultant	€15,125	Technical advice in the context of the examination on the National Broadband Scheme
20 May 2011	Productive Personnel Ltd	€4,500	Technical advice in relation to an examination of the performance management and development system
24 March 2011	Philip Lee Solicitors	€48,599	Review of NAMA due diligence

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National Treasury Management Agency

Date of Award	Name of Company	Value of Contract	Brief Description of Contract
24 March 2011	Philip Lee Solicitors	€48,599	Review of NAMA due diligence
9 March 2011	Arthur Cox	Both awards were for a period of three (3) years and services are drawn down as and when required. Arthur Cox have received payments of approximately €1.36 million in respect of the period 9 March to date under these arrangements. A&L Goodbody and Matheson Ormsby Prentice have not received any payments to date under these arrangements.	Following a competitive tender process, NTMA awarded a contract to a single legal consultant (Arthur Cox), to provide general legal services on an ad hoc basis to the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) Banking Unit1. This contract was awarded on the basis of discounted hourly rates.
9 March 2011	Legal Panel (A&L Goodbody, Arthur Cox and Matheson Ormsby Prentice).	As above	Following a competitive tender process, the NTMA appointed a panel of legal consultants (A&L Goodbody, Arthur Cox and Matheson Ormsby Prentice) under a framework agreement to provide specific legal services to the NTMA Banking Unit*. This appointment of the panel was on the basis of discounted hourly rates and/or fixed fees where appropriate.
6 April 2011	Davy Corporate Finance	€42,500	Valuation of the holdings of the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) in unlisted preference shares of the Governor and Company of the Bank of Ireland plc and Allied Irish Banks plc
15 April 2011	Goldman Sachs	Fees up to €7.8 million may be payable depending on completion of transactions and performance.	Financial advisor to the NTMA Banking Unit* for liability management exercises and capital raising transactions in respect of BOI, AIB, ILP, EBS, INBS and Anglo.
15 April	KPMG	Overall contract amount dependent on amount of services provided based on hourly rate.	Provision of tax consultancy services for National Asset Management Agency (NAMA).
29 April 2011	PWC	€35,000	Accounting advice to NTMA Banking Unit* in relation to issue of contingent capital instruments by AIB, EBS, BOI, ILP.
16 May 2011	McKinsey	€2.55 million	Advisor to NTMA Banking Unit* on matters relating to Anglo/INBS (including the merger of Anglo and INBS and the disposal of the US loan book).
24 May 2011	Tibus	€40,500	Design and implementation of updated websites for NTMA, NAMA, State Claims Agency, National Development Finance Agency and NPRF.

Date of Award	Name of Company	Value of Contract	Brief Description of Contract
26 May 2011	PWC	€25,000	Advices to Clinical Indemnity Scheme for State Claims Agency.
17 June 2011	Colin Maltby	€38,000 plus €3,000 expenses incurred up to end September 2011.	Advisor in respect of the sale of part of the NPRF's global private equity portfolio.
30 June 2011	DKM Economic Consultants	€42,000	To undertake an economic study for NAMA of the potential impact of the proposed Deferred Consideration Mortgage Initiative.
11 July 2011	Amárach Research	€15,800	To carry out market research for NAMA on theDeferred Consideration Mortgage Initiative.
12 July 2011	System Dynamics	€12,375. (Note: this contract was terminated after 3.5 days of consultancy drawdown. Consequently a total of €1,732.50 was spent on this contract.)	A 25 day contract to provide Microsoft Sharepoint Development Services for the integration of the NAMA Portfolio Management System and the NAMA Document Management System (DMS).
10 August 2011	Towers Watson	Overall contract amount dependent on amount of services provided.	Two year contract in place for provision of HR services.
1 September 2011	Version1	€78,000	A six month contract to provide Technical Project Management Services (Test Management) for the NAMA Portfolio Management System.
21 September 2011	DNM	€14,000	A 20 day contract to provide Microsoft SharePoint and .NET Development Services for the integration of the NAMA Portfolio Management System and the NAMA Document Management System (DMS).

*The Deputy should note that certain advisory expenses incurred in relation to the capital raising measures (including the liability management exercises) will be recovered from the covered institutions in due course. Also from 5 August 2011, the banking responsibilities of the NTMA have transferred to my Department.

Diplomatic Representation

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the meeting he held with the head of the European Central Bank, Mr. Jean Claude Trichet, in Poland on 17 September 2011; the matters discussed affecting Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25503/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I had the opportunity to meet with President Trichet on the margins of the Ecofin meeting in Poland on Saturday, 17th September. I raised with him the issue of the burden sharing with the senior unguaranteed bondholders in Anglo Irish Bank. This was unresolved business and I pressed the case for such burden sharing. However, President Trichet was of the strong view that such action was not in the interests of Ireland or the Euro Area, particularly given the challenges facing the euro area at this time and the contagion that we witnessed recently that has affected Italy and Spain. Commissioner Rehn also made the same point on this issue when I met him at a separate meeting on Saturday.

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

President Trichet was very complimentary of the progress being made by Ireland and he noted the narrowing of bond spreads that had taken place, which he would not wish to see put at risk. I noted the points he made and I said I would report back to Government on the discussion.

I also mentioned to President Trichet, and in the separate meeting with Commissioner Rehn, the situation in relation to the Promissory Notes. These Promissory Notes are amounts due from the State to Anglo Irish Bank as consideration for the capital provided in 2010. While the State has budgeted to meet both the interest and cash requirements I am eager to have the Promissory Notes examined to see if they can be re-engineered in a better way for the State, for example, by lengthening their maturity and reducing their interest rate on them. This re-engineering would have to be completed in a manner which does not impact on the capital position of Anglo. This may or may not be feasible. I proposed that our experts get together to examine the technical aspects and the implications of any potential changes. They were agreeable to this on the basis that there is clearly no commitment on their part upfront. We are now proceeding on that basis.

Departmental Agencies

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has given his approval to the establishment of NewERA as a non-statutory body in the National Treasury Management Agency; if so, if he will provide details of the way that this will work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25504/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I expect that an announcement on the establishment of and the practical arrangements for NewERA will be made shortly.

National Asset Management Agency

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he approves of the incentivisation arrangements the National Asset Management Agency is entering with developers whereby NAMA allows developers to share in any additional return or profit beyond the amount NAMA has paid for the developer's loan plus an allowance for NAMA's expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25505/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The National Asset Management Agency has been established as a body corporate and is independent in the performance of its functions under the National Asset Management Agency Act 2009. NAMA has a Board of Directors and a commercial remit under the legislation to manage its portfolio of over €70 billion and it has to consider, on a case-by-case basis, the overhead costs associated with leaving a debtor in place to manage his business at an agreed salary level versus the commercial alternative of appointing an insolvency expert.

The Chairman of NAMA recently explained that the agency is regularly faced with having to make difficult choices between working with a developer on his loans or foreclosing through the appointment of a receiver. The agency is charged with maximising the commercial return to the taxpayer — its job is to make the highest amount it can on the loans it is handling. In each case, the option selected by NAMA is that which is likely to generate the higher return for the taxpayer.

The following incentivisation example has been provided to me by NAMA. Where NAMA has paid €50m for a debtor's loans which aggregate to €100m nominal value, NAMA might set a minimum repayment target of €55m for the debtor. If, say, by year 7, the debtor reaches that

minimum repayment target, an incentive arrangement will apply whereby thereafter, the debtor will be allowed to retain 10% of any excess sum realised. If a total of €60m is realized, therefore, this is an excess of €5m over the minimum target and the debtor retains €500,000. In such a case NAMA's profit will be €9.5m over the amount paid for the debtor's loans. This of course is an example and different repayment targets will apply to different borrowers depending on the particular circumstances of each case. It should be noted that the key factor in determining what NAMA pays for any debtor's aggregate debt is the current market value of the underlying property securing that debt. Therefore, if NAMA pays €50m for the loans, as in the example, it is likely that the value of the underlying property is of the same order.

Sometimes NAMA engaging with a borrower will seem unpalatable. The economic reality, however, demands that NAMA fulfils its mandate and recovers as much money as it possibly can for the taxpayer and, in this, I fully support the efforts of the Board.

Banks Recapitalisation

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to any interest among private equity investors in taking a minority shareholding in AIB as outlined recently to the Oireachtas finance committee by the bank chairman, Mr. David Hodgkinson; his views on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25507/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am aware that AIB has held initial, preliminary meetings with equity investors who have indicated an interest in potentially acquiring a stake in AIB. Following these discussions, I am informed by the bank that they expect investors will require more visibility on the bank's performance, particularly its asset quality, before discussions move beyond the preliminary and exploratory stage. In light of current market conditions the bank's expectations are that this required visibility is only likely to be during the course of 2012 at the earliest.

At present, AIB is undergoing a significant restructuring process and as one of the two pillar banks in the domestic economy it is natural that investors will seek to have preliminary discussions with both the bank and the State in order to better understand the underlying performance and value of the AIB franchise. The recent transaction completed by the State with private investors in Bank of Ireland demonstrates that international money managers remain optimistic over the outlook for the Irish economy. As and when any concrete interest is expressed by external investors in making an investment in AIB it will be carefully evaluated by my staff and the bank to ensure that taxpayers' interests are protected at all times.

Fiscal Policy

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has finalised a date for the publication of the pre-budget outlook and medium term fiscal plan in October; if he intends to brief Opposition spokespersons in advance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25508/11]

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the planned new multi-annual fiscal plan due to be published with the pre-budget outlook in October will deal with the period January 2012 to December 2014 or the period January 2012 to December 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25509/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 78 together.

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

The Pre-Budget Outlook will be published in October although a precise date has not yet been set. The revised economic and fiscal forecasts which will be contained in the Pre-Budget Outlook will take account of the latest available data including the CSO's Quarter Two National Accounts and the end-September Exchequer Returns. The multi-annual fiscal projections which will be published in the Pre-Budget Outlook will cover the period 2012 to 2015.

Sovereign Bonds

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the value of Irish Government bonds purchased by the ECB over the past number of months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25511/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department does not have the information sought by the Deputy. The vast majority of Irish sovereign bonds are held by institutional investors in the Euroclear clearing and settlement system, generally in a nominee account structure which does not permit the identification of the beneficial owners. This is standard market practice in the sovereign bond markets.

While the Central Bank of Ireland maintains a register of Irish Government bonds, the bonds held by Euroclear, representing 99.74% of Irish Government bonds in issue, are registered in one omnibus account in the Central Bank's register and details of the bond transactions relating to those bonds are held by Euroclear. All transactions in relation to the remaining 0.26% of Irish Government bonds are made through the Central Bank and information regarding individual holders is treated as confidential. I might add that my understanding is that the ECB releases figures only for its total purchases of sovereign bonds under its Securities market Programme and does not release information on bond purchases in individual markets.

Banking Sector Regulation

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he and the Central Bank received a copy of the corporate governance report into Irish Nationwide Building Society; the actions he has taken since; if any further investigations, including criminal, are required and when he intends to publish the report. [25512/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): 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 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.

European Central Bank

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he, acting on behalf of the Irish Government and independently of the Irish Central Bank Governor, has made his views known to the European Central Bank about its interest rate policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25513/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The determination of interest rate policy is solely a matter for the Governing Council of the European Central Bank, which is independent in these matters. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for me to intervene in that process.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 60.

National Asset Management Agency

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the National Asset Management Agency has yet initiated any legal proceedings to reverse the transfer of assets by NAMA debtors to spouses or other family members; if he will provide details of the number of such transfers which have been reversed voluntarily by NAMA debtors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25519/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At a recent meeting of the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, the Chief Executive of NAMA pointed out that, having been through the business plans of debtors which account for close to 75% of NAMA debt, he does not consider that there is a 'huge pot of gold' that can be recovered through legal proceedings to reverse asset transfers by NAMA debtors. I am informed by NAMA, however, that most of the debtors who engaged in such transfers are co-operating with it as regards a voluntary reversal of asset transfers.

As negotiations are ongoing with many debtors and assets are being re-valued at current prices, it is not yet possible to determine the final valuation of reversed asset transfers. In a number of cases where debtors are refusing to co-operate, it has been necessary for NAMA to adopt a number of approaches, depending on the legal advice received in each particular case. This may involve the pursuit of personal guarantees through the courts and, in some cases, will require litigation to reverse asset transfers where the original intention appears to have been to place the assets concerned beyond the reach of NAMA.

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage of loans in value terms in the National Asset Management Agency that are currently described as performing loans, and if he will define if that means paying interest, capital or both. [25520/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The NAMA Quarterly Report for Q1 of 2011 states that 23% of loans (by value) are performing. Performing loans are defined in the Report as loans which are not in arrears because interest and principal is being received in line with contractual obligations or where, if there are arrears, they are outstanding for less than 30 days. The NAMA Quarterly Report for Q2 is scheduled to be delivered to me by the end of this month and I will thereafter arrange for it to be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the National Asset Management Agency has sought to invoke any personal guarantees in respect of its debtors in the courts. [25521/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): NAMA has confirmed to me that it is engaged in a number of such proceedings but is constrained from commenting in specific detail as these matters are before the courts.

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if any persons in the National Treasury Management Agency, including National Asset Management Agency, have taken a reduction in basic pay since 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25522/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The overall remuneration of NTMA senior management has been reduced very substantially this year due to their waiving of the performance-related element of their remuneration in respect of 2010. The public sector pension deduction provided for in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 applies to all NTMA staff. While the NTMA was not subject to the general reductions in salaries provided for in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009, in 2010 it secured a reduction of some 8% in overall payroll costs, on a like-for-like basis compared with the previous year, through a reduction in the performance-related element of overall remuneration. In 2011, it secured a further reduction of almost 3% in overall payroll costs, again on a like-for-like basis.

Staff recruited by the NTMA and assigned to the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) in 2010 and 2011 have been recruited on specified-purpose contracts — their term of employment lasts for as long as NAMA requires their particular function.

It is my intention to examine the approach to remuneration in the NTMA in more detail in the coming months following consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. I will then see what changes, if any, might be appropriate in relation to the remuneration of all staff in the NTMA, having regard to the changing economic circumstances of the State and the need for transparency in public expenditure.

State Banking Sector

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he or any agency acting on his behalf, has completed an examination of the severance arrangements contained in contracts of employment in respect of senior executives currently employed by State-supported banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25523/11]

95. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the review of remuneration practices at the covered financial institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25550/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 and 95 together.

As alluded to by the Deputy in his questions, a review of remuneration policies and practices by each of the covered institutions is underway. As part of that review, the institutions were asked to consider measures that could be taken to realign staff expectations with regard to remuneration and benefits in the current economic environment and financial circumstances of the banks. An analysis of severance arrangements is also part of the review.

The review exercise is ongoing. I fully recognise that there is a real public interest in the levels of remuneration at the covered institutions and I will endeavour to have this completed in the shortest timeframe possible with a view to putting the information into the public domain.

National Asset Management Agency

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the highest salary amount sanctioned by the National Asset Management Agency for payment to one of its debtors, including full details of the elements of the remuneration package approved, such as company car and other benefits in kind, and any other information deemed relevant. [25524/11]

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of instances in which the National Asset Management Agency has approved salaries in excess of €100,000 in respect of its debtors, including full details of the elements of the remuneration packages approved, such as company car and other benefits in kind, and any other information deemed relevant. [25525/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 89 together.

I understand from NAMA that, as part of its business plan agreements with debtors, it normally looks for and obtains a reduction of 50%-75% in overhead costs and that any remuneration paid to debtors is payable from this much-reduced budget. The Chairman of NAMA has recently stated that the majority of debtor remuneration packages fall into the €75,000 to €100,000 range, including all benefits-in-kind. I understand that, in two cases, the debtor's remuneration package approved by NAMA, as part of the budget for overheads, exceeded €100,000 and that the highest is in the order of €200,000.

The Chairman also pointed out that NAMA is faced with a choice in the case of any particular debtor as to whether it uses the knowledge and experience of the debtor to optimise the realised value of property assets or whether it is more cost-effective to use the services of receivers or other insolvency professionals. Where NAMA decides that the most cost-effective approach is the former, it takes a large number of factors into account before approving a remuneration package. These include the debtor's knowledge of the assets, the overall value of the assets, his experience, NAMA's view of the extent to which he can add value and his level of cooperation with NAMA including, where applicable, voluntary reversal of asset transfers and the pledging of unencumbered assets.

National Recovery Plan

90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the current status of the National Recovery Plan 2011-2014 prepared by the previous Government; and if it can be regarded as his policy in view of the fact that the link to it appears on the homepage of his Departments' website. [25529/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the National Recovery Plan was published at the end of November of last year. It set out the previous Government's plan for a return to sustainable economic growth and the restoration of order to the public finances. It also formed the basis of the previous Government's negotiations with the EU/IMF/ECB Troika. The National Recovery Plan 2011-2014 is not a policy document of the current Government. Indeed, since coming to office, the current Government has successfully renegotiated a number of aspects of the Programme of Financial Support, including securing very significant reductions in our Programme borrowing costs. As the Deputy is also aware, my Department's website contains information on a numerous range of matters that relate to the work of the previous Government, including, for instance, the Budget documents going back for the last ten years. This is simply helpful for members of the public who wish to obtain access to documents of interest.

Employment Action Plan

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the jobs initiative, which took effect on 1 July 2011, to begin having a positive effect on the live register figures-CSO's quarterly national household survey measure of unemployment. [25530/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The latest Quarterly National Household Survey data revealed that employment recorded its lowest quarter of contraction since the crisis began in Q2, as it continued to move towards stabilisation. Furthermore, 8 of the 14 economic sectors were net job creators over the second quarter, including the private sector as a whole. However, the data also confirmed that unemployment remains unacceptably high; in seasonally adjusted terms there were over 300,000 people unemployed in the quarter, resulting in an unemployment rate of 14.2 per cent. Subsequent months have seen an increase in the live register, and there were almost 470,000 people signing on in August. Reflecting seasonal factors this figure is expected to decline in the coming months, but will nevertheless remain at an elevated level. While the broad consensus, amongst the major international organisations and domestic forecasters, is that the Irish economy will return to annual growth this year, recovery in the labour market typically lags recovery in overall activity. As a result, net employment is expected to decline once again for this year as a whole, albeit at a much slower pace than in previous years, before gradually strengthening in the coming years.

This net figure represents gross flows into and out of employment in the various sectors and as a result it is very difficult to quantify the number of jobs that the Jobs Initiative will deliver. Anecdotal evidence, however, from the high value added tourism sector for example, would suggest that they are already having some positive impact in sustaining and generating employment.

Tax Yield

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money collected to date on the pension levy introduced in the jobs initiative and the amount expected to be received by the end of 2011. [25531/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The yield of stamp duty to the Exchequer at the end of August from the levy on pension schemes introduced in section 4 of the Finance (No.2) Act 2011 was €140 million. This amount represents early payments of the total yield of €470 million expected for 2011 for which the due date for payment is 25 September.

Consumer Protection

93. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if there are any plans to limit the number of unsolicited contacts made by financial institutions with debtors in respect of non-mortgage debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25542/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Last year, the Central Bank published a consultation paper on the 'Review of the Consumer Protection Code' (the Code). The paper outlined new and amended requirements for regulated financial institutions when dealing with consumers, the purpose being to strengthen the existing consumer protection framework. A second consultation paper was issued in June 2011. In addition to the receipt of in excess of 90 submissions, the Central Bank consulted with the Consumer Advisory Group which was established under the Central Bank Reform Act 2010. It is expected that the revised Code will be signed off by the Central Bank Commission at the end of this month. The draft revised Code requires that contact with consumers in arrears is proportionate and not excessive and places

limits on how often a regulated institution may contact consumers in arrears, with no more that three unsolicited communications permitted in any calendar month.

State Banking Sector

94. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if any retiring executive at a State supported bank in the past three years has received a gift from the institution with a value in excess of €5,000; and if so, if he will provide the details of the institution, the beneficiary and the nature of the gift. [25544/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the respective covered institutions that the information sought by the Deputy is as follows: Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland, Irish Life & Permanent, Anglo Irish and Educational Building Society:

In response to the Deputy's enquiry their respective searches have not revealed any evidence of a gift with a value in excess of €5,000 being made to a retiring executive over the period.

Irish Nationwide Building Society:

INBS have informed me as above other than the presentation by them of a watch in April 2009 as a parting gift to the former head of the Society — the relevant details of which are already in the public domain.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 87.

Tax Code

96. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the taxation of lump sums paid to retiring public servants and his plans to introduce changes in this area. [25578/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that two separate tax treatments can apply depending on the nature of the lump sums paid to a retiring individual. (These rules apply equally to all employees — public and private sectors).

Retirement lump sums paid under pension arrangements

The following arrangements apply to retirement lump sums paid under Revenue approved pension arrangements:

- Lump sum amounts up to €200,000 are paid free of tax. They are also paid free of USC.
- The portion of a lump sum between €200,001 and €575,000 is taxed on a ring-fenced basis at 20%. (This means that no tax credits or other tax reliefs can be set against this portion of the lump sum.) No USC is chargeable.
- Any amount of a lump sum in excess of €575,000 is taxed at the individual's marginal rate of tax (credits and other tax reliefs are available). In this instance, USC is chargeable on the excess. These amounts are lifetime amounts with prior lump sums aggregating with later lump sums.

Termination lump sums

If a termination payment is not taxable at an individual's marginal rate of tax under the general rules applying to the employment income of individuals, then the payment is generally subject to the taxation rules set out in section 123 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. These rules tax termination payments that are not otherwise chargeable to income tax subject to a

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

number of exemptions and reliefs. These exemptions and reliefs are set out in section 201 of, and Schedule 3 to, the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

The exemptions are —

- A basic exemption from income tax of €10,160 plus €765 for every complete year of service; or
- "Standard Capital Superannuation Benefit" (known as "SCSB"). This is an exemption equal to 1/15th of the individual's annual income (average of the last three years), for each year of employment less any tax-free lump sum which is received or receivable under any approved or statutory pension scheme.

It is open to the individual to choose whichever exemption is of most benefit.

The basic exemption from income tax as outlined above can be further increased by up to €10,000 if the individual is not a member of an occupational pension scheme. This enhancement can only be claimed if the individual has not made any claims in respect of a termination lump sum received in the previous 10 years.

These exemptions are subject to an overall lifetime tax-free limit of €200,000 with any amount received in excess of this amount subject to income tax at the individual's marginal rate of tax. USC also applies to the excess.

A further relief called "Top Slicing Relief" is available which reduces the marginal rate of tax on the taxable element of any termination lump sum to the average rate of income tax applying to that individual over the previous 3 tax years.

As the Deputy will know, a new single pension scheme for all new entrants to the public service is about to be legislated for. The new scheme brings public service pension terms more in line with private sector norms and makes a closer connection between the contribution levels and benefits received. It will change the calculation of benefits so that pensions are based on "career average" earnings rather than final salary on retirement. The minimum pension age for new public servants has also be increased from 65 to 66 and is linked to increases in the state pension age. As the new scheme is for new entrants, it will take some time before it has an impact on public servants retiring.

Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 66.

Educational Institutes

98. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25368/11]

99. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the protection provided in the case of a person (details supplied) under sections 43 to 47 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25369/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 99 together.

The governance and day to day activities of the Institute concerned are matters for which the management authorities of the Institute are responsible. My Department does not have any function in relation to its academic affairs or to decisions about the programmes of study that it provides. I understand that demand from students and resource availability are key factors in such decisions and it is not always possible to offer a particular programme in any given year.

I understand that each year of the programme in question leads to a distinct and separate level of certification which is awarded by the U.K based Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI). The IMI is the internationally recognised professional association for individuals working in the motor industry. An individual who has successfully completed any of the three levels of the course would qualify for an appropriate award, Award (Level 1); Certificate (Level 2); Diploma (Level 3).

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 provides that HETAC or FETAC shall not validate a programme of education and training or delegate authority to make an award in respect of a programme of education and training, where the programme concerned is of greater than three months duration and being provided on a commercial and profit-making basis, unless the provider has put in place arrangements for the protection for learners. As the programme concerned was not validated by HETAC or FETAC and does not lead to an award from either of those bodies, the protection for learners requirements set out in the 1999 Act does not apply in this case.

School Management

100. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his policy on the placing of vending machines in schools at both primary and secondary level; if any restrictions on the installation of such machines are in place; the details of his policy on encouraging healthy eating in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25377/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

It is a matter for each school to devise guidelines around the types of food that are available on the school premises and such policies should be driven by the needs and welfare of the pupils.

I am aware that many schools have, in cooperation with their parents' associations, developed healthy eating policies and I would encourage others to do so.

School Patronage

101. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when patronage for a new school (details supplied) in County Wicklow will be announced; the deadline for applying to be patron body; when construction of this school will commence; when the school will open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25378/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In June this year, I announced that 20 new primary and 20 new post-primary schools are to be established in the next six years across a number of locations. This announcement included a proposal to establish a new school in the area referred to by the Deputy. My Department has recently informed patron bodies of these new schools to be established and has invited applications for patronage of same. The deadline for receipt of applications for patronage of new post-primary schools is Friday the 13th January 2012. Plans will be progressed for the delivery of accommodation for these schools.

The information in relation to where new primary and post-primary schools are required, the criteria for deciding on patronage and the invitation for patronage from interested parties is available on my Department's website, *www.education.gov.ie.*

School Staffing

102. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of retired primary and secondary teachers in the public education system who returned to employment as substitute teachers and or who supervised for State examinations for each of the years from 2006 to date in 2011. [25396/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Information regarding the numbers of primary and post primary retired teachers who returned to teaching from September 2007 to March 2011 by school year is outlined in the table below. I will arrange for the data in relation to the full 2010/2011 school year to be forwarded to the Deputy. The data for the 2011 / 12 school year is not available at this stage as teacher appointments to schools are not finalised.

The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations including organising the holding of examinations, determining procedures in places where examinations are conducted including the supervision of examinations and making arrangements for the marking of work presented for examination.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

FÁS Training Programmes

103. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for a FÁS course in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25420/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I understand from FÁS that an application has been received by FÁS from the employer of the person in question to register him as an apprentice Motor Mechanic. Applicants registering to the motor trade must pass a FÁS approved colour vision test which must be administered by an Optician, Medical Doctor and/or Optometrist.

I also understand from FÁS that the person in question failed to pass the colour vision test, that he has appealed to the nominated independent Medical Examiner and that the results of this appeal are pending.

Special Educational Needs

104. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has plans to extend the hours allocated for a special needs assistant at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25462/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. This now includes a requirement for the NCSE to have regard to an overall cap on the number of SNA posts.

The NCSE has now advised all mainstream schools, including the school referred to by the Deputy in Meadowbrook, of their SNA allocation for the current school year, taking into account the care needs of qualifying pupils attending the school.

I wish to clarify that the recruitment and deployment of SNAs within schools are matters for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a

manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

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.

The NCSE will advise schools early in the new school year of any review process to review allocation decisions to ensure that correct procedures were followed and that they comply with my Department's policy. The merits of individual allocation decisions will not be open to appeal under this mechanism.

It will be expected that schools, before requesting a review, will be in a position to demonstrate that they have made every effort to manage their allocation of SNA posts to best effect.

105. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a home tuition grant will be made available to a child (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25467/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that my Department's home tuition scheme provides funding to parents to provide education at home for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school. The scheme was extended in recent years to facilitate tuition for children awaiting a suitable educational placement and also to provide early educational intervention for pre-school children with autism.

Allocation of home tuition for the school year is subject to applicants meeting the eligibility criteria. My Department has no record of receiving a home tuition application for the child in question.

The Deputy will be aware that the NCSE is responsible for the provision of a range of educational services at local and national level for students with special educational needs. In particular, its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) co-ordinates special needs education provision at local level and arranges for the delivery of special educational services. The SENOs act as single points of contact for parents of students with special educational needs. Another specific function of the SENO is to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs and SENOs are a valuable source of support to parents who are actively sourcing a placement for their children.

School Staffing

106. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is concerned that a large number of trainee primary teachers have been unable to get their probationary year post and so cannot fully qualify as teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25477/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that, despite the restrictions on recruitment to the public sector arising from the calamitous economic crisis our country is in, teacher vacancies are continuing to be filled.

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Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence indicates that there is an over supply of teachers and that there are newly qualified teachers not yet holding teaching positions in schools, which will enable them to fulfil the requirements for full registration with the Teaching Council. The full extent of over supply is not yet known.

In light of concerns expressed by teaching unions, my Department has introduced a circular which obliges schools to recruit unemployed teachers ahead of retired ones, in an effort to ease the difficulties for those who cannot find work in the profession.

My Department is also engaged in discussion to extend the JobBridge National Internship Scheme to teachers and I hope to issue a circular to schools in the near future. This will provide newly qualified teachers with opportunities to undertake the necessary teaching duties to complete the process of probation and fulfil the requirements for full registration with the Teaching Council.

In light of the numbers of newly qualified teachers likely to enter the teaching profession and the expected availability of teaching positions, the Teaching Council has agreed that the minimum service requirement for registration probation purposes will be decreased from 170 days to 100 days for the school year 2011/12.

Special Educational Needs

107. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has now provided the pupils of a school (details supplied) with appropriate alternative educational facilities to the full satisfaction of the parents concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25478/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for the provision of a range of educational services at local and national level for students with special educational needs. In particular, its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) co-ordinates special needs education provision at local level and arranges for the delivery of special educational services. The SENOs act as single points of contact for parents of students with special educational needs.

Another specific function of the SENO is to identify appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs. SENOs are a valuable source of support to parents who are actively sourcing a placement for their children. The NCSE have been fully engaged in securing placements for the children in question. The NCSE has advised my Department that, irrespective of the assessed levels of ability of the children, there are placements available for these children. I also understand from my officials that the parents of the children have been advised of their placement options by the NCSE. It is now up to the parents of the children concerned to engage with the schools in question. I understand that a number of the parents are actively engaging with the schools in this context.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has approved additional home tuition for the children which will facilitate transitional arrangements when the school based placements have been accepted by the parents.

Schools Building Projects

108. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the application for a new school building by a national school (details supplied) in County Cork. [25533/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm to the Deputy that the location of a new building for the school to which he refers is currently being finalised in the context of the overall school accommodation needs for the Carrigaline area. Among the options being considered is a site, the acquisition of which was recently agreed with the Local Authority, subject to planning permission, and for which a planning application will shortly be lodged. Once the location of the new school building has been determined, the school building project will be considered in the context of the capital budget available to my Department for school buildings generally.

109. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a planned extension to a primary school (details supplied) in County Cork and if he will set out a timeline for the completion of the project. [25534/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware from my previous response to him in July that this project is at an advanced stage of the tender process. Since July a number of technical issues have arisen in relation to access to the site. It is anticipated that these issues will be resolved by the project's Design Team in the coming weeks. Subject to no further issues arising, it is envisaged that the project will then progress to construction and will take circa 18 months to complete.

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of an extension for the existing special needs unit in a primary school (details supplied) in County Cork. [25536/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am please to inform the Deputy that construction of the special needs unit commenced in August.

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to his announcement of 40 new schools on 27 June 2011, the next step in the process of developing a new second-level school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25538/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In June this year, I announced that 20 new primary and 20 new post-primary schools are to be established in the next six years across a number of locations. This announcement included a proposal to establish a new second-level school in the area referred to by the Deputy. My Department has recently informed patron bodies of these new schools to be established and has invited applications for patronage of same. The deadline for receipt of applications for patronage of new post-primary schools is Friday the 13th January 2012. Following receipt of applications from prospective patrons my Department officials will consider the applications in line with the recently announced criteria and prepare a report for consideration by the News Schools Establishment Group, who will in turn submit same for my consideration and decision.

Plans will be progressed for the delivery of accommodation for these schools.

The information in relation to where new primary and post-primary schools are required, the criteria for deciding on patronage and the invitation for patronage from interested parties is available on my Department's website, *www.education.gov.ie.*

112. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the appointment of a design team for an extension to a primary school (details supplied) in County Cork. [25540/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school to which the Deputy refers was included in the Ministerial announcement of January 2011. This school project is one where a brief will be formulated and the appointment of a Design Team will commence in 2011. My Department is currently liaising with the Patron of the school regarding site issues which need to be addressed before the project can progress further.

School Curriculum

113. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is committed to retaining history as a compulsory subject at junior certificate level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25543/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The NCCA has been asked to review the junior certificate and advise on the scope for reform designed to strengthen literacy and numeracy, embed key skills, promote active learning and enhanced creativity and innovation, and ensure appropriate ways of generating evidence of learning. Concerns have also been raised about curriculum overload, and rote learning.

The Council has completed a public consultation process and is finalising its advice to me on the direction of reform, in consultation with the partners in education. I expect the Council's advice shortly.

I am aware that teachers of history have raised concerns that their subjects will no longer be compulsory in voluntary secondary schools. I believe that students should have as wide a choice as is feasible in their schools given the overall level of student demand and interest, the teaching resources available, and the qualifications profile of staff. The importance of history in promoting critical analysis skills, interculturalism, an understanding of human development, democracy, past and current world issues, and the skills for an environmentally sustainable life are fully appreciated. I will be guided by the NCCA's advice in this matter.

School Transport

114. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the conditions for applying to the remote area grant for attending primary and secondary schools; the rates of grant payable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25545/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Families of children who are eligible for school transport, but for whom no service is available, may apply for the Remote Area Grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

The rates of grant range from a family minimum of €1.30 per day to a maximum of €5.10 per day. Grants are paid annually on receipt of a completed Statement of Attendance Form. An application for school transport must precede an application for the Remote Area Grant.

Schools Building Projects

115. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the appointment of a design team for a planned new school building (details supplied) in County Cork. [25546/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school to which the Deputy refers was included in the Ministerial announcement of January 2011, where a brief will be formulated and the appointment of a Design Team will commence in 2011.

My Department is currently finalising the schedule of accommodation for the proposed new school, taking into account the level of specialist accommodation which will be required to cater for the special needs pupils in this school. When this brief is completed, the project will then be advanced to the next stage of the architectural planning process.

Departmental Correspondence

116. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the correspondence (details supplied) sent to him by Kilkenny City Vocational School Parents Association; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25560/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm that the correspondence referred to by the Deputy has been received by my Department. However, as the correspondence refers to a matter which is subject to ongoing legal proceedings I am not in a position to make a statement.

State Examinations

117. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to assist the small number of second level schools or colleges who are consistently receiving a high failure rate in maths at leaving certificate and junior certificate level; if he has identified these schools; the support or remedial help that will be made available to these schools; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are many schools where there is a 100% pass and honours result in leaving and junior certificate maths. [25573/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am aware that there are a range of issues in relation to Mathematics education generally. Project Maths, the new mathematics syllabus which is being introduced on a phased basis aims to address these difficulties. The syllabus is designed to transform teaching and learning of Mathematics, so that students will develop instrumental understanding (knowing how), relational understanding (knowing why), the ability to apply their knowledge and skills in familiar and unfamiliar contexts, and analytical and creative powers in mathematics. A key objective is to improve attainment levels in Maths and to encourage more students to take the subject at higher level.

Initial results from the Project Maths schools which are in the vanguard of implementation are encouraging. In 2011 at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, the ABC rate in the Project Maths schools was higher at higher level than the national figures and there were improved EFNG rates at Ordinary level also. In the context of Project Maths, a national programme of professional development is under way for all Maths teachers and will continue to at least 2013. As part of this, intensive post graduate courses will be developed aimed at teachers who do not hold a major qualification in Maths.

I am aware that some schools do better than others. The SEC provides my Inspectorate with whole school result information to assist in the conduct of Whole School Evaluations through which school inspectors provide advice and guidance to schools. There is also a range of supports in place for schools through DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in our Schools). As the deputy will be aware, DEIS is designed to ensure that schools serving the most disadvantaged communities benefit from the maximum level of support available.

Supports under DEIS at post-primary level include:

- access to Home School Community Liaison services
- access to the School Completion Programme
- enhanced guidance counselling provision

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- access to planning supports
- provision for school library and librarian support in post primary schools with most disadvantage
- access to the Junior Certificate School Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme

Higher Education Grants

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which students already committed to third level courses are finding it difficult to remain in education due to cut backs introduced by the previous administration; if it might be possible to address any such issues with particular reference to those who may be forced to drop out of third level courses due to changes in the non-adjacent grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25596/11]

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if any examination has been done regarding the total number of third level students who might be forced out of the education system in the wake of austerity measures introduced by the previous administration; if he will examine any steps that could be taken to address such issues given the desirability of encouraging continued education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25598/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 and 120 together.

I regret that the economic circumstances of the country are such that I am not in a position to reverse any of the changes to the student grant measures announced in Budget 2011 by the previous Fianna Fáil — Green Party Government. These changes included the removal of the automatic entitlement of mature students to the non-adjacent rate of grant and an increase in the qualifying distance criterion for the non-adjacent rate of grant.

From this September, students who reside 45 kilometres or more from their higher education institution will continue to be eligible for the higher, non-adjacent rate of grant. Those on particularly low incomes will also continue to receive a "top-up" in the special rate of grant. In addition, third level students in difficult financial circumstances will have access to the Student Assistance Fund. A study of progression in Irish Higher Education' — Oct 2010 looked at new entrants in 2007-8 and their progression into 2008-9. This report is a reference document that will inform policy and the development of interventions to improve rates of completion and graduation' in higher education.

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

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of children with special needs for whom facilities were reduced following the measures introduced by the previous administration; the extent, if any, to which any alleviation can be offered which might address the issues arising within the financial constraints prevailing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25597/11]

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree, if any, to which he can set aside any provision to meet requirements of the most serious cases of special needs which might not be anticipated in the context of previous budgetary projections with particular reference to addressing the needs of those children whose development might be impaired permanently as a result of the economic situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25606/11]

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the cases of those most severely affected by shortages in the facilities for children with special needs with a view to some alleviation measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25607/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 119, 127 and 128 together.

This Government is committed to the protection of frontline services for pupils with special educational needs. 10,575 whole time equivalent (wte) Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts are being provided for primary, post-primary and special schools for the coming school year in order to support the care needs of pupils with disabilities. This represents an increase over the December 2010 position where 10,543 posts were provided.

Approximately 9,950 learning support/resource teacher posts, including those provided under the General Allocation Model, are also being provided in primary & post primary schools in order to provide additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs. This represents an increase of approximately 350 whole time equivalent posts over last year's allocation.

There has therefore not been a reduction in the overall level of resources being provided for children with special educational needs. The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. This now includes a requirement for the NCSE to have regard to an overall cap on the number of SNA posts. Having considered all of the applications for SNA support which have been received from mainstream primary and post primary schools, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has now advised all mainstream schools of their SNA allocations for the 2011/12 school year, taking into account the number of valid applications for SNA support and the assessed care needs of the children concerned. SNA provision in special schools is currently being reviewed.

As not all applications for SNA support can be made in advance of the school year, in order to prudently manage this valuable but limited resource, the NCSE and my Department decided that 475 of the 10,575 posts should be retained in order to allocate them over the coming school year in cases such as emergency, appeals, acquired injuries or new school entrants with special needs care. The NCSE therefore has capacity to increase SNA provision for schools from the retained pool of 475 posts. However, as these posts have to last for the school year the NCSE must manage the allocation of any additional posts in a measured and prioritised manner. The care needs of pupils for whom any new applications are being made must be assessed in the context of the existing levels of SNA support available to the school. It is expected that schools, before requesting any review of their SNA provision, will be in a position to demonstrate that they have made every effort to manage their allocation of SNA posts to best effect.

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In relation to the allocation of Resource Teaching hours, schools were asked to forward as soon as possible any outstanding applications, or additional outstanding materials to support incomplete applications, to the NCSE for consideration, but in any event by no later than 16 September 2011.

NCSE are now giving consideration with regard to the number of applications received, as to whether there is potential to revise the 90% allocation previously given to schools, and also the extent to which new Resource Teaching allocations can be made, taking into account the number of valid new applications received and in the context of my Departments Employment Control Framework obligations.

Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 118.

Schools Building Projects

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to meet the most urgently required projects in the school building programme in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25599/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has identified a number of areas where, due to demographic changes, it is projected that there will be a requirement for significant additional school provision at both primary and post-primary levels over the coming years.

In this context, I have recently announced that 20 new primary and 20 new post primary schools are to be established nationally in the next six years to meet the needs of our growing population. In addition to these new schools, it may be necessary to extend the capacity of many existing schools to meet the demand for increased pupil places.

The current status of all projects on the school building programme may be viewed on my Department's website at *www.education.ie* and this will be updated regularly throughout the year.

Questions Nos. 122 and 123 answered with Question No. 27.

Jobs Initiative

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of training places with a likelihood of leading to employment so far created under the schemes operated by him; the extent to which this is in line with projections and requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25603/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): My Department is delivering the majority of the additional training, education and work experience places (15,900) for the unemployed contained in the Jobs Initiative which was announced in May 2011 through the following programmes:

- 6,000 places on FÁS Specific Skills Training Courses
- 3,000 places on the Back to Education Initiative (FE)
- 1,000 places on Post Leaving Certificate Courses (FE)
- 5,900 places on the Springboard Initiative (HE)

In addition, 5,000 places are being made available through the National Internship Programme (JobBridge) which is being managed by the Department of Social Protection.

The Forfás Review of Labour Market Programmes published in February 2010 found that the most effective programmes for the unemployed were the Specific Skills Training programmes.

Springboard is a new higher education Fund which is being rolled out for the first time in 2011. It will provide free part-time higher education courses for unemployed people in areas of current and future skills needs as identified by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

My Department is now funding the provision of over 116,000 training places this year for the unemployed through FÁS, Skillnets and the Labour Market Activation Fund. (The Labour Market Activation Fund which was introduced in 2010, aims to stimulate innovation in the provision of training and activation measures for jobseekers seeking to up-skill and get back into work).

In addition, there are now 172,000 places available in the Further Education Sector and 162,000 places available in the Higher Education Sector which the unemployed may also access.

Significant progress has already been made towards meeting the objectives set out in the National Skills Strategy for the period to 2020. A priority for me as Minister for Training and Skills is to ensure the delivery of high quality training, education and activation services to the priority cohorts of the unemployed. The establishment of SOLAS will build on the respective strengths of the Further Education and Training sectors. I expect that SOLAS will ensure the provision of high quality further education and training programmes that will be responsive to the needs of learners, jobseekers and business.

School Staffing

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to ensure the retention of the required number of teachers at primary, second and third level notwithstanding the possible retirements in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25604/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Teaching resources are allocated to schools on a school year basis. Schools will be permitted to fill vacancies that arise during the course of the current school year in allocated posts. The level of retirements in 2012 will become clearer after 1 December when teachers are required to give notice of their intention to retire. The position at third level operates somewhat differently in that individual institutions have considerable autonomy within an overall employment control and budgetary framework.

Similarly the precise position at third level will become clearer after 1 December and will inform how each institution will manage its staffing position.

Schools Refurbishment

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which funding is likely to be available in the coming year for refurbishment and extension at primary and second level schools throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25605/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): At its meeting on 11 April 2011, the Government approved the preparation of a new capital investment framework for the period from 2012 to be prepared by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This involves a review of the planned public capital programme in order to determine those programmes and projects that will best support economic recovery.

My Department has submitted a report to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on a proposed overall capital investment programme for the period 2012 to 2016 for

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consideration. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will in due course present a draft review to Government and at a later stage Government Departments will receive notification on their capital allocation for the coming years.

Until the new capital investment framework is in place, it is not possible to give an indication on the level of funding available to any particular element of the school building programme in 2012 or beyond. The necessity to ensure sufficient school places arising from increasing demographics and involving both new school buildings and extensions, will continue to be the priority for schools capital expenditure.

Questions Nos. 127 and 128 answered with Question No. 119.

Higher Education Grants

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if any assistance can be offered to alleviate hardship in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25608/11]

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 any of the changes to the student grant measures announced in Budget 2011 by the previous Fianna Fáil — Green Party Government.

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

130. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has given further consideration to the need to appoint additional special needs assistants at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 24 particularly in view of the continued concerns of the local school community in relation to this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25614/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. This now includes a requirement for the NCSE to have regard to an overall cap on the number of SNA posts.

Some 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.

The NCSE issued a circular to all schools advising of the allocation process for the 2011/2012 school year. A key feature of the amended scheme is to provide for an annual allocation of Special Needs Assistant support to eligible schools.

The NCSE has now advised all mainstream schools, including the school referred to by the Deputy in Tallaght, of their SNA allocation for the current school year, taking into account the care needs of qualifying pupils attending the school.

I wish to clarify that the recruitment and deployment of SNAs within schools are matters for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

The NCSE will advise schools early in the new school year of any review process to review allocation decisions to ensure that correct procedures were followed and that they comply with my Department's policy. The merits of individual allocation decisions will not be open to appeal under this mechanism.

It will be expected that schools, before requesting a review, will be in a position to demonstrate that they have made every effort to manage their allocation of SNA posts to best effect.

Ministerial Staff

131. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26117/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Since I was appointed as Minister for Education and Skills on 9 March 2011, I have appointed two special advisers as follows: Mr. John Walshe, Special Adviser on a salary €92,672 per annum and Ms. Deirdre Grant, Director of Communications (Special Adviser) on a salary €86,604 per annum.

National Lottery

132. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a shop (details supplied) can have the lotto installed in view of its location and footfall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25450/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): While I, as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, have overall responsibility for the National Lottery, the appointment of Lottery agents is a matter for the National Lottery Company. I have no role in day-to-day commercial decisions of this nature.

Retailers who wish to act as a Lottery agent are advised to contact the National Lottery Company directly.

Public Service Remuneration

133. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide details of the salary and other elements of the remuneration package which will be paid to the new President of Ireland to be elected by the Irish people on 27 October 2011; if there are any plans to change the salary and remuneration package; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25506/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Under the Presidential Establishment (Amendment) Act, 1973, the personal salary of the President is set at the

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rate paid to the Chief Justice plus ten per cent. In accordance with the Act, the salary of the current President is €325,507 p.a. The President also receives an allowance for entertainment and other expenses related to the Office of €317,434 p.a. The remuneration and allowances of the current President are protected under the Constitution by virtue of Article 12.11.3 which provides that the emoluments and allowances of the President shall not be reduced while in Office.

In line with my stated intention to provide for reduced salary rates applicable to new appointees to the Judiciary, I am also making provision for a reduced salary payable to the new President of Ireland following the forthcoming election. The new salary will be €249,014 p.a. and the necessary legislative amendment will be provided for in the forthcoming Single Pension Bill. The allowance for entertainment and other expenses related to the Office of President stands at €317,434 p.a (£250,000 p.a.) since 1998 and there are no proposals to amend it.

I acknowledge that notwithstanding the Constitutional protection afforded to the emoluments and allowances of the President while in Office, the current President has voluntarily waived sums due in respect of her entitlements under the legislation.

134. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of civil servants across the civil service currently earning over €100,000, earning over €150,000, earning over €200,000 and earning over €250,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25510/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The number of civil servants across the civil service currently on pay scales over €100,000, €150,000, €200,000 and €250,000 is set out in the table below.

This is less than 2% of numbers serving.

Non Industrial Civil Servants End June 2011	Headcount
Over €100,000	585
Over €150,000	48
Over €200,000	13
Over €250,000	0
Total	646

These figures do not take account of the deduction of the pension levy which was introduced in March 2009.

Pension Provisions

135. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the changes he intends to introduce in the area of pension and severance arrangements for retiring senior civil and public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25514/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The matter of pension arrangements for retiring Secretaries General, heads of other State offices and non-commercial State agencies, is at present the subject of a review by my Department, following which I will bring forward proposals. This review is dealing with the terms of future appointments. The Government will be ensuring that the new terms reflect our changed economic circumstances.

The new single public service pension scheme will introduce a career averaging system, rather than one based on final salary. There is no provision in the scheme for enhanced exit terms for Secretaries-General. I will introduce legislation on this shortly.

It should be noted that Secretaries General have had their salaries cut from €285,000 to €214,000, which will have a significant impact on the superannuation benefits of those retiring after February 2012. Secretaries General have also taken a voluntary reduction of €14,000 to bring their salaries down to €200,000. Those retiring before end February 2012 will be subject to a reduction in their pension, which in the case of a Secretary General is around 10 per cent. Lump sums over €200,000 are also being taxed.

136. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has compiled information on the deficits in the pension schemes of the full range of State bodies, including commercial and non-commercial State sponsored bodies and agencies; if so, if he will provide the full details available on the overall position; his response to such deficits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25515/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The vast majority of public service occupational pension schemes are financed on a pay-as-you-go basis with the annual cost of pensions being met from current revenue and therefore do not have funds. The commercial semi-state bodies do have pension funds as they are responsible for their own pension arrangements and funding. Deficits on pension funds are the responsibility of the State Companies in line with standard commercial practice. Details of the pension funds of individual State companies can be found in their Annual Report and Accounts. As Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I am generally required to consent to pension schemes made by these public sector bodies. The legal requirement usually arises from the founding statutes of the organisation in question. My role arises because of my responsibility for public service pension policy and for public service expenditure generally. In this context I seek to ensure that the terms granted by the commercial semi-state sector are not out of line, or likely to give rise to cost-increasing claims for similar terms elsewhere in the non-commercial public service.

Some of these commercial bodies may have funds which are failing to meet the minimum funding standard and it is for them in the first instance to put in place a credible funding plan to satisfy the Pensions Board that they are addressing these deficits, including increasing contributions and reducing benefits where necessary. Many of these bodies have been engaged in doing this over the past number of years.

137. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a civil servant with less than 40 years service can avail of the provisions in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009 and retire before the end of February 2012 with their pension being based on their salary pre-reduction. [25612/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): An established civil servant with less than 40 years service may avail of the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act, 2009 and retire before the end of the February 2012 so long as he/she fulfils the following provisions:

(i) has completed a qualifying service of a minimum of two calendar years and

(ii) has attained a minimum preserved pension age of 60 years if he/she took up employment before 1 April 2004, or 65 if he/she took up employment after 1 April 2004, when the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004 was introduced.

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An established civil servant may also exercise the option to avail of cost neutral early retirement. Cost Neutral early retirement is a facility which allows qualifying officers who wish to retire up to ten years before minimum preserved pension age to apply to receive immediate payment of lump sum and pension, as an alternative to preserved benefits. The lump sum and pensions are reduced to make them the equivalent, in actuarial terms, of preserved benefits.

An unestablished civil servant with less than 40 years service may avail of the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act, 2009 and retire before the end of the February 2012 so long as he/she fulfils the following provisions: (i) has completed a qualifying service of a minimum of two calendar years and (ii) has attained a minimum preserved pension age of 65 years.

An unestablished civil servant may also exercise the option to avail of cost neutral early retirement. Cost Neutral early retirement is a facility which allows qualifying officers who wish to retire up to ten years before minimum preserved pension age to apply to receive immediate payment of lump sum and pension, as an alternative to preserved benefits. The lump sum and pensions are reduced to make them the equivalent, in actuarial terms, of preserved benefits.

Construction Contracts

138. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the Construction Contract Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25379/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to introduce new legislation to protect small building subcontractors that have been denied payments from bigger companies. In addition, you may be aware that the Construction Contracts Bill 2010 was introduced by Senator Feargal Quinn and passed Committee and remaining stages in the Seanad on 8 March 2011. It is now before the Dáil.

In this regard, my colleague Minister of State Mr Brian Hayes is working with Senator Quinn to continue a collaborative approach in regard to advancing the Bill. The Senator's Bill is a welcome initiative and I understand that Minister Hayes and Senator Quinn held a meeting with relevant stakeholders and opposition spokespersons on 28th June 2011.

In relation to the exemption of contracts below €200,000 from the Construction Contracts Bill 2010, I understand that the Senator pointed out in the Seanad that this threshold was proposed to reduce the administrative burden on contractors involved in smaller contracts.

I understand that the provision making the decision of an adjudicator non-binding where the dispute is referred to arbitration was included in the Senator's Bill to ensure that the State had the right to appeal a decision to protect the taxpayer.

These two concerns remain valid, nonetheless, and were highlighted by the consultation as matters that required further consideration. These issues have been examined in the Regulatory Impact Assessment of the Bill which is being finalised in my Department at present.

These steps will make it possible to bring proposals to Government about how to progress this legislation. It is intended to have the legislation progress in the Dáil in the current session.

It is important that a solution to the problem of non-payment in the construction sector must not place an unnecessary regulatory or cost burden on the parties to the dispute, other parties involved in the project, or the State.

Parental Leave

139. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to extend parental leave to public servants similar to the leave for civil servants as per Circular 13/2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25389/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The statutory entitlements to Parental Leave are set out in the Parental Leave Act 1998 and the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2006.

All employers have to provide access to up to fourteen weeks unpaid leave for employees with children under eight years of age. The fourteen weeks can be spread over eight years by agreement, but the employer can insist that they are taken in blocks of at least six weeks.

The arrangements for parental leave for civil servants come within my area of responsibility. However, arrangements in other parts of the public service are the responsibility of the appropriate Minister.

Within the civil service the arrangements for parental leave are set out in the Circular 20/2008: Parental Leave in the Civil Service.

Circular 13/2010 amended Circular 20/2008 with effect from 1 September 2010. The amendment relates to an increase in the maximum age of the child in respect of whom employees may take parental leave from eight to thirteen years. In the case of an adopted child, where the child is eleven years or more but less than age thirteen, the parental leave must be taken within two years of the adoption order. In the case of a child with a disability, the age limit of sixteen years still applies.

The total amount of parental leave has not increased; it is the cut off point, the time by which the leave must be taken, that has been extended.

All other terms included in the previous Circular, 20/2008, continue to apply.

Consultancy Contracts

140. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide details, including the value and the name of the beneficiary, of any contract awarded by him or any public body directly under his control for public relations, communications and consultancy services from 9 March 2011 to date in 2011. [25502/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I take it that the Deputy is referring solely to public relations costs and not to advertising costs that would be incurred by my Department in the normal course of business, such as entries into telephone directories, the placing of advertisements in national newspapers, recruitment advertising, advertising associated with the national development plans, e-tenders etc.

The table below details the spend for public relations, communications and consultancy services from 9 March 2011 to date, for both my Department and also for the agencies under my aegis:—

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Date of Award	Name of Company	Value of Contract	Brief Description of Contract
May 2011	MKO Partners Ltd	€35,819.80	External validation of the savings reported in respect of three sample initiatives under the Croke Park Agreement. This Review was undertaken under the auspices of the National Implementation Body.

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Date of Award	Name of Company	Value of Contract	Brief Description of Contract
July 2011	Deloitte Ireland & Accenture	€24,195 (plus VAT) per month	Three month contract to assist with the development of a public sector reform plan

Valuations Office

Date of Award	Name of Company	Value of Contract	Brief Description of Contract
May 2011	The Media Group	Total value of contract estimated at €10,000.	Media/Public relations issues associated with the Dublin City Council revaluation.

Office of the Ombudsman

Date of Award	Name of Company	Value of Contract	Brief Description of Contract
April 2011	System Dynamics	€16,000	Lotus Notes Development (I.T.)
July 2011	Dr Brendan Williams	€2,500	Analysis of case material for investigation
August 2011	Eamonn Galligan	€907.50	Consultancy in respect of planning & development regulations

In the period in question the Office of Public Works, the Public Appointments Service, the Commission for Public Service Appointments and the State Lab, have awarded no contracts in relation to public relations, communications or consultancy services.

Departmental Agencies

141. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons employed by the Industrial Development Agency Ireland and Enterprise Ireland by grade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25366/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Between them IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland employ a total of 1,077 people. IDA employs 251 people, while Enterprise Ireland employs 826 people, which equates to 807.5 whole time equivalents. A breakdown of these numbers by grade, in respect of each of the agencies is set out in the attached tabular statements.

Tables showing the number and grades of staff employed by IDA and Enterprise Ireland

Table A: Staff employed by IDA Ireland by grade

Job Title	Number
CEO	1
Executive Director	2
Divisional Manager	5
Department Manager	19
Section Manager	63
Project Executive	97

Job Title	Number
Assistant Project Executive	29
Executive Assistant	35
Total number of staff employed	251

Table B: Whole Time Equivalent Staff employed by Enterprise Ireland

Job Title	Number
CEO	1
Executive Director	4
Divisional Manager	12
Department Manager	64
Senior Executive	288.5
Executive	140
Administrator	102.5
Executive Asst. /Clerical Asst.	81.5
Local overseas staff / overseas graduates	114
Total W.T.E	807.5

Banking Sector Investigations

142. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he is satisfied that no additional resources are required by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement to expedite the investigations currently underway in respect of certain matters at Anglo Irish Bank; if he has sought and received such an assurance in recent times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25527/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The investigation into events at Anglo Irish Bank is the most complex that the Director of Corporate Enforcement has ever undertaken and accordingly he has been assured by my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality that extra resources will be made available for this investigation if requested by him. My Department has not received any request for resources beyond those additional resources already provided to that Office.

Work Permits

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when a review will be completed in the case if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who has applied for a work permit in respect of an employee with specialised skills, in view of the fact that evidence has already been submitted to address issues raised previously; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25593/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department processes applications in respect of the different types of employment permits and all applications are processed in line with the Employment Permits Act 2006.

I wish to advise the Deputy that it is current Government policy to issue new employment permits only in respect of:

— highly skilled, highly paid positions or;

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

— non-EEA nationals who are already legally resident in the State on valid employment permits or;

— where there is an officially recognized scarcity of workers of a particular type or qualification.

I am informed that there is no record of a valid application in this case. However, if the prospective employer or employee wishes to submit a completed application with all of the relevant attachments and fee, it will be considered on its own merits.

Departmental Schemes

144. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will review a matter (details supplied) regarding the job scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25628/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I assume the Deputy is referring to the Job Creation Initiative to deliver additional sustainable jobs, which was announced by the Taoiseach in May 2011. IDA Ireland was asked to work on a framework to give effect to the proposal within current Irish legislation and EU State Aid Rules and a procurement process is currently under way in relation to this initiative.

Ministerial Appointments

145. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the name and salary of every special adviser appointed by every Cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came into office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26121/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The following table identifies the Special Advisers appointed to my office since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011:

Name	Salary
Mr. Conor Quinn	€80,051
Mr. Ciaran Conlon	€127,000

Social Welfare Benefits

146. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for mortgage interest supplement in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [25455/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that the mortgage interest supplement entitlement of the person concerned is under review. The HSE will inform the person concerned of its decision in due course.

147. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Waterford who has been unemployed for two years, is dependent on their spouse's invalidity pension and is not in receipt of a social welfare payment in their own name is eligible to apply to undertake a community employment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25459/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under the eligibility criteria for Community Employment, a qualified adult dependant of an eligible person who is currently in receipt of either Jobseeker's Assistance, or Jobseeker's Benefit, for 12 months or more, may avail of the spousal swap option. This involves the person exchanging his or her placement opportunity on the scheme with his or her adult qualified dependant. Unfortunately, this transfer arrangement does not apply to a qualified adult dependant of a person on Disability Allowance, Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension or Blind Pension.

Departmental Schemes

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of positions or places already created under the JobBridge scheme; if particular inadequacies have been identified; her plans to address any issues arising; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25602/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As of Friday 16 September, a total of 2,471 internship opportunities with host organisations were approved and were available on the JobBridge website to be filled. In addition, to date 1,276 interns have commenced an internship under the JobBridge scheme. Of these, 583 individuals have converted their Work Placement Programme placement into a JobBridge internship.

The Department of Social Protection continues to monitor the operation of the JobBridge scheme and reviews the scheme and its eligibility criteria on an ongoing basis.

149. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review the entitlement of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin to avail of the JobBridge initiative. [25419/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): It is not appropriate for me to comment on the social welfare status of a specific individual or whether they are eligible to participate in a specific labour market activation measure.

However, it should be noted that individuals who were previously in receipt of Disability Allowance and who transfer their payment to Jobseeker's Allowance/Benefits will have their period of time in receipt of Disability Allowance taken into account for the purposes of the three month qualifying period for JobBridge.

Social Welfare Payments

150. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views regarding a submission on winter fuel allowance; the actions he will take to address the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25421/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The national fuel allowance scheme assists householders on long-term social welfare payments with meeting the cost of their heating needs during the winter season. The allowance represents a contribution towards a person's normal heating expenses. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Fuel allowance is payable for 32 weeks and is currently benefitting over 380,000 people at an estimated annual cost of over €230 million. The payment rate is now €20 per week for all recipients.Help is also available for people with special or additional heating needs through the Heating Supplement and Exceptional Needs Payment Scheme under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme. In addition, electricity and gas allowances under the household benefits package, are payable throughout the year to over 390,000 pensioners, people with disabilities, and carer households

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

towards their heating, light and cooking costs at an estimated overall scheme cost of €382 m in 2011.

There would be a number of difficulties in paying the fuel allowance as a lump sum for some recipients while others receive it as part of their weekly payment. If the payment were given in advance as a lump sum, there could be significant over-payments if a recipient's circumstances were to change during the payment season and they were to lose the entitlement. The lump sum payment might not be used for the purpose of fuel purchase leading to hardship at a later stage and recourse having to be made to supplementary welfare allowance payments. If it were paid in arrears, it obviously would create further budgeting difficulties.

Many oil companies provide facilities for making payment by monthly instalment over a period of time which allows people to plan and budget for fuel expenses. I am satisfied that this arrangement is sufficient to meet the needs of our customers.

Along with other Departments and agencies, my Department has been working with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources on an Affordable Energy Strategy which will be published shortly. The most cost-effective means of protecting households from energy poverty in the long term is to reduce their consumption of energy through improving the thermal efficiency of the home. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has administered an energy efficiency programme for privately owned low income households (Warmer Homes) since 2001. Over 65,000 such households have benefited to date, with a further 15,000 expected to receive energy efficiency upgrades this year. A similar upgrade programme is also in place for local authority houses.

Social Welfare Benefits

151. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a redundancy claim in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; when payment will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25423/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I can confirm that the notification of redundancy in respect of the individual concerned was received in the redundancy payments section on 19 July 2011 and is awaiting processing.

Social Welfare Appeals

152. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an appeal for carer's allowance will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25424/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 13 August 2011. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Social Welfare Services on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer for consideration. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Social Welfare Benefits

153. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Social Protection her policy regarding rent supplement; if there is a policy to prevent proliferation of rent supplement properties on a

street or in an area and if not if she will consider introducing such a policy; if there is a requirement that landlords in receipt of rent supplement are registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board and registered for tax purposes; the action she will take in respect of the high number of rent supplement properties, many of which are protected structures and the deteriorating state of properties (details supplied); the action that can be taken against tenants in receipt of rent supplement who engage in anti-social behaviour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25435/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of rent supplement is to provide short-term income support to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible people living in private rented accommodation who are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from their own resources and who do not have accommodation available to them from another source.

In general there is no limit or restriction on the proportion or number of people that may receive rent supplement in an area. However, Section 25 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 provides that a payment of rent supplement can be refused in respect of accommodation which is situated in an area notified to the Minister for Social Protection by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, as being an area of regeneration.

Under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, landlords are legally obliged to register tenancies with the PRTB. The Department is also working closely with the PRTB to ensure that all tenancies where rent supplement is in payment are registered with the PRTB. To that end, the Department provides details of new rent supplement payments to the PRTB to enable them identify tenancies that are not registered and to take any follow-up action necessary.

Landlords are legally obliged to register tenancies with the PRTB within one month from the start date of the tenancy or at a later date on payment of an increased fee. For this reason, it is not practicable for the Department to insist that a tenancy be registered with the PRTB before payment of rent supplement can be made. There are also instances where a rent supplement tenancy need not be registered with the PRTB, for example, in the case of renting a room in a house or where a premises is owner occupied.

Over the years the Department has been working closely with the Revenue Commissioners to ensure that landlords who benefit from monies paid out under the rent supplement scheme comply with their obligations under the Taxes Acts. Section 7 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2010 provides that from 1st January 2011, rent supplement should not be payable in respect of a tenancy where the landlord:

i. has not provided the HSE with a Tax Reference Number in a prescribed form, or

ii. has not advised the HSE in a prescribed form that she/he has no Tax Reference Number and has not notified the HSE the reasons why she/he has no Tax Reference Number

The Taxes Acts place an obligation on the Department to provide the Revenue Commissioners with payment details relating to rent supplement on an annual basis. Section 7 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2010 will help ensure that those benefiting from the rent supplement scheme are tax compliant.

Responsibility for ensuring that a protected structure or any element that contributes to its special interest is not endangered is a matter for the owner/occupier of the building. It is a matter for the planning authority to take appropriate action if it considers that a protected structure is endangered.

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

Responsibility for setting and enforcing housing standards rests with the Local Authorities. However, accommodation occupied by rent supplement tenants should at least meet minimum housing standards. In consultation with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, S.I. No. 572 of 2006 and Section 25 of Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 introduced the condition that allows the HSE to decide that a rent supplement may not be payable where it has been notified by a housing authority of the non-compliance with standards. This condition for rent supplement supports the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government Action Programme which aims to promote further improvement in private rented accommodation standards, including a review of the regulations and more effective enforcement.

Social Welfare legislation already provides the HSE with the authority to refuse payment of a rent supplement in the case of a person who has been required to deliver up possession of a dwelling provided by a housing authority or an approved body where the reasons for that requirement include anti-social behaviour or the interests of good estate management.

In the case of private rented accommodation, tenancy arrangements involve a contract between the landlord and tenant and tenant behaviour is a matter for the landlord in the first instance. There are a number of avenues open to landlords in such cases, including the mediation service for landlords and tenants operated by the Private Residential Tenancies Board and/or recourse to the Garda Síochána and/or the Courts in relation to the enforcement of the law in dealing with anti-social or criminal behaviour. If necessary, the landlord may seek termination of the tenancy which, if effected, would result in the termination of rent supplement.

Jobs Initiative

154. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views that the promises given by her upon the launch of the JobBridge programme are now being broken (details supplied); JobBridge participants have been informed that their fuel allowance will now not be paid to them as they are part of the JobBridge programme; if she will verify that what was promised at the launch of the programme, and what is currently published on her Department's website, is at odds to the reality of the way the programme is being implemented and that participants are losing secondary benefits, in particular, their fuel allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25441/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Participation on JobBridge should not affect an individual's secondary benefits provided that their underlying circumstances have not changed. I would ask the Deputy to provide me with further details of the particular case he is referring to so that my Department can investigate the issue.

Social Welfare Benefits

155. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to review the back-to-education allowance to include qualifying persons who have previously held educational qualifications with which they are unable to obtain employment and who wish to retrain with the help of this scheme in an area where there are employment opportunities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25443/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The back to education allowance (BTEA) scheme is a second chance education opportunities scheme designed to remove the barriers to participation in second and third level education by enabling eligible people on

social welfare to continue to receive a payment while pursuing an approved full-time education course that leads to a higher qualification than that already held.

A person wishing to pursue BTEA will have to satisfy a number of conditions such as being a certain age, in receipt of a prescribed social welfare payment for a specified time period, pursuing a full time course of study leading to a recognised qualification in a recognised college and progressing in the level of education held by the client with reference to the national framework of qualifications among others.

Progression has always been a fundamental condition of BTEA. State support for education purposes is grounded on a student progressing from one qualification level to a higher one. This is necessary to ensure displacement does not occur, in that courses could be offered to students who are not progressing at the cost of students progressing from a lower education level. It should be noted that in 2010/2011 academic year, of the 25,032 participants supported through BTEA, 43% pursued second level courses. Furthermore, the scheme was never intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third level education system.

However, if a person wishes to pursue a part time education course they may be able to do so while still obtaining their jobseekers payment. They must apply at their local social welfare office and verify that participation on the course does not reduce their availability for work. In the case of jobseekers benefit, participation on a course does not grant any extension to the normal period for which jobseekers benefit is paid.

On May 10th, as part of the Government's Jobs Initiative, 20,900 new and additional places were announced in training, education and work experience programmes. As part of this initiative, a new fund, entitled Springboard, which is being managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills, provides education and training opportunities to support unemployed people. The primary objective of Springboard is to help unemployed people to remain as close as possible to the labour market by accessing part-time flexible higher education and training opportunities to upskill or reskill in areas where sustainable employment opportunities may arise as the economy recovers. The target group for this programme of over 200 courses includes unemployed people with a previous history of employment who already hold a higher level qualification at NFQ Levels 6 to 9, who may also require additional upskilling or reskilling in order to re-enter employment. By way of the part-time education option, unemployed people on jobseekers' payments will be facilitated in retaining their payment, subject to continuing entitlement, within the broader back to education framework.

FÁS, as the National Training Authority, anticipates the needs of, and responds to, a constantly changing labour market. It strives to do this through the provision of tailored training programmes that suit various needs and access to many training programmes is not determined by a person's welfare status. Through a regional network of 66 offices and 20 training centres, FÁS operates these training programmes including some in co-operation with community, voluntary and statutory organisations. Further information is available locally at these FÁS offices.

The BTEA, in conjunction with other employment support schemes, will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that it continues to meet its objectives.

156. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will reconsider and reinstate rent supplement to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25458/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Health Service Executive (HSE) advised that it has received a claim for rent supplement from the person concerned. The HSE requested further information from the person concerned to process her application. The HSE will make a decision on her application when the requested information has been provided.

Unemployment Levels

157. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons registered as unemployed at the Coolock and Kilbarrack social welfare offices in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and to-date in 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25490/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of the Department, the following table gives the numbers of persons registered as unemployed at Coolock and Kilbarrack local offices from 2007 to date in 2011. The figures are from end December in each year from 2007 to 2010 and up to 26 August 2011.

Year	Coolock	Kilbarrack
2007	2,288	2,148
2008	3,584	3,533
2009	5,150	5,237
2010	5,015	5,360
2011	5,299	5,685

Social Welfare Benefits

158. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25541/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for carer's allowance from the person in question was initially refused on the grounds that the Department's medical assessor expressed the opinion that the care recipient is not so disabled as to require full time care and attention as prescribed in regulations. In addition, it was decided that the person in question does not satisfy the full time care requirement.

Following submission of further medical evidence in respect of the care recipient, the claim was reviewed and the decision to refuse the claim on medical grounds was reversed. In order to establish whether full time care and attention was being provided and whether all other conditions necessary for receipt of carer's allowance were satisfied, the file was sent to the department's investigative branch for investigation. Upon receipt of the inspector's report, the deciding officer decided that the person in question does not qualify for carer's allowance on the grounds that full time care is not being provided and for failure to supply information requested by the social welfare inspector. On 19 July 2011 the person in question was notified of this decision and the reasons for it. There is no record of an appeal by the applicant and the statutory period for submission of an appeal has now lapsed.

Social Welfare Appeals

159. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an appeal for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [25566/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 10 June 2011. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Social Welfare Services on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer for consideration. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Social Welfare Benefits

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if due consideration was given to the circumstances whereby jobseekers allowance was refused in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare whose spouse is employed but whose mortgage is on interest-only repayments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25583/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for jobseekers allowance from the person concerned was disallowed because his means were in excess of the scheduled limit on the basis of his wife's earnings. He may apply for mortgage interest supplement (which is means tested) to the community welfare officer at his local health centre in Kilmeague, Co. Kildare.

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a bereavement grant might be payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25584/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A bereavement grant is a payment designed to assist families in dealing with death and funeral expenses. It is a once-off payment, based on PRSI contributions, made from the Social Insurance Fund (SIF). Means tested exceptional needs payments may be available under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme to those in need who have not made the required number of contributions to the SIF. To qualify for a bereavement grant, the person on whose insurance record the claim is based must have 156 PRSI contributions. Alternatively, they must have paid 26 PRSI contributions and a specified number of credited PRSI contributions.

The person concerned has insufficient PRSI contributions for payment of a bereavement grant, based solely on his Irish social insurance record.

Under EC Regulations, an application should be made to the Competent Authority where the insured person last paid a social insurance contribution. In this case, that is the Department of Work and Pensions in the UK as the person concerned has not paid PRSI in Ireland since 2003.

Ministerial Staff

162. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if she will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26123/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Since my appointment on 9 March 2011, I have appointed the following advisers — Edward Brophy, Special Adviser, was appointed with effect from 29 July 2011, on a salary of €127,796. Kathleen Barrington, Special

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Adviser (Press), was appointed with effect from 18 July 2011, on a salary scale of €80,051 — €98,424. There is no Minister of State attaching to my Department.

Irish Language

163. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the effect the new funding stream from Foras Na Gaeilge called An Scéim Óige will have on the youth clubs that have been run by Coláiste na BhFiann for 40 years; his plans to ensure the youth clubs continue to operate if the new funding stream is started; if this change of funding will affect the recently launched 20 year Irish language strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25352/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): At the outset, it should be noted that Foras na Gaeilge is an agency of the North/South Language Body, An Foras Teanga, which is jointly funded by my Department and by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland. Decisions regarding An Foras Teanga are made by both Sponsor Departments under the auspices of the North/South Ministerial Council.

Foras na Gaeilge currently provides core funding to 19 Irish language organisations in both jurisdictions, including Cumann na bhFiann. Following an external review of the organisations, completed on behalf of Foras na Gaeilge, the North/South Ministerial Council agreed that the core funding arrangements be reconfigured to ensure a more streamlined and cost effective approach. The reconfiguration consists of moving from core funding for 19 organisations to a competitive funding model based on a portfolio of schemes requiring the delivery of various strategic priorities.

Draft schemes have been prepared by Foras na Gaeilge and following approval by the board of Foras na Gaeilge and by the Finance Ministers in both jurisdictions, these schemes will be brought to the North/South Ministerial Council for approval. Pending the introduction of the schemes, it has been agreed that interim core funding will continue to be provided to the 19 organisations to 30 June 2012.

The draft schemes include a Youth Scheme with the objectives of providing a range of youth services on an all-island basis and supporting groups/clubs that provide opportunities for young people to regularly use Irish in a social environment outside the school system. It will of course be open to Cumann na bhFiann to seek funding under the proposed Youth Scheme to continue its work with Irish language youth clubs.

Finally, the introduction of the proposed Youth Scheme is seen as complementary to the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*, given its emphasis on linking language learning to the informal use of Irish in recreational, cultural and other out-of-school activities.

Inland Waterways

164. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding farmers removing gravel from rivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25373/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I understand that works that could materially impact on rivers and river beds, such as the deepening or widening of the river bed, would require planning permission. Minor works, which would be considered to be maintenance works within the meaning of the Planning Acts, would not require planning permission. Policy in relation to planning issues is a matter for the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Gravel extraction may pose potential threats to wildlife, habitats and protected species. In an area protected under the European Communities (Habitats) Regulations 1997 or the Wildlife Acts, and where planning permission is not required, such works may be a notifiable activity and might therefore require my consent. In cases where the works would disturb or destroy areas important for the otter, a licence may be required from my Department before such works could be undertaken. Individuals contemplating such activities should therefore contact officials from the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department before commencing such works.

I also understand that Inland Fisheries Ireland has powers and duties under the Fisheries Acts in relation to the protection of fish spawn, which could be affected by the removal of gravel. Policy in this regard is a matter for the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

Ferry Services

165. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the unsuccessful tenderers for the recent awarding of the Heir Island ferry contract; if he will outline in detail the criteria the unsuccessful tenderers didn't meet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25551/11]

166. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in relation to the recent awarding of the ferry contract for Heir Island off west Cork, the conditions required for the provision of a relief boat as part of the tender process; if it is required to be of a particular size; if it is required to be available for a minimum period of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25552/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 165 and 166 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the tendering process is not complete until the contract is awarded. With regard to information regarding the fulfilling of the award criteria, any party to the process may contact my Department where they will receive a full debriefing on their tender and their scores in relation to the criteria as outlined in the tender documents. With regard to the conditions required for the provision of a relief boat, the vessel must meet the requirements of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport for the transportation of passengers, including all provisions relating to seaworthiness and the certification thereof. The operator must also ensure that arrangements are in place to have a back-up vessel available when the main vessel is out of service.

Ministerial Staff

167. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26113/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was established on 2 June 2011. My Department has received sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for the appointment of two Special Advisors. My officials are currently in contact with both individuals with a view to finalising specific contracts arrangements in line with the guidelines on staffing of Ministers' Offices issued earlier this year. No salary costs have been incurred

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by my Department to date, pending the finalising of these arrangements. It should be noted that Mr. Dinny McGinley, TD, has not appointed any Special Advisors.

Postal Services

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on the importance of the rural post offices here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25402/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The operation of An Post's post office network is a matter for the board and management of the company and not one in which I have a statutory function. However, I do appreciate the importance of the rural post office infrastructure in particular. The Government's core policy goal for the postal sector is to ensure that Irish customers, both business and residential, enjoy competitively priced, high quality postal services. The Government is committed to a strong and viable An Post and supports its maintenance of the maximum number of economically viable post offices.

Decisions regarding the delivery of social welfare payments are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Social Protection.

Inland Waterways

169. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding farmers removing gravel from rivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25372/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I have no remit as regards the undertaking of such works. I understand this is a matter for the land-owner and the relevant authorities, including the local authority, in each instance. Similarly Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) has no remit other than how these works impact on fish spawning grounds or fish stocks. It is an offence under section 173 of the Fisheries (Consolidation) Act 1959 to disturb any spawning bed, bank or shallow where the spawn or fry of salmon, trout or eels may be.

Telecommunications Services

170. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the steps he will take to improve broadband in rural areas (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25392/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The telecommunications market in Ireland has been fully liberalised since 1999 and, since then, has seen the steady growth and development of well-regulated competition in the provision of the full range of telecommunications products and services. The Government is not a player in this market and can only intervene in cases of market failure. The most significant intervention in this regard in the context of the Deputy's Question is the National Broadband Scheme (NBS) which has delivered broadband services to some 1,028 electoral districts countrywide.

Between the significant private and public sector investments over recent years all areas of the country now have access to at least a basic broadband service. In addition to the NBS the Rural Broadband Scheme, which recently closed for applications, aims to identify the remaining individual premises in rural Ireland, outside of the NBS areas that are unable to obtain a

broadband service and to provide a basic broadband service to those premises, where requested.

The Verification Phase of the Scheme will commence very shortly. Under this phase efforts will be made to obtain a service for those who have applied under the Scheme from commercial Internet Service Providers under existing market terms. This part of the process should be carried out over the period October-January 2012. If internet service providers confirm that a particular applicant cannot be served at present, the Rural Broadband Scheme will seek to offer a service through whichever company is successful in bidding for the RBS procurement contract.

The procurement process is expected to commence toward the end of October and will aim to identify the preferred supplier. Pending contract negotiations a service provider will be appointed in early 2012. Rollout of the service under the Scheme is expected to be completed by the end of 2012.

171. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding Eircom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25393/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The electronic communications market is, and has been since its liberalisation, a commercial competitive market. Thus, the provision of electronic communications services is a matter for those privately owned commercial sector service providers, regulated by the independent regulator, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). While I would welcome continuous investment by all of the infrastructure owners in their networks, neither I nor ComReg has any role or function in their investment decisions. The Deputy may be aware that the company referred to in the question recently announced a commitment to a significant investment in upgrading their broadband network. Notwithstanding the above we will refer your concerns to eircom for direct attention.

Bord Gáis Bills

172. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the steps he will take to ensure that Bord Gáis continues to accept bonds from community welfare officers for persons who are in need of help when connecting to the gas grid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25465/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The issue referred to by the Deputy is a day to day operational matter for Bord Gáis Éireann and one in which I have no statutory function.

I have asked Bord Gáis Éireann to write directly to the Deputy outlining its position on this matter.

Semi-State Companies

173. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide a list of the commercial semi-State companies under his remit whose chief executives have agreed to take a voluntary salary cut to bring them within the €250,000 salary cap announced by the Minister for Public Expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25539/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin, announced the terms of a Government Decision for the introduction of pay ceilings for higher posts across the public service and for CEO posts in Commercial State Companies, in June 2011.

Energy Transmission Network

174. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in relation to EirGrid lines and especially the Srannagh, Carrick-on-Shannon line to Sligo, the persons responsible for the following (details supplied). [25626/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I have no role in the planning and construction of individual transmission grid projects which is a day-to-day matter for EirGrid and ESB as the two State Bodies with statutory responsibilities for the national electricity transmission network infrastructure. Both bodies are responsible for ensuring that all relevant national, EU and international guidelines for health, safety and the environment are adhered to.

An Bórd Pleanála is the statutory entity responsible under the Strategic Infrastructure Act for planning decisions in relation to the transmission network.

The Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland has specific statutory functions in relation to radiation.

Ministerial Staff

175. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every Cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26115/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Government has appointed two Special Advisers on my behalf. Information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the Table below:

Name	Date Appointed	Annual Salary
Mr. Finbarr O'Malley	28 March 2011	€83,337
Mr. Simon Nugent	11 April 2011	€97,200

Mortgage Interest Rates

176. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to ensure that local authorities who are charging an interest rate of 12.5% under the income related housing purchase loan scheme are obliged to reschedule mortgages in distress at a lower interest rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25447/11]

183. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he, or legislation, prevents local authorities from reducing the interest rate of 12.5% charged on income related housing purchase loan mortgages that are in distress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25448/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): I propose to take Questions Nos. 176 and 183 together.

The fixed interest rates referred to reflect the cost of long-term funds prevailing at the time the loans were advanced and, like all fixed rate loans, are fixed for the life of the loan.

The costs of reducing the fixed rates on these loans would be substantial and would have to be borne by the Exchequer, the Housing Finance Agency or the relevant local authority.

It is important to note that borrowers on these particular fixed rate mortgages have been free, since 1980, to redeem such loans without any interest rate penalty and refinance them in the private sector. This represents a significant concession, having regard to the redemption penalties of up to six months interest or more, applied by commercial lending agencies in the event of early redemption of such mortgages.

Where any borrower, either from a local authority or from a private financial institution, is facing difficulties in meeting mortgage repayments, they should engage proactively and constructively with the lender to seek to achieve an agreed solution. The services of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service are also available to such borrowers and support is available through the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme.

In addition, my Department issued comprehensive guidance to local authorities on the treatment of mortgage arrears in March 2010. That guidance was closely based on the Central Bank's first statutory Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears to ensure that cases of local authority mortgage arrears are handled in a manner that is sympathetic to the needs of the particular household, while also protecting the position of the local authority concerned.

To reflect the content of the Central Bank's revised Code of Conduct — which replaced the previous code from 1 January 2011 and was informed by the deliberations of the Expert Group on Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt — my Department is currently preparing updated guidance to local authorities in consultation with the City and County Managers Association.

Leader Programmes

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government with regard to the highly successful Leader programme, if he will carry out a review to ensure the more timely delivery of funding and the streamlining of the application procedure and also funding for food type projects which were successful in the past should be restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25630/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): There are 36 Local Action Groups contracted by my Department to deliver the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 and they are the principal decision makers with regard to projects approved for funding. As part of programme implementation the RDP is subject to continuous monitoring and evaluation and a full and comprehensive mid-term evaluation of the programme was conducted in 2010. My Department is addressing all of the recommendations of this evaluation which includes continued comprehensive support for the Local Action Groups implementing the programme while continuing to ensure value for money for all funding distributed through the RDP. EU regulatory compliance obligations require robust and comprehensive application and approval procedures; however, my Department works with Local Action Groups on an on-going basis to promote the efficient and effective delivery of the RDP.

Food and food-related business are a significant driver of enterprise activity in rural areas. These businesses require continued support to generate employment in rural Ireland. I and my Department continue to work with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in pur-

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suing a solution that meets the EU regulatory requirements. We are also maintaining ongoing contacts with the European Commission on the matter. While it is my objective to find an appropriate solution in the context of our overall budgetary situation, it is important to recognise that €62 million is available this year for other eligible Axis 3 elements of the RDP.

Waste Management

178. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way money collected from the packaging levy is used; the proportion of same that goes to the green bin collection; the agencies through which this money is channelled; the rules in place regarding its expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25380/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Directive 94/62/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on packaging and packaging waste (the Packaging Directive) classifies items such as bottles, drink cans and containers as packaging.

While such packaging is not currently subject to a levy, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to drive a waste reduction programme as part of the overall policy in the area of a sustainable waste strategy. One of the possible elements of this waste reduction programme is the introduction of a levy on packaging.

I recently consulted with industry, other stakeholders and the public on a possible levy on packaging. This consultation closed on Friday 5 August 2011 and the submissions and comments received are currently being examined.

Environmental levies are currently in place on plastic bags and waste deposited to landfill. Revenues from these levies are paid into a 'ring-fenced' Environment Fund and can be used to support activities that are of benefit to the environment. Details of expenditure from the Environment Fund are available in the published Environment Fund Annual Accounts. Copies up to and including 2009 are available from the Oireachtas library and are on my Department's website *www.environ.ie.*

Section 74(9) of the Waste Management Act 1996, as amended, specifies the purposes for which payments may be made from the Environment Fund. These include assistance in a range of areas such as:

- schemes to prevent/reduce waste;
- waste recovery activities;
- research & development into waste management;
- production, distribution or sale of products deemed to be less harmful to the environment than other similar products;
- development of producer initiatives to prevent/reduce waste arising from their activities;
- implementation of waste management plans;
- enforcement of the provisions of any enactment relating to waste management, prevention of litter or protection of the environment;
- partnership projects, that involve local authorities, to improve the quality of the environment for particular local communities;
- promotion of awareness of the need to protect the environment, including national and regional campaigns;

- promotion /support of education and training to assist achievement of campaign objectives;
- resources (human or material) to enable education and training to be carried out;
- initiatives undertaken by community groups and others for protection of the environment;
- to facilitate, assist, support or promote initiatives undertaken by international organisations or other persons outside the State in respect of the protection of the environment or sustainable development or both;

and

- such other purposes for protection of the environment as may be prescribed by the Minister in regulations.

179. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the grants available to community groups to establish community waste and recycling projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25381/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department provides funding through the LA21 Environmental Partnership Fund to assist small scale, local, non-profit environmental projects aimed at increasing environmental awareness and developing sustainable communities. Community groups can apply for funding for a variety of environmental projects including those related to waste reduction, re-use and recycling and enhancing public awareness of these issues. Application for funding is made to local authorities who match the funding provided by the Department. The funding programme has operated since 1997 and has grown from year to year. Funding of €305,000 was provided in 2010 to 448 projects. The 2011 Fund will be announced shortly and community groups will be invited to submit proposals, for relevant projects, to their local authority. Departmental funds allocated to projects will be matched by a similar amount from the local authority. Eligible projects are those that will support and complement, at a local level, national environmental policies such as those on Waste, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Air, Water and Sustainable Development.

Community groups can also avail of support under the measures of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 that are managed by my Department. The Programme has an objective of supporting integrated approaches to the protection of the local heritage through a suite of related preservation actions, complemented by a range of initiatives designed to develop the sustainable economic contribution of the natural heritage. In this context, actions to support waste reduction can be supported, particularly those initiated through community effort. Anyone wishing to apply for this funding should contact their Local Development Company. The contact details for the 36 Local Development Companies contracted to deliver the RDP in Ireland can be found on my Department's website at *www.environ.ie.*

Community groups may also apply to bodies such as the County and City Enterprise boards for grant assistance towards commercially viable waste recycling projects.

Planning Issues

180. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on whether An Bord Pléanala should have representation from rural Ireland on the board itself in view of the interest of being fair when it comes to rural planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25385/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): The Board of an Bord Pleanala comprises a Chairperson and up to 9 ordinary members. The appointment process, set out under sections 105 -107 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 and Articles 56-65 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, require selections to be made by the Minister from nominees put forward by four representative panels of nominating bodies prescribed for this purpose.

Appointees to the Board do not represent their nominating body, but are appointed to provide, as a function of the Board, independent consideration of planning authorities' decisions submitted to the Board on appeal. I am satisfied that the current nomination and appointment processes are fair and transparent. Furthermore, as the legislative provisions underpinning these processes have only recently been endorsed by the Oireachtas, I have no proposals to make any further amendments at this time.

181. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on whether the sustainable rural housing guidelines for planning authorities should be re-visited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25387/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): My Department's Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing (2005) are designed to achieve a balance between a good planning framework for rural housing and the local housing needs of those who are part of, or have links to, local rural communities. They elaborate on the physical development policies for rural areas as set out in the Government's National Spatial Strategy (2002) which, inter alia,promotes sustainable rural settlement as a key component of delivering more balanced regional development.

The Guidelines set out how planning authorities should frame their development plan policies for the different types of rural areas which may exist within the development plan area, such as rural areas close to large towns and cities or those suffering from population decline. They also provide guidance to planning authorities on dealing with planning applications for rural housing including consideration of issues such as access to appropriate wastewater treatment facilities, potential impacts of the development on groundwater, landscape, natural and cultural heritage and addressing road safety issues (e.g. frontage onto national roads).

I am satisfied that the Guidelines are being implemented effectively and fairly, and I will continue to keep them under review in this regard.

Security of the Elderly

182. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on whether senior alert scheme which allows financial support to elderly persons for the use of personal pendant alarms should be extended to cover the installation of house alarms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25431/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Seniors Alert Scheme focuses mainly on the provision of monitored personal alert equipment. Personal alarms bring greater ease of mind to the user as they allow for direct two-way interaction with the monitoring station in the event of any concerns being raised by the user. They can also monitor many other features such as smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and other telecare devices.

I have no proposals to extend the scheme to cover house alarms.

Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 176.

184. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding an application in respect of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25451/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The organisation referred to in the Question registered with the Seniors Alert Scheme on 12 August 2011.

A request for application forms was received on 15 September and a response issued on 16 September 2011. Completed application forms have not been received in my Department as yet.

Social and Affordable Housing

185. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there can be an exemption made in Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 to allow those who were in the rental accommodation scheme before changes in legislation came into force, to remain on the housing waiting list (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25457/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): I refer to the reply to Question No. 21 of 15 September 2011 which sets out the position in this matter.

EU Regulations

186. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress made to date that he has made regarding the ongoing discussions between him and the European Commission regarding concerns that the EC has over article 28 of regulation 1698/2005 which allows for the adding value to agricultural and forestry products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25469/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 is divided into 4 Axes. Axis 1 deals with the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and Axis 2 aims to improve the countryside and environment. The objectives of Axis 3 are to support the diversification of the rural economy and improve the quality of life in rural areas. Axis 4 provides support for the use of a "bottom-up" approach to development which ensures local people are involved in decision making, thereby facilitating sustainable development in a more inclusive way. In Ireland the LEADER approach is used to implement Axis 3 measures.

A significant number of projects funded under the previous Leader+ programme, 2000-2006, and under the diversification and business-creation measures of the current rural development programme, RDP, involve support for enterprise initiatives that add value to agrifood products. Basic agricultural products are listed in Annex 1 to the EC Treaty and are commonly called Annex 1 products. Under the main rural development regulation, support for adding value to Annex 1 products is facilitated under Axis 1 of the programme. Early this year, Ireland was notified by the European Commission that support for adding value to agrifood products is only allowable under Axis 1 and not under Axis 3 of the RDP. As a result, grant aid under Axis 3 of the RDP for this type of activity remains suspended.

Food and food-related business are a significant driver of enterprise activity in rural areas. These businesses require continued support as we look to ways to generate employment in rural Ireland. I and my Department continue to work with the Department of Agriculture,

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Fisheries and Food in pursuing a solution that meets the regulatory requirements. We are also maintaining ongoing contacts with the European Commission on the matter. While it is my objective to find an appropriate solution in the context of our overall budgetary situation, it is important to recognise that €62 million is available this year for other eligible Axis 3 elements of the RDP.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

187. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the actions taken by him to alleviate the problems many residents in the Killester area of Dublin North Central face with low water pressure during the harsh winter months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25470/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The operation, maintenance and management of the water supply are in this instance a matter for Dublin City Council and I have no function in the matter.

Building Regulations

188. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has received a copy of the report commissioned by Dublin City Council and prepared by the Hayes Higgins Partnership — Consulting Engineers, into alleged defects at the Priory Hall complex, Dublin 13; if he will make the report immediately available to Priory Hall residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25474/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Dublin City 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 on a fee paying basis. Any further action in relation to the issues which have arisen in regard to this development would be a matter for Dublin City Council, which my Department understands will deal with the situation as appropriate in line with the standard arrangements in place for the discharge of their statutory functions. My Department is aware that copies of the report have been forwarded to those owners who participated in the survey. The question of further dissemination of the report is a matter for Dublin City Council and the other property owners involved.

Departmental Bodies

189. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will fully report on the recent establishment of a working group on pyrite; if he will report on the members of the working group; the terms of reference of the working group; the target date for the group to report to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25475/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I refer to the replies to Questions 29, 101 and Priority Question 3 on 15 September 2011 which dealt comprehensively with this matter. I am in the process of setting up a panel of persons, with suitable expertise, to identify a way forward which I hope will facilitate a mediated solution between the parties involved. The panel will be chaired by Mr. Brendan Tuohy, a former senior public servant, and arrangements for the selection of the other members of the panel will be finalised this week. I have asked Mr. Tuohy to complete his work and submit a report to me

by early in the New Year. The report will then be published. My Department will provide technical and administrative support to the panel in carrying out its work.

Local Authority Housing

190. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has received any proposal from Dublin City Council to amend the allocation system of the housing department in view of the number of persons on the council's waiting list and the many applicants who have been more that five years on that list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25476/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): Under section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, which came into operation on 14 June 2010, the making and amendment of an allocation scheme for social housing is a reserved function of the elected members of each housing authority. I understand that Dublin City Council adopted its current allocation scheme on 9 May 2011. I have not received any draft amendment to that scheme.

Planning Issues

191. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the review of the national planning guidelines; if developments of the scale, for example, of a second company (details supplied) will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25616/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): I refer to the reply to Question No. 24 of 15 September 2011 which sets out the position in this matter.

Emergency Planning

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will review the matter (details supplied) regarding locations of salt and grit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25629/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): As Lead Government Department with responsibility for co-ordinating the emergency response to severe weather, my Department has finalised and published The Report on the Review of the Response to Exceptional Severe Weather Events of 2009-2010. The Report, which is available on my Department's website at *www.environ.ie*, sets out the sequence of events as they occurred, draws various conclusions and makes recommendations to improve preparedness and increase resilience for future severe weather events. The Report recognises and acknowledges the very considerable community and voluntary contribution during the severe weather, and recommends that this should be fostered and encouraged as part of the overall response to future such events. It recommends that the good practice which has emerged in relation to making grit available at drop-points to local communities should be adopted as a consistent and standard practice by all local authorities and relevant guidance be prepared and disseminated.

Guidance is being prepared by my Department in conjunction with local authorities and will be issued shortly. The Report also makes recommendations in relation to salt stocks, which are to be used for keeping priority traffic routes open. The issues around legal liability of those acting in a voluntary capacity on behalf of the community are also under consideration.

Ministerial Staff

193. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26118/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I appointed Ms Claire Langton as Special Adviser to my office with effect from 10 March 2011 with an annual salary of €80,051. My colleague, Minister of State Mr. Willie Penrose, appointed Mr. Aidan Culhane as his Special Adviser on 23 May 2011 with an annual salary of €80,051.

Crime Prevention

194. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether the community alert programme as operated by Muintir na Tíre should be reinvigorated and whether the national crime council should be re-established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25432/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Community Alert programme is a voluntary community-based initiative in rural communities, set up in 1985 by Muintir na Tíre in association with the Garda authorities. It is dedicated in particular to improving the quality of life of vulnerable people in rural communities, especially the elderly, by crime prevention, neighbourliness and self-reliance, general community safety and well-being, accident prevention, promotion of personal safety and awareness of social inclusion. My Department provides financial support for the programme and has done so for some time.

The relationship between An Garda Síochána and Muintir na Tíre is formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations. The programme was given added impetus with the publication of a joint Muintir na Tíre/Garda strategy for the period 2007 to 2011, which was developed following a fundamental review of the programme by representatives of Muintir na Tíre, An Garda Síochána and the Community Alert development officers, which took account of the social and demographic changes that had taken place since 1985. One of the actions included in the Garda Policing Plan for 2011 is an evaluation of the Community Alert strategy, in the context of ensuring the protection of vulnerable persons and groups and a partnership approach to solving community problems. I am confident that the co-operation between Community Alert and An Garda Síochána will continue to benefit communities.

In line with Government policy as set out in the Programme for Government and the need to rationalise the functioning of publicly funded bodies generally, I have no plans to re-establish the National Crime Council. Since 2009, my Department has been engaged in a major consultation exercise leading to the production of a White Paper on Crime. The objective of the White Paper process is to provide a comprehensive framework for future crime policy in the form of a National Anti-Crime Strategy.

Garda Equipment

195. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of mobile intoxilyser machines in operation by the Garda traffic corps to monitor and detect drink driving; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25491/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I informed by the Garda authorities that, while use is not made of mobile intoxilyser units (mobile evidential breath testing

instruments), there are 1,005 roadside breath screening devices allocated across all Garda Divisions, which are used by members of An Garda Síochána to assist in forming an opinion whether a driver has consumed intoxicating liquor in excess of the legal limit. There are 64 evidential breath testing instruments installed and operational in Garda stations nationwide. I am advised that the Garda authorities are satisfied there are sufficient roadside breath screening devices to meet current operational needs. The availability and allocation of devices are kept under constant review by Garda management in consultation with the Medical Bureau of Road Safety.

Courts Service

196. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, in view of the increased activity in the Courts Service, in areas such as judgment and the sheriff's area generally, he is satisfied that there are adequate resources to deal in a timely way with cases; if there are parts of the country that are under more pressure than others; if so, his plans to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25358/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The execution of all court orders is a matter for the Sheriffs in accordance with the provisions of the Enforcement of Court Orders Act,1926, as amended. However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that there was a 9% increase in the number of execution orders lodged with Sheriffs' offices throughout the country in 2010 and this trend appears to have continued into 2011. The Sheriff is assisted in the task of executing the orders by Court Messengers. The Courts Service has informed me that there are currently three vacancies for Court Messengers in Wexford, Cavan and Roscommon whose work is currently being undertaken by messengers in adjacent counties.

Following a request from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for a review of the role of the Court Messenger, the Courts Service is currently undertaking this review in consultation with Sheriffs and it is expected that the review will be completed in the next two months. The Courts Service has indicated that there are delays in some counties because of the increased volumes being received but these are being dealt with as quickly as possible in the context of the resources available.

Garda Operations

197. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of alcohol seized by the Garda from persons drinking alcohol in public places for the years 2008, 2009, 2010 and to date in 2011; the monetary value of the alcohol seized by gardaí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25360/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my answer to his Question No. 96 of yesterday's date.

Garda Stations

198. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date on which the tender was put out to supply food to prisoners while in Garda custody; the name of the company that was awarded the contracts; the length of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25361/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that there is currently no general tender in place for the supply of food to persons in

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Garda custody. It is the responsibility of the station in which a person is detained to provide food to that person during the custody period.

I am further informed that a review of expenditure on meals for persons in custody was carried out by An Garda Síochána in late 2010. Following on from that review An Garda Síochána published a tender for such meals on the Government e-tenders website on 29 July, 2011, covering stations within the Dublin North Central Division as a pilot project. The closing date for the receipt of tenders was 20 September, 2011.

The Garda authorities have indicated that, following the conclusion of the Dublin North Central tender process, consideration will be given to going to the market in respect of the provision of meals for persons held in custody in other Garda Divisions.

Garda Operations

199. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the powers and equipment available to gardaí when dealing with a vehicle which has tinted windows; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25362/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my answer to his Question No. 97 of yesterday's date.

Citizenship Applications

200. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 694 of 14 September 2011, the expected residency and citizenship status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 18; the full extent of any outstanding requirements; when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25382/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to advise the Deputy that the position remains as stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question 694 on 14 September, 2011, namely, that an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received in the Citizenship Division of my Department in September 2008. The application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

On the processing of naturalisation applications generally, the Deputy may be aware that I have introduced a series of measures within my Department to provide for speedier processing of citizenship applications to bring about a substantial reduction in the processing timescale and in particular to address the backlog of applications awaiting a decision.

In relation to the correspondence to which the Deputy refers, if he wishes to email his query to INIS again using the Oireachtas Mail facility my officials will respond to any other issues raised that have yet to be addressed.

Legal Costs

201. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current estimated cost to the Exchequer of the various legal cases regarding the case of a person (details supplied). [25394/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to inform the Deputy that the person concerned has brought several legal challenges before the courts in this State as well as a case before the European Court of Human Rights. This involved in excess of 20 Court

appearances. The person referred to was unsuccessful in all of those cases and therefore the State has not made any contribution to her legal costs.

The information sought by the Deputy, in as much as it is available, is being compiled and will be communicated to him in due course.

Legislative Programme

202. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Criminal Law Defence and Dwelling Bill 2010, which was published in July 2010, will be enacted by him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25397/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Criminal Law (Defence and the Dwelling) Bill 2010 was restored to the Order Paper in March to be proceeded with at Committee Stage in Dáil Éireann. As the Deputy will appreciate, it is not possible for me to give a definitive date for when the Bill will be enacted as this will depend on its progress through both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Legal Profession

203. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if any barristers have been disbarred in the history of the State; if so, the number of same per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25398/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my response to Question No. 708 of 14 September 2011 in which I indicated that King's Inns had informed me that no barrister has been disbarred in the last ten years. I am awaiting data predating the last ten years from King's Inns and I will arrange to have the material forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Sale of Scrap Metal

204. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the need to develop a strategy for the monitoring of the sale of scrap metal to ensure that only legitimate products are traded and to reduce the theft of metal from farmyards, businesses, private properties and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25433/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy again as soon as the report is to hand.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

205. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide the list of organisations here registered with the Garda Central Vetting Unit which employ or engage persons who in the course of their work will have substantial, unsupervised access to children or vulnerable adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25439/11]

206. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the arrangements in place to enable organisations to register with the Garda Central Vetting Unit; if it is a self-registration process; if there is a mechanism in place to ensure that all organisations that should register actually do so; if there is a procedure in place to follow up organisations that should register but fail to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25454/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 and 206 together.

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The Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) provides employment vetting for approximately 19,000 organisations in Ireland, who are registered with the GCVU and which employ personnel to work in a full-time, part time, voluntary or student capacity with children and/or vulnerable adults. The procedure is also conducted for fostering and the Adoption Board.

The service provided is continually being extended, on a phased-basis, to those organisations seeking registration.

The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be practicable by way of answer to a Parliamentary Question to provide details in relation to approximately 19,000 organisations but if the Deputy has any questions in relation to a specific organisation, I will be happy to respond to him. I can tell the Deputy that, in broad terms, the groups which are registered with the GCVU include;

- State and Local Government organisations
- Religious Institutions
- Children's Organisations
- Primary, Secondary Schools and the Third Level Sector.
- Transport Companies providing school transport to primary and second level students.
- Crèches and pre-school organisations
- Youth organisations
- Sporting organisations
- Disability organisations
- The Health Sector

In addition, a large number of other voluntary groups providing services to children or vulnerable adults are also registered.

There is currently no statutory obligation on organisations to register with the GCVU. In July 2011, I obtained Government approval for a draft scheme of a "National Vetting Bureau Bill 2011". The scheme provides a statutory framework for vetting procedures. It will provide that organisations dealing with children and vulnerable adults must register with the National Vetting Bureau which will be established under the Bill and will take over from the GCVU. It is hoped to publish the Bill in the fourth quarter of 2011

Travel Documents

207. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way a person (details supplied) can proceed with an application for a temporary Irish travel document, in view of the extenuating circumstances in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25473/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INIS) that the person concerned was recently afforded temporary permission to remain in the State valid until 02 July 2014. The holding of this type of immigration status does not obligate INIS to issue a travel document and any decision to do so is discretionary. I should point out that a temporary travel document is normally only granted in exceptional circumstances, for example, to go abroad for urgent medical treatment or other humanitarian reasons, and where the applicant is not in a position to obtain a passport or other equivalent document from his or her own authorities.

The person concerned has previously held an Irish temporary travel document initially issued on 03 September 2007 that was renewed on at least two subsequent occasions to allow the person procure their national passport. I am advised that INIS has written to the person concerned this week with regard to the possible facilitation of his request to be issued with a further temporary travel document. A reply is awaited.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may also be made direct to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Garda Stations

208. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in a garda division (details supplied); the number of gardaí attached to each of these stations; the annual cost of running these stations in terms of utilities, maintenance and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25495/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The allocation of resources, including personnel, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner in consultation with his senior management team. I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are 19 Garda stations in the Division referred to by the Deputy. The strength of each Garda station in the Division as at 31 August 2011, the latest date for which figures are available, is set out in the table below.

Wicklow Garda Division

District	Number
Baltinglass District	
Baltinglass	36
Blessington	17
Carnew	4
Donard	1
Dunlavin	2
Hollywood	1
Shillelagh	1
Tinahely	2
Bray District	
Bray	127
Enniskerry	6
Greystones	35
Newtownmountkennedy	4
Wicklow District	
Arklow	35
Ashford	11
Aughrim	2
Avoca	3
Rathdrum	5
Roundwood	4
Wicklow	48
Total	344

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With regard to the annual cost of running these stations, in terms of utilities, I am informed that the lowest level at which costs are assigned under the Garda Vote is at District level and therefore it is not possible to provide expenditure figures in relation to individual stations. However, the total annual cost of utilities and cleaning in 2010 for the Districts that are attached to the Wicklow Division were as follows:

District	
Baltinglass	€94,576
Bray	€169,887
Wicklow	€86,107
Total	€350,570

I am further advised that the total annual cost of maintenance for Garda stations in the Wicklow Garda Division in 2010 was €219,473.

Garda Investigations

209. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied that no additional resources are required by the Garda to expedite the investigations currently under way in respect of certain matters at Anglo Irish Bank; if he has sought and received such an assurance in recent times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25526/11]

210. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of files that have been forwarded by the Garda to the Director of Public Prosecutions in respect of the Anglo Irish Bank investigations; the number of files still under progress by the gardaí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25528/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 210 together.

I attach the highest priority to the full investigation of white collar crime and bringing the perpetrators of such crime to justice to the greatest extent possible. I have expressed, both before and since my appointment as Minister, my unhappiness with the protracted nature of the investigations. I do not intend this as any criticism of investigators and prosecutors, who face tough challenges as a result of the complexities of the matters being investigated. At the same time, I am concerned to ensure that I do not say anything that could prejudice any possible prosecutions or any court hearing. It is imperative that such investigations are conducted in a thorough, methodical and comprehensive manner, so as to ensure that account is taken of all pertinent matters. If this is not done, there is a risk that any prosecutions that may proceed would be jeopardised.

On becoming Minister, I sought and received assurances that there were sufficient resources available to the investigations. I am informed by the Garda authorities that they remain satisfied that sufficient personnel and technical expertise is available to assist in the various aspects of the ongoing investigation. I can assure the Deputy that this Government will continue to provide sustained support for the investigation in terms of resources, as well as the necessary legislative and administrative supports, and that if those involved in the investigations believe at any stage that additional resources are required that will be responded to.

All members of An Garda Síochána allocated to this investigation have previous experience in the investigation of fraud related offences. The investigation is augmented by experienced

investigators from the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement. There is close co-operation and ongoing liaison between An Garda Síochána and the OSCE, and ten members of An Garda Síochána are currently on secondment to the OSCE.

I am informed that two comprehensive investigation files were submitted by the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation to the Law Officers in December, 2010. In addition, a supplementary investigation file was submitted in May. The files remain under consideration by the DPP, and his directions are awaited. The investigation by An Garda Síochána and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement is ongoing in respect of both these investigations and of other complaints. I understand that it is intended to submit further files to the DPP in the near future.

Citizenship Applications

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a decision is likely to be made in respect of an application for naturalisation in the case of person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25585/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy in April 2010. The application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made direct to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Residency Permits

212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made to date in the determination of residency entitlement in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25586/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person concerned arrived in the State on 5th February, 2007 and applied for asylum on 8th February, 2007. However, it was established that the person concerned had been recognised as a refugee in another EU Member State. The Refugee Applications Commissioner made a decision in accordance with the provisions of Section 17(4) of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) i.e. that the person concerned was a person to whom a declaration of refugee status could not be given. This decision was conveyed to the person concerned by letter dated 12th June, 2007.

The case of the person concerned was examined under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended), and Section 5 of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) on the Prohibition of Refoulement. Consideration was also given to representations submitted on his behalf for permission to remain in the State. On 14th August, 2008 a Deportation Order was made in respect of him. The person concerned instituted Judicial Review proceedings on 9th September,

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2008 challenging Section 17(4) of the Refugee Act 1996 and also the Deportation Order made in respect of him and accordingly, as the matter is sub judice, I do not propose to comment further.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Refugee Status

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the history to date in respect of residency and naturalisation entitlement in view of the fact that stamp 4 has been withdrawn in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8 who has lived in this country for more than 11 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25587/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned claimed asylum in the State on25 November 1998, had hisclaim examined by the Asylum Division of my Department but was refused refugee status. Following an appeal, the Refugee Appeals Tribunal recommended that heshould be recognised as a refugee.

Based on this recommendation, the person concerned was advised of the decision to issue him with a formal declaration of refugee status by letter dated 13 July 2001. This communication also advised the person concerned of the rights and entitlements accompanying refugee status in the State. The person concerned continues to hold the status of refugee in the State.

I have been advised that the applicant left the country on 7 September 2009 and did not return until 30 July 2011. During this time, his Garda National Immigration Bureau card expired on 31 July 2010. Furthermore, his 1951 UNHCR travel document expired on 10 August 2011. He has not presented to the Garda National Immigration Bureau to renew his registration since his return to the country.

The person in question has not made an application for Naturalisation. I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Deportation Orders

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the degree to which he might be prepared to review the decision to deport in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15, in view of the fact that they have family commitments here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25588/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned is a failed asylum applicant, having claimed asylum in the State in November, 2003. His asylum claim was investigated by the Offices of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, both of whom concluded that the person concerned did not meet the criteria for recognition as a refugee. Against this background, I am satisfied that the asylum claim of the person concerned was fairly and comprehensively examined before a decision to refuse it was arrived at. I am equally satisfied that the representations submitted by and on behalf of

the person concerned, for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), were given the fullest consideration under all the relevant headings before a decision was taken to make a Deportation Order in respect of him, on 2nd December, 2005. Overall, I am satisfied that the decision taken to deport the person concerned is justified.

The person concerned remains the subject of a Deportation Order. The effect of the Deportation Order is that the person concerned must leave the State and remain thereafter out of the State. As the person concerned has not yet left the State, the enforcement of the Deportation Order is now an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Asylum Applications

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made to date in the matter of determination of residency and citizenship entitlement in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25589/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my Reply to Parliamentary Question No. 85 of Thursday, 26th May, 2011 — as set out. The position is unchanged since then.

Arising from the refusal of her asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 29th September, 2008, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of her. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against her. In addition, she was notified of her entitlement to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

The person concerned submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome. In the event that the application for Subsidiary Protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before the file is passed to me for decision. Once a decision has been made, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

The Deputy should note that as the person concerned has not established a right of legal residency in the State, the issue of an application for citizenship does not arise at this time. I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Departmental Correspondence

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who did not receive correspondence indicated in the context of a reply to a recent parliamentary question and did not sign any such correspondence; if it might be possible to reissue the subject documents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25590/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Deputy's Question refers to a reply I gave to a recent Parliamentary Question in relation to the case of the person concerned. However, it is not clear what specific Parliamentary Question the Deputy is referring to. In the absence of specific information in this regard, I am unable to provide the Deputy with a substantive response to his current Question.

It is open to the Deputy to revert with the number and date of the earlier Parliamentary Question he is referring to and upon receipt of this information I will endeavour to provide the Deputy with a detailed response. I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Residency Permits

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a long-term residency visa can be issued in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25591/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that no application for Long Term Residency from the person referred to by the Deputy has been received. If the person concerned has been legally resident in the State for over five years on the basis of work permit/work authorisation/working visa conditions, he may apply to the Long Term Residency Unit of INIS for a five year residency extension.

I would remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual Immigration cases may be made direct to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Ministerial Staff

218. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every Cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26122/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In my capacity as Minster for Justice and Equality I have appointed Ms Jane Lehane and Mr Thomas Cooney as my Special Advisers. They are both paid at the Principal Officer Standard Scale (€80,051 — €98,424).

Defence Forces Personnel

219. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Defence the number of persons currently in

the Air Corps and Naval Service by rank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25367/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The following table shows the number of persons in the Air Corps and Naval Service by rank, as at 31 August 2011, the latest date for which figures are available. Overall numbers in the Permanent Defence Force, including numbers serving in the air corps and naval service, are subject to ongoing control and monitoring on a monthly basis to ensure compliance within the overall parameters and controls set by Government for the sector. Number of persons in the Air Corps and Naval Service by rank at 31 August 2011.

Rank	Air Corps	Naval Service
Major General	1	0
Brigadier General	1	1
Colonel	2	2
Lieutenant Colonel	13	11
Commandant	29	38
Captain	66	64
Lieutenant	35	39
Sergeant Major	5	5
Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant	4	5
Company Sergeant	39	58
Company Quartermaster Sergeant	11	14
Sergeant	124	193
Corporal	177	177
Privates	276	382
Cadets	3	16
Total	786	1,005

Ministerial Staff

220. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every Cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26116/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have not appointed any special advisors in my role as Minister for Defence. Similarly, no special advisors have been appointed by Mr. Paul Kehoe T.D. in his role as Minister of State at the Department of Defence.

Raw Milk Products

221. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the total number of illnesses and or deaths of persons conclusively linked to the consumption of raw milk since 2001; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25624/11]

228. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to Parliamentary Question No. 587 of 21 July 2011, if he will publish the evidence that was quoted in same as his Department having in its possession, that shows raw milk consump-

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tion is a danger to food safety and public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25617/11]

229. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the difference in the risk analysis between legally permitted foods manufactured from raw milk, specifically, soft cheese, butter or yoghurt in comparison to raw liquid milk; if he will provide documentation on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25618/11]

230. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will reconsider the question of production and sale of raw milk under a licence system; if he will consider working with stakeholders on a pilot system incorporating geographically dispersed producers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25619/11]

231. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide details of the numbers of illnesses and or deaths conclusively associated with the consumption of raw milk since 2001; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25620/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 228 to 231, inclusive, together.

My Department's dairy science and veterinary experts and the independent scientific committee of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland have strongly advised that there are serious health risks associated with drinking raw milk. Disease risks include TB, Brucellosis, E. coli O157, Campylobacter and Salmonella. There have been incidents of these in Ireland and other countries in recent years. Resulting illnesses can be serious and on occasion fatal.

The proposed ban on the sale of raw milk for direct human consumption is not new. Sale of raw cows milk was banned for many years (from 1997 till 2006) by my Department; and previously by most local authorities. The ban lapsed due to a change in EU legislation in 2006.

It is important to note in this context that the ban will not apply to making cheese using raw milk. The cheese making process takes time and this provides an opportunity to withdraw product from sale in the event of a problem arising with the source milk. The cheese making process also prevents growth of pathogens and in some cases encourages slow decline in numbers of some pathogens.

A number of artisan food producers are pasteurising raw whole milk and are licensed by my Department in this regard. These artisans are very successfully marketing liquid whole milk, ice cream, different flavoured yoghurts and artisan farmhouse cheeses. I am advised by the FSAI that meaningful differences in nutritional value between pasteurised and unpasteurised milk have not been demonstrated and these artisans clearly show that pasteurised whole milk can be used in the manufacture of safe and quality dairy products.

Regulation allowing sale of raw milk for direct human consumption, on a restricted basis, would be difficult and costly to implement and would still not eliminate the serious health risks.

There is no formal system for notifying disease outbreaks related to the consumption of raw milk. It is not possible therefore to provide exact numbers of illnesses or deaths related to consumption of raw milk. However, I have been advised by the FSAI of a number of cases in Ireland in recent years which have resulted in serious health problems.

The FSAI recommends therefore that the sale of unpasteurised milk from all farm animals which is intended for direct human consumption should be prohibited; and advises that the most effective way to protect public health is to ensure that such milk is pasteurised.

The prevalence of TB in herds in Ireland puts us in a different position to most other Member States in the EU where the disease has been eradicated. It is inappropriate that Ireland should adopt the same approach to the consumption of raw milk as countries that do not have the same difficulty with TB and therefore have no associated risk.

The ban will not apply to the consumption of raw milk which has not been placed on the market — e.g. a dairy farmer drinking milk from his/her own cows. Such a ban is not possible under the law and in any event would be unenforceable. However, it is recommended to avoid this practice for health reasons.

Ireland exports over €2bn worth of dairy products each year; and is the leading producer of infant formula with about 15% of the world market. Any food scare associated with raw Irish milk could have major implications for our dairy industry. The recent E. coli outbreak in Germany, resulting in 46 deaths, 782 cases of HUS (haemolytic uraemic syndrome, a serious kidney condition) and 3,128 known cases of VTEC, indicates the scale of possible risks associated with raw food.

In all the circumstances I am satisfied that a ban on the sale of raw milk for direct human consumption is justified.

Section 54 of the Health Act of 1947 has been identified as the appropriate primary legislation for the renewal of the ban and it is intended to bring forward a Statutory Instrument under that Act for signature by the Minister for Health. The latest indicative timeframe for the introduction of the S.I. is end 2011, which includes allowance for a 3-month EU notification period.

Farm Inspections

222. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to Parliamentary Question No. 21694 of 20 July 2011, the reason an inspector has not yet called to a person (details supplied) to clarify outstanding issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25353/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): An Inspector of my Department visited the farm of the person named on 6 September 2011 and conducted the necessary inspection, the results of which are currently being finalised. It is expected that the person named will shortly be formally notified, in writing, of the outcome of the inspection.

Inland Waterways

223. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding farmers removing gravel from rivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25374/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The matter raised does not fall within the remit of my Department.

Meat Exports

224. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food his plans to increase the amount of exports of Irish meat and meat produce to the BRIC countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25434/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department, together with Bord Bia and the Department of Foreign Affairs, continues to place the highest

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priority on ensuring and developing market access to markets worldwide for Irish food products including increasing our exports of meat and meat produce to the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India & China) countries.

Russia is currently our main market for beef exports outside of the EU and is a particularly important outlet for beef offals. Russia is also a significant market for Irish pigmeat exports as is China. My Department, together with Bord Bia and the Department of Foreign Affairs are actively trying to help Irish companies to develop new opportunities in these countries and I myself recently met with representatives of Chinese pigmeat industry who came on a visit to Ireland in order to develop trade links. We are also actively seeking to gain access to the Chinese market for Irish beef and we are expecting a visit from a high level group from China in the near future which should help us to advance this objective. I also intend to travel to China myself on a trade mission later this year.

Brazil is one of our main competitors on overseas markets and there are currently no opportunities to export Irish meat or meat produce to Brazil. Likewise with India, there are technical barriers which effectively prevent the exportation of Irish meat to that country. The securing of access to these markets in the future will be an issue for the WTO negotiations.

Grant Payments

225. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork has not yet received the balancing payment under their REP scheme 4 application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25461/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in June 2008 and has received full payment for the first two years of their contract. In addition, 75% of the second year payment issued for the amount of €6,221.18 on 7th April 2011. An area based discrepancy was subsequently discovered following a cross check between the Single Payment Scheme application for 2010 from the person named and the REPS agri-environmental plan. This discrepancy has resulted in the imposition of a penalty and a delay in processing the final 25% payment under REPS 4 for 2010.

My Department is currently making arrangements to process outstanding payments to farmers of the 25% due in respect of 2010 in the cases where penalties were incurred and I expect payments to commence in these cases in October.

226. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payment for REP scheme 4 will issue to a person (details supplied). [25572/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in May 2008 and has received full payment for the first two years of their contract.

In addition, 75% of the third year payment issued for the amount of €5,361.00 on 3rd March 2011. An area based discrepancy was subsequently discovered following a cross check between the Single Payment Scheme application for 2010 from the person named and the REPS agri-environmental plan. This discrepancy has resulted in the imposition of a penalty and a delay in processing the final 25% payment under REPS 4 for 2010.

My Department is currently making arrangements to process outstanding payments to farmers of the 25% due in respect of 2010 in the cases where penalties were incurred and I expect payments to commence in these cases in October.

Herd Intermingling

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 783 and 784 of 14 September 2011, if clarification can be given as to whether the land in question was occupied by animals from different herds, bearing different herd numbers originating in different locations at the same time during the period 1989 to date in 2011; if specific portions of the land were dedicated for occupancy by any such animals; if it is permissible for animals from different herds to inter-mingle in such situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25592/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the rules governing the allocation of herdnumbers, a herd must be maintained separately without inter-mixing of stock from other herds. There is no evidence available to my Department in respect of the period October 2007 to-date that any portion of the land in question was occupied by animals from different herds. The files relating to the period prior to October 2007 have been archived and it is not possible for me provide any information in respect of that period in the time available. I will write to the Deputy when this information becomes available.

Questions Nos. 228 to 231, inclusive, answered with Question No. 221.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme

232. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will confirm that a person (details supplied) is included in REP scheme 4. [25622/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application for entry into the Agri-Environment Options Scheme 2011 (rather than REPS 4) was received from the person named by my Department on 16th May 2011. All applications received are currently being checked and successful applicants will be notified in writing of approvals before the end of this month. Unsuccessful applicants will similarly be notified and will be offered the opportunity to appeal any decision.

Ministerial Staff

233. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every Cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26112/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): In response to the Deputy's question, I have detailed below the information requested in respect of the two Special Advisors employed in my Department since 9 March 2011.

Name	Salary p.a.
Fergal Leamy Employed: 9/3/2011-9/9/2011	€130,000
Aine Kilroy	€80,051

Preschool Services

234. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the continuation of the preschool year (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [25357/11]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was introduced in January 2010 and provides a free preschool year to all eligible children in the year before commencing primary school. Almost every preschool service in the State is participating in the programme ensuring that it is available to children in all areas, and 63,000 children, or 94% of the eligible age cohort, availed of the programme in the 2010/11 preschool year. In 2011, the ECCE programme is expected to cost €166 million.

Services participating in the ECCE programme are required to provide age-appropriate activities and programmes to children within the Síolta framework for early learning. They are also encouraged to implement the Aistear curriculum which has been developed for children aged from birth to 6 years. The ECCE programme is universally available, free of charge, to all preschool children and I believe this is critical to ensuring equality of access and school readiness.

While I understand that some parents may have concerns about the future provision of the ECCE programme, given the current economic difficulties, I would like to assure you of the Government's ongoing commitment to early childhood care and education.

Preschool services currently participating in the programme have a legal contractual agreement up to the end of August 2012 and planning is already underway for the September 2012/August 2014 period of the programme. Having said this, you will appreciate that all programme funding is considered in the context of the annual estimates and budgetary process and it is not possible to give a specific guarantee in advance of these discussions.

Clearly resources are scarce. However, my objective is to incrementally develop the ECCE programme over the term of this Government. A key element of this will be to support implementation of the Workforce Development Plan, by the Early Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills, which is co-located within my Department. The Workforce Development Plan provides a framework for ensuring that personnel working in the ECCE sector have access to accredited training, enabling quality and standards in ECCE services to be continuously improved.

From May of this year, my Department has been working with two major voluntary child care organisations to provide subsidised on-line accredited training courses to staff working within ECCE services. I hope to continue this initiative in 2012, by supporting training modules which have a specific focus on educating children with special needs and children with literacy and numeracy difficulties. In addition, I will be collaborating closely with my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, in implementing the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. Early intervention is crucial and the Strategy provides for a range of actions to support preschool children and their families, to be undertaken by my Department.

The current arrangements within the Health Service Executive (HSE) for the provision of support services to preschool children with special needs is being examined by the Office of Disability and Mental Health in the Department of Health, and my Department will continue to liaise with that Office. In addition, I have asked officials in my Department to examine various options for additional provision or improvements to the ECCE programme, in particular for marginalised groups, including children with special needs.

Ministerial Staff

235. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every Cabinet member and Minister of State

since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if she will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26114/11]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of my Department is set out below:

Name	Whole time equivalent	Annual Salary
Marion Mannion	1.0	€80,051
Jennifer Carroll Mac Neill	0.5	€40,025
William Lavelle	0.5	€40,025

All of the above appointments were made in line with the guidelines on Ministerial Appointments issued by the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform.

Proposed Legislation

236. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health if the new legislation proposed by him to allow pharmacists to administer the flu vaccine also makes provision for pharmaceutical assistants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25356/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): New regulations are being drafted at present which will place beyond doubt the right of registered pharmacists to administer seasonal influenza vaccination to patients.

Prior to the Pharmacy Act 2007 pharmaceutical assistants were permitted to act on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the pharmacist's temporary absence. This legacy entitlement has been continued in the Pharmacy Act 2007 for those persons who were pharmaceutical assistants before commencement of the 2007 Act. In contrast to registered pharmacists, pharmaceutical assistants are not subject to statutory fitness to practice requirements and disciplinary sanctions, and therefore cannot be held personally accountable or restricted from practise for professional misconduct or poor professional performance. In addition, the Act places no legal obligation on pharmaceutical assistants to undertake continuing professional development to ensure that they continue to be competent and fit to be registered. Other health professionals involved in the administration of vaccines to patients, i.e. medical practitioners and nurses, are subject to fitness to practice and disciplinary sanction in the event of professional misconduct.

As a consequence, it is not proposed that the regulations relating to the administration of seasonal flu vaccine will extend to pharmaceutical assistants.

Hospital Services

237. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding services at a hospital (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25376/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services

238. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the reason home help hours have been cut in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; if same will be reinstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25383/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

239. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if home help hours will be increased for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25384/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Cancer Screening Programme

240. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Health if persons over 69 years are being excluded from the rectal screening programme; if so, the medical grounds for this exclusion; and if this is related to budget constraints. [25400/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Preparatory work on a national colorectal cancer screening programme commenced in early 2010 and the programme is expected to be introduced in mid-2012. In the initial phase, screening will be offered to men and women aged between 60 and 69 years; there are estimated to be just over 400,000 people in this age group. It is intended to extend the programme to include all those aged 55 to 74, as resources and capacity allow.

Based on expected uptake rates and incidence, it is estimated that around 6,000 colonoscopies will take place each year within the screening programme in this initial phase, and preparations are focused on building up resources and capacity to meet this additional need. The phased implementation of the programme will allow for capacity to be built up gradually before it is extended to the full 55-74 year age group.

Colorectal cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer among both men and women in Ireland. On average 2,270 new cases are diagnosed each year and around 900 people die of the disease. In Ireland, incidence is highest in those aged 55-74. Within that cohort, half of all cancers are diagnosed in men and women in the 60 to 69 age group and according to advice from the National Cancer Screening Service, it is this group that will benefit most, from a population perspective, in the initial phase.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

241. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason the condition Myasthenia Gravis is not currently recognised by the Health Service Executive in relation to the long-term illness scheme; his plans to address this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25401/11]

244. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will add myasthenia gravis to the long-term illness scheme; if not, the reason for same; if so, when; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25430/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 244 together.

Myasthenia Gravis is not one of the conditions prescribed by the Minister for Health for the purposes of the Long Term Illness Scheme. There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the scheme. However, the terms of the scheme will be reviewed in the context of

the Government's proposals for Universal Health Insurance and free GP care at the point of delivery.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme no individual or family pays more than €120 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

In addition, people who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the Health Service Executive can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. Those who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of general practice consultations.

242. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he intends to include inflammatory bowel disease and its variants on the long-term illness scheme; if not, the reason for same; if so, when; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25425/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Long Term Illness Scheme. However, the terms of the scheme will be reviewed in the context of the Government's proposals for Universal Health Insurance and free GP care at the point of delivery.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme no individual or family pays more than €120 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

In addition, people who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the Health Service Executive can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. Those who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of general practice consultations.

Medical Cards

243. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card was withdrawn from a person (details supplied); if he will consider a review of the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25429/11]

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.

Question No. 244 answered with Question No. 241.

General Medical Services Scheme

245. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will change the requirement on general medical service card holders to seek a new prescription each month in order that it can be brought into line with the less stringent requirement on long term illness card holders, who are only required to submit themselves to a clinical review once every six months, thus minimising general practitioners workloads and reducing the burden on patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25436/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): A repeat prescription facility was introduced to the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme in March 1991.

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Under this facility, prescriptions for certain drugs and medicines may be renewed on a three monthly, rather than a monthly, basis. Patients who are stabilized on their medication do not need to visit their General Practitioner (GP) every month in order to have their prescriptions renewed. The facility to change prescriptions from monthly to quarterly for suitable patients provides efficiencies for GPs and patients, by reducing unnecessary consultations and journeys to the surgery and pharmacy.

Hospital Accommodation

246. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health when he will complete his review of the proposed bed closures at Mount Carmel Hospital, Clonakilty, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25438/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): During a visit to the region in April 2011, my colleague, Minister Reilly, took the opportunity to visit Clonakilty Community Hospital, to inform himself on the range of services provided at the hospital, the rationale for the reduction in long stay beds at the hospital and the potential impact of this decision. Minister Reilly also met with the Clonakilty Hospital Action Group in May 2011.

The Department is currently considering the future of HSE Provision of Residential Care for Older People. This review will consider the position of all HSE residential facilities for Older People in terms of meeting the National Standards and Regulations. It will also consider local demographic pressures and the extent of existing public and private provision, with a view to developing an overall strategy on how the Executive should continue to provide this service in view of current budgetary and other pressures. I should make it clear, however, that, providing quality and safe care for our long stay residents will have to remain at the heart of these considerations.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

247. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm if all recent appointments of junior hospital doctors who in the course of their work will have substantial unsupervised access to children and or vulnerable adults received vetting from the Garda Central Vetting Unit and if this is not the case to outline the provisions to allow persons to be without Garda vetting in view of the fact that arrangements are in place with the Health Service Executive to expedite the processing of very urgent applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25440/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The appointment, including arrangements for obtaining Garda Vetting, of junior hospital doctors in the Health Service Executive is a matter for the Executive. My officials have asked the HSE for the information sought by the Deputy and I have instructed them to forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

All new employees of the HSE, at any grade, and not just those dealing with vulnerable clients, are subject to Garda Vetting. The Health Service Executive policy on Garda Vetting sets out its procedures. Paragraph 3.2 provides, where a candidate is urgently required to take up duty and the relevant forms have not been returned from the Garda Central Vetting Unit, that the candidate may be allowed to take up duty once the relevant Business Manager certifies in writing that the candidate will not have unsupervised access to children or vulnerable adults. This is on the basis that the candidate has signed relevant Declarations and sufficient reference/background checks have been received.

My officials will forward to the Deputy a copy of the Health Service Executive policy on Garda Vetting.

Health Services

248. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of agencies that applied for the expression of interest for the enhanced home support and personal care services for older persons; the number that subsequently tendered for the provision of these services; his plans to approve further agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25444/11]

249. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the involvement families have in the selection of the agencies that provide enhanced homecare packages; in the event that families are not satisfied with the care given, the options that are available to them to change the agency; his plans to make further changes to the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25445/11]

251. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of those who tendered to provide care for the enhanced and homecare package that have been approved since the tendering process commenced in April; the number by location; if he is satisfied the system is working adequately; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25463/11]

An Ceann Comhairle: I propose to take Questions Nos. 248, 249 and 251 together.

As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

250. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25460/11]

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.

Question No. 251 answered with Question No. 248.

Departmental Reports

252. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will furnish the titles and dates of publication of all reports produced by the expert body on fluorides and health, both those made available to the public and not; if he will also make available the names and details, qualifications and so on, of those who are current members of the expert body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25464/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): The Irish Expert Body on Fluorides and Health has published three reports:

- Action Plan (2005)
- Progress Report 2004-2008 (2009)
- Code of Practice on the Fluoridation of Drinking Water (2007)

[Deputy Róisín Shortall.]

In May 2008, the Expert Body commissioned an audit of all water treatment plants nationally to assess compliance with the Code of Practice on the Fluoridation of Drinking Water (2007). The audit report will be published shortly.

The published reports and a range of information, including details of its membership and position statements, are available on its website, *www.fluoridesandhealth.ie.*

Departmental Expenditure

253. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health the amount, not percentages, of the health budget allocated to mental health in the years 1990, 2000, 2010 and in 2011; and the amount of the mental health budget allocated and spent in delivering mental health services in primary care, excluding services provided by psychiatric secondary services in the community [25471/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The following table provides details from the Revised Book of Estimates for the Public Services of non-capital expenditure on mental health for the years requested:

Year	Mental Health Non-Capital Expenditure
	€m
1990	0.210
2000	0.434
2010	0.977
2011	0.920

Approximately 60% of the Primary Care Teams in operation have mental health personnel either on the team or have direct linkages with mental health services and up to 90% of mental health problems are dealt with at primary care level. However the HSE is not currently able to extrapolate the cost of providing these mental health services from within the overall primary care budget, as budgets are not tracked by care group and, because for example, a wide range of services provided to patients by GPs in their surgeries, are not reported to the HSE.

Eating Disorders

254. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he has had any discussions with the health insurance providers on the inclusion of public and private services to treat eating disorders within health insurance packages; if he has asked the health insurance providers to review their policies in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25488/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have not had any discussions with health insurance providers in relation to this matter. However, each private health insurance provider in the Irish market has the right to determine how much capacity in any particular area is purchased by them to deliver the services required by their customers. Health insurance contracts must provide a certain minimum level of cover prescribed in the relevant regulations. Beyond that, it is not the role of the Minister for Health to direct private health insurers as to which services or facilities they cover. This is a commercial decision for the insurers themselves.

The national policy document for mental health 'A Vision for Change' sets out the framework for the development of mental health services generally. HSE services for people with eating disorders are embedded in the Community Mental Health Teams and with Primary Care.

The HSE has developed a Mental Health in Primary Care accredited training programme for primary care practitioners with Dublin City University. The skills included in this programme are designed to enhance the capacity of primary care to recognise, assess and treat a range of mental illnesses within the primary care setting. As individuals with Eating Disorders frequently present to the primary care practitioner with complications of their condition, early intervention at this level greatly improves outcomes.

Community based Adult Mental Health Services receive referrals from Primary Care and provide assessment and treatment to individuals with eating disorders. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Teams provide a similar role for their cohort of referrals.

Where the individual's psychiatric or medical needs are more acute, in-patient admission is offered within the local psychiatric services or acute medical care where necessary.

Following the recommendation of the Consultant Psychiatrist, the HSE can and has worked with service providers in the independent sector to provide specialised care, on an in-patient and/or an out-patient basis. In a limited number of cases, referrals to specialised eating disorder services in Dublin or the UK can be clinically recommended and supported in appropriate circumstances subject of course to the necessary resources being available.

Mental Health Services

255. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if the male and female acute units at St. Ita's Hospital, Portrane, County Dublin, were closed on 31 August 2011; if so, the alternative care arrangements put in place for patients of the acute units; if he will also provide a full update of the planned replacement unit at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; when the building will commence; its planned opening date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25489/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The acute male and female units at St Ita's Hospital, Portrane closed by 18 September, 2011, in line with the condition attached to the registration of St Ita's, by the Mental Health Commission. Patients have transferred temporarily to St Vincent's Hospital, Fairview and Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown, or other more appropriate services depending on their individual care plans. In patient admissions for the North Dublin Mental Health Service have also temporarily transferred to St Vincent's, and Connolly Hospitals.

The HSE proposes to refurbish the existing admissions unit at St. Ita's and work is scheduled to be completed by 31 January, 2012. When complete, and subject to the approval of the Mental Health Commission, the temporary units will revert to St. Ita's Hospital, pending completion of a new purpose built acute in-patient psychiatric facility for North Dublin. This new unit is currently being developed at Beaumont Hospital and planning permission has been approved, contracts are signed and construction work is due to commence shortly. This new unit is expected to be fitted out and ready for occupancy in early 2013.

Consultancy Contracts

256. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a detailed breakdown of all retired Health Service Executive personnel on full pensions who are now in consultancy contracts with the HSE or his Department in all sections and in each county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25494/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Pat Harvey (former CEO of the North Western Health Board) serves as Chair of the Health Sector Implementation Body on the Public Service Agreement and his fee in this regard is paid by my Department.

[Deputy James Reilly.]

The Health Service Executive has advised that, as at 25 July 2011, there were five retired HSE personnel on pensions who were in consultancy contracts as follows:

HSE Area	Number of staff	Service Provided
HSE West	1	Strategic and Operational expertise in the development and operation of a nursing home in Sligo
	1	Chairing of Dental Enquiry Review for Mayo PCCC
	1	Review of case of a child in care. This review was commissioned by HSE West and the National Child Care Office (Co. Galway)
HSE Dublin North East	2	(i) Engineer with Specialist Engineering Knowledge in Louth Meath Hospital Group. (ii) Expert advice in Accreditation/INAB Procedures (Laboratory) for Louth Meath Hospital Group
Total	5	

Mental Health Services

257. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding psychiatric services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25496/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Under the Employment Control Framework for the Health Sector, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has discretion to make exceptions to the general moratorium on recruitment in the public service in order to maintain essential services. Such exceptions must of necessity be kept to a minimum so that the targeted employment reductions and consequential payroll savings are met. The Framework also provides that certain posts are exempted from the moratorium including a number of psychiatric nurse vacancies (up to 100 posts can be created where they are required to support the implementation of 'A Vision for Change'). In July 2011, the HSE made the decision to pause recruitment due to its serious budgetary situation. Notwithstanding this pause, exceptions are still being made to address critical service risk.

Services for People with Disabilities

258. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a motorised wheelchair will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny and if he will expedite the matter. [25558/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

259. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an early date for an assessment will be arranged in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [25561/11]

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.

Medical Cards

260. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an application now under appeal for a medical card will be expedited and approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [25564/11]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

261. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Health if fair deal payment will issue to a family on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Longford. [25570/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

262. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the present level of services at the minor injuries unit in Monaghan General Hospital will be retained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25575/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE is planning to change the opening time of the Minor Injuries Unit at Monaghan to an 8 hour 5 day service and expects that this will take effect from October. This change is to be viewed as a temporary measure and will be reviewed in 2012.

The change in the opening times of the Monaghan MIU is the direct result of the current budgetary and financial position facing the health system. The HSE has reviewed other possible options to save money and/or increased revenue, but has concluded that they would not generate sufficient savings in the short term.

I have emphasised to the HSE the need to ensure that the impact of such changes to patients is minimised and that all changes are fully communicated. I understand that arrangements, which include staff redeployments and a communications plan, are being put in place by the HSE in relation to this change.

263. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to date on the proposal to establish a medical assessment unit at Monaghan General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25576/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A representative group has been established by the HSE to undertake the clinical and financial feasibility study on such a development. Terms of reference have been agreed and I understand that the group is due to commence its work in October. The timeframe for completion of the project is 6 weeks from commencement.

National Lottery Funding

264. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for National Lottery funding in respect of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25577/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department has received an application for funding from the 2011 National Lottery allocation from the organisation in question. This is one of a large number currently being assessed by my Department. The Deputy will be informed of the outcome of the application as soon as a decision has been made.

Care of the Elderly

265. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health his plans regarding a nursing home (details supplied) in County Galway; if he will retain the nursing home as a community residential facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25579/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

266. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a procedure will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25594/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when provision can be made for an MRI scan without charge in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare, a medical card holder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25595/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I understand the clinic referred to in this question is a private clinic. I have no role in relation to personal appointments to such a clinic. Should the patient referred to wish to have an appointment within the public health system she should contact her GP.

Medical Cards

268. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health if statistics are available regarding patients, diagnosed with cancer, who applied for medical cards or GP cards in the past 12 months; if so, if he will provide details of the number whose applications have been refused on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25615/11]

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.

Food Poisoning Related Illnesses

269. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide data on the total number of food poisoning related illnesses reported here since 2001; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25623/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The list of notifiable diseases in Ireland was amended in 2004, the data pre and post that date will differ with respect to which notifiable diseases could be included under "food poisoning".

The table below shows the annual number since 2001 of cases of selected notifiable diseases that are most likely to be transmitted by food. The Deputy will notice that since 2004, specific

notifiable categories are included in place of the general term of "food poisoning" as used in the previous three years.

Notifiable disease	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Bacillus cereus food-borne infection or intoxication				1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Foodborne Botulism				0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Campylobacter infection				1685	1796	1811	1879	1736	1807	1661
Clostridium perfringens (type A) food-borne disease				5	1	0	0	1	1	0
Food Poisoning (bacterial other than salmonella)	1219	1394	1623	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Listeriosis				11	12	7	21	13	10	10
Salmonellosis	428	369	449	415	345	422	456	449	333	356
Shigellosis	28	26	36	56	36	53	43	75	70	60
Staphylococcal food poisoning				3	6	0	0	1	1	0
Trichinosis				0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Yersiniosis				6	3	1	7	3	3	3
Total	1675	1789	2108	2182	2199	2295	2408	2279	2226	2090

Mortality Statistics

270. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Health the number of deaths from smoking related illnesses since 2001; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25625/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The disaggregation of mortality data for the purpose of deriving the number of smoking-related deaths may not always exclude deaths that are not tobacco-related. Bearing this in mind, it is currently estimated that approximately 5,200 deaths per annum are attributable to smoking.

Ministerial Staff

271. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26120/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Since 09 March 2011, I have appointed Mr Mark Costigan as Press Adviser and Mr Sean Faughnan as Special Adviser, both on the Principal Officer (Standard) salary level which ranges from €80,051 to €92,672. Ms Maev-Ann Wren has been appointed as Special Adviser to Minister of State Shortall, on a half time basis and at 50% of the Principal Officer (Standard) scale.

[Deputy James Reilly.]

A Government Order will shortly be sought regarding Mr Faughnan's and Ms Wren's appointments.

Sports Capital Programme

272. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the allocation of funds in respect of a project (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25351/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The club in question has received funding of almost €300,000 under the Sports Capital Programme since 2000. All grant allocations have been drawn down in full by the club.

It will be open to the club to apply for funding under any new round of the Sports Capital Programme. No decision has yet been made about the timing of further rounds of the Programme.

Departmental Schemes

273. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure that additional funds are allocated for 2012 local improvement scheme work (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25388/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Local Improvements Scheme provides funding for non-public roads and the maintenance and improvement of these roads is in the first instance a matter for the relevant landowner. The Government is undertaking a review of expenditure for the period 2012 to 2016. When my Department's provision for these years is known and the internal allocations within my Department are decided, I will then be in a position to decide what schemes will continue to receive support from the limited funds available to me.

Road Safety

274. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review the practice of having a standard deduction of around 17.5% from the actual recorded breath is to alcohol reading of a motorist who has been breathalysed for driving over the limit; his views on whether this is out of sync with best international road safety practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25492/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The deduction from actual recorded breath readings is a matter for the Medical Bureau of Road Safety (MBRS). I have referred the Question to the MBRS for direct response to the Deputy.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Departmental Expenditure

275. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent on Metro North to date; the stage spending, planning and works on the Metro North project are at in view of the current expenditure review that is due this month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25493/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The total expenditure made available by my Department under the current procurement process for the Metro North project is €150.99 million. This expenditure is broken down as follows:

	€million
Development, design and procurement	63.51
Railway Order & Statutory Approval	15.92
Advance Enabling Works	45.89
Land and property acquisition	25.67
Total	150.99

The Railway Order for Metro North became enforceable in December 2010 and is valid for 10 years. As part of the Order, An Bord Pleanala (ABP) decided that the depot for Metro North should be re-located and an application for a separate Order for the depot was submitted to ABP in May 2011. A decision by ABP is anticipated by the end of this year.

As a general point with regard to monies spent on the planning of transport projects, the last government decided to spend huge amounts of money planning road and rail projects without being sure that the money would be in place to construct those projects. I have changed this policy and have instructed both the National Roads Authority, the National Transport Authority and Railway Procurement Agency to rein in spending on planning and preparatory works. I do not believe that it is appropriate to continue to spend millions of euros planning projects when we do not know if we can fund them.

With regard to the Capital Spending Review, Metro North is being procured as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) and two bidders have been shortlisted. However a significant Exchequer contribution is also required. The successful awarding of a major PPP contract involving private funding is challenging at any time but is particularly challenging in current circumstances where Ireland has been the subject of intervention by the IMF/EU. Until financial credibility is restored the international debt funding market will be reluctant to lend funds to finance projects in Ireland, the repayment of which is ultimately dependant on the state.

The level of funding available for public transport investment from 2012 to 2016 will be dependent on the outcome of the capital expenditure review. A major consideration for transport investment over the next five years will be the need to prioritise funding to protect investment made to date and to maintain high safety standards.

The outcome of the review should be available in the next few weeks. Until the review is completed it would be premature for me to comment further in relation to individual projects.

Coast Guard Service

276. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a planned building project (details supplied) in County Cork under his aegis. [25535/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Office of Public Works placed a contract for the construction of a new Coast Guard station in Crosshaven, Co. Cork on 3rd August 2011. The contractor is now on site and the project is expected to be completed in 12 months.

Ministerial Staff

277. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the names and salaries of every special adviser appointed by every cabinet member and Minister of State since the new Government came to office on 9 March 2011; and if he will give the same details for any other advisers appointed. [26124/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The names of the two special advisors in my Department are Mr. Nick Miller and Mr. Brian Murphy.

The remuneration of Mr. Brian Murphy is still being finalised and Mr. Miller's salary is €80,051 per annum.