

DÁIL ÉIREANN

*Dé Céadaoin, 12 Deireadh Fómhair 2011.
Wednesday, 12 October 2011.*

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

Paidir.

Prayer.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: The interdepartmental mortgage arrears group report is being published this morning by the Minister for Finance. I understand the report recommends an independent mortgage advice service to guide mortgage holders and, in addition, it also suggests the early introduction of new non-judicial arrangements and describes this as vital.

Yesterday in the House the Taoiseach indicated he would welcome constructive proposals on the issue. In the interests of offering practical urgent assistance to people in mortgage arrears and debt, Deputy Michael McGrath is publishing a Bill today, the debt settlement and mortgage resolution office Bill 2011. The Bill is ready to go and is based on the Law Reform Commission report of last December but extends its recommendations to include mortgages as well. It is a constructive proposal and has the merit of giving immediate implementation to a number of the recommendations that may or may not be contained in the report.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: It is a pity Fianna Fáil did not do it last year.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: We got no co-operation from the Labour Party. Deputy Stagg would not support us.

Deputy Michael McGrath: We go not no support from the Labour party.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Yesterday in the House the Taoiseach said he would welcome constructive proposals on an issue that is not a laughing matter or a matter for barracking but an issue that is of real concern to hundreds of thousands of people who are very worried about their mortgage arrears and household debt and who cannot see a future ahead of them.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Fianna Fáil created the situation.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is also a significant drag on the economy, particularly the domestic economy. Deputy Michael McGrath's Bill would legislate for an independent debt settlement office, a statutory, objective office that would provide a mechanism to resolve household debt issues. I ask the Taoiseach to give the Bill serious consideration. It will be published today and taken next week in the House and I ask the Taoiseach to accept and move forward with its recommendations.

The Taoiseach: I commend Deputy Michael McGrath on his initiative in tabling a Bill on behalf of the party about a matter that is very serious. The Minister for Finance will publish the report on the mortgage situation today at 11 a.m. Yesterday I said that what I would like to see happen here is that every Member of the House would have the opportunity to make a contribution both on the mortgage report and, in this case, on the Deputy's Bill and also on any other initiatives, ideas or proposals that people have that are not currently in practice or contained in this report. I do not know if the Deputy has a leaked version of the report or if Deputy McGrath's Bill includes all of the measures that will be in it when it is published at 11 o'clock.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It was on "Morning Ireland" this morning.

Deputy Michael McGrath: It was all over the *Sunday Independent*.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Deputy Ciarán Lynch practically wrote it.

The Taoiseach: We are serious about the best possible response for those who cannot meet their mortgage repayments, with 800,000 mortgages in place and 100,000 having difficulties, and it is in respect of those that the commission looked at the question and made recommendations. I want to hear the response of all Deputies on the best solution. The Minister for Finance is giving everyone the opportunity to have their views expressed and will take all of those, including existing structures, the contents of the report and any other new ideas, and draw them all together and give a Government response. The Deputy will publish his Bill today but I do not know what is in it. There will be a two day debate next week on the mortgage report and taking that in conjunction with the Deputy's Bill, we can have a proper discussion of the situation facing so many people. I cannot second guess what might be in Deputy McGrath's Bill, no more than people can second guess the implications of the contents of the recommendations in the report. I assure the Deputy that the Government is taking this seriously and will act quickly. In the interests of everyone who sees constituents with such problems we should act swiftly and responsibly. I would like to hear the views of Members of all parties about this.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Deputy Michael McGrath's Bill is based on the report of the Law Reform Commission of last December, which the Government has had for the last six to seven months. He has used that to craft a detailed Bill but has extended it to cover mortgages.

The Taoiseach asked if someone had access to a leaked report. With respect, the Keane report should be in every Member's in-box this morning before the formal launch at 11 o'clock.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Micheál Martin: Why did the Taoiseach mention leaked then? There should not be any issue with leaking, it should have been given to every Member in advance of its publication.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Deputy Martin is a quare man to talk about publishing reports.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Two specific commitments were given in the programme for Government. It was stated that the negative equity generation would be assisted through enhanced mortgage interest relief.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Negative equity created by Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Micheál Martin: That was to happen in July but it did not happen. The Taoiseach also committed that interest increases arising from ECB interest rates would be absorbed by

the banks, not mortgage holders. This has not happened and there have been two ECB increases. How quickly will the Government act on this report and how quickly will legislation be introduced as a result of this report to give relief to the 800,000 people the Taoiseach mentioned? We have the legislation ready and it is based on substantive work undertaken. In addition to what was done already, I would urge the Taoiseach not to be political about this like all his cheerleaders. He should be sensible and practical and enact this Bill.

Deputy Simon Harris: The negative equity generation was created by Fianna Fáil

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: If Fianna Fáil had not ruined the country there would be no need for this.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we cool down for a minute?

Deputy Simon Harris: We would not need legislation if Fianna Fáil had not caused the problem.

Deputy Micheál Martin: How many leaders does Fine Gael have?

Deputy Jerry Buttiner: At least we have a leader over here.

Deputy Robert Troy: Fine Gael did not want him a couple of years ago.

Deputy Tom Hayes: Donie Cassidy tells Deputy Troy everything.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: It is no laughing matter.

The Taoiseach: The Keane report came from a decision of the Economic Management Council, EMC, that a commission should look at the question of mortgage over-indebtedness here.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I have no difficulty with that.

The Taoiseach: That is why it has been produced. I am not suggesting that leaked documents are being made available.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach did suggest that.

The Taoiseach: I am merely suggesting to the Deputy that it is pure coincidence that Deputy McGrath produced and published his Bill today.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is the Taoiseach saying he wrote the Bill last night?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Martin asked when the Government will act. Following the EMC recommendation, the Government commissioned the Keane report, which will be published in 20 minutes. The House will have a two-day debate on the report next week. I have already said the Minister for Finance will draw down all the recommendations and any other initiatives put forward by Members, and will act swiftly on them. The banks will have to play their part in this. The taxpayers have forked out to recapitalise these banks. In many cases people over-borrowed from banks and lending institutions and were over-lent to. Because of the economic decline and the impact of the recession, 100,000 mortgage holders now have difficulties. Some cannot pay, some have real struggles to pay and there are those who do not want to pay.

[The Taoiseach.]

I want everyone to have an opportunity to say his or her piece on this matter and to put forward constructive suggestions that are in the interest of alleviating the problem for those who are suffering and are a cause of concern at present. It may be that Deputy McGrath's Bill, based on the Law Reform Commission's recommendations has something to offer. We will put that into the mix also. By next week we will have had a conclusive and comprehensive debate on this matter, allowing the Minister for Finance to respond swiftly and efficiently in the interest of those who are caught in this bind.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I ask the Taoiseach about media reports carried this morning which suggest the Government is planning a €1 billion cut in social welfare budget.

Deputy Joan Burton: Not at all.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I remind the Taoiseach that he made commitments not to introduce welfare cuts and I ask him to reiterate that commitment to the House.

I also ask the Taoiseach to address the issue of proposed cuts to rent supplement, which keeps a roof over 95,000 households. The Taoiseach knows as well as I do that the local authority housing stock is woefully inadequate and that any cut to rent supplement would cause huge difficulty and suffering to people who are also struggling.

The Government is keen to talk about social welfare fraud. What is meant is irregular payments, including departmental error. The Taoiseach might look at the extravagant salaries paid to special advisers to the Government which are sanctioned by the Government in breach of its own caps. One special adviser to the Minister for Social Protection is in receipt of a salary of €127,796. That payment was sanctioned by the Government and is in breach of the caps advanced by the Government. This is the same Government that is cooking up plans to slash the welfare budget.

The Taoiseach: The question is based on a prediction which is based on newspaper reports that the Government intends to cut €1 billion in the social protection budget. Sinn Féin are very good at predictions. They predicted that we would not be able to reverse the minimum wage decrease brought in by the previous Government and that the interest rate reduction would not be applied to Ireland.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: We predicted that the Taoiseach would not answer the question.

The Taoiseach: They made numerous predictions that were completely off the mark. Deputy McDonald speaks of irregularities. She would know something about that, I suppose.

The Government is involved in a comprehensive spending review of all Departments, and I mean all Departments. Every Minister will have to answer to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform before the Estimates are prepared for 2012 and the picture produced for the following three years.

The Deputy is, of course, aware that the country is in an economic bind, with constraints upon us. Those who are drawing social welfare payments legitimately do not want to see others in the system scamming it off. This causes considerable anger and resentment. I am sure the Deputy, in her next question, will agree that she does not want to see any social welfare fraud, in so far as it is preventable. That money comes from other taxpayers. People who are in the social protection payment area do not want to see that kind of carry-on when they are trying to get back to work.

The Deputy's comments are conjecture and are based on media reports. Everyone knows that every Department is going through this review. In due course, the Government will make known its decision. The decisions arising from the public expenditure review will be published before the budget. The Deputy will have an opportunity to give her views and her ideas as to how this can be moved forward.

I meet people all the time who are on social welfare lists. The job of Government is to balance the requirement of getting our deficit to 8.6% of GDP next year while providing a measure of confidence, hope and initiative for the indigenous economy and getting as many people as possible off the live register and back into the world of work.

The Deputy's comment, based on a newspaper report, is speculation. The Government will announce its own decisions when it has decided what it wants to do.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: In the absence of the published comprehensive spending review and of the Taoiseach giving any affirmation to the House that he will not cut welfare, we are left with conjecture. I judge from the tone of his remarks that he is equivocating. He is not prepared to repeat his pre-election promise to protect welfare payments.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: The sky might fall on Grafton Street.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: No one wishes to see any social welfare payment scammed, as the Taoiseach puts it. Equally, no one in this House, and certainly no Member of the Government parties, should cast aspersions on welfare recipients by constantly using the term "fraud" when the correct term is "irregular payments", whether the Taoiseach is comfortable with that or not.

Will the comprehensive spending review take account of the Minister's special adviser earning almost €130,000 per year? The rule book was thrown out the window in respect of that appointment. There is largesse for the Minister's adviser and cuts to very meagre social welfare payments. No one in this House is living on the basic social welfare payment of €187 per week. That is reality, from which the Taoiseach seems sadly divorced.

The Taoiseach: Deputy McDonald is a member of the Committee of Public Accounts, which has looked at irregular social welfare payments and fraud. I know the Deputy contributed to that debate. The Government is concerned about the level of unemployment in the country. We have been left with a mess, which means we must make a range of decisions

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Can the Taoiseach tell us about the Minister's adviser? That person is in gainful employment.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Will the Deputy listen?

The Taoiseach: We will balance our requirements so we meet the conditions that have been signed on for and which we have renegotiated. That we are going to do. At the same time, the only way to deal with the level of unemployment we face is by a range of initiatives and confidence boosters to get people off the live register and into the world of work. The savings ratio in the country is exceptionally high because people do not have the confidence, which we would like them to have, to start spending. Before responding to the Deputy's specific question in regard to the individual mentioned, I must point out that the cost of advisers to the current Government is €800,000 less than it was in respect of the previous Government.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Is that all?

Deputy Micheál Martin: That is not true.

The Taoiseach: The person whom Deputy MacDonald singled out for Sinn Féin treatment left the private sector on a salary of more than €200,000——

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The Taoiseach still has not answered the question.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The Deputy should listen to the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: ——to take up a temporary contract as adviser to the Minister for Social Protection, which position carries a salary of €129,000.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Was that not by choice?

The Taoiseach: That is a drop in salary, which the Deputy could figure out if she subtracted €129,000 from €200,000.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: A nice one.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Our hearts are bleeding, Taoiseach.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: What a pay cut.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Is Deputy O'Dea still fighting for the Independents?

Deputy Shane Ross: The House will be aware of the imminent departure of the Secretary General at the Department of Finance, as announced last week. Is the Taoiseach prepared to explain to the House the circumstances in which this happened? Is this part of the policy which he enunciated prior to forming a Government to shake up the Civil Service and to make civil servants accountable for their actions, in particular those who were in charge or in pivotal positions at the time of the bank guarantee, the collapse of the economy and EU-IMF deal? The question that must be asked is did Mr. Cardiff jump or was he pushed. Was his departure a decision of Government or did he make it himself?

The departure of the Secretary General of the Department of Finance presents the Government with a great opportunity to make an inspired appointment. This vacancy is possibly the most important that will occur in the Civil Service during the lifetime of this Government.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: Is Deputy Ross applying for the job?

Deputy Shane Ross: Can the Taoiseach give us an assurance that the process in this regard will be transparent and will include external interviewers rather than people from the Department of Finance? Can he also give us an assurance that people from the private sector will be considered for this job?

Deputy Paul Kehoe: Is Deputy Ross interested?

Deputy Shane Ross: I would be based on the current pay scale, bonuses and pension provisions.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: We are running out of time.

Deputy Shane Ross: I would like to hear the Taoiseach's response to the following constructive suggestion. Will the Taoiseach, following the selection and appointment process, consider allowing the appointee to appear in public session before an Oireachtas committee, presum-

ably, the Committee of Public Accounts — Mr. Cardiff will have to appear before MEPs when he goes to Europe — for questioning in regard to his or her qualifications so that people can be reassured that the Civil Service, in particular the Department of Finance which has not covered itself in glory recently, is accepting outsiders for appointment?

An Ceann Comhairle: Before calling on the Taoiseach to reply, I remind Deputies to be careful about mentioning individuals who are not here to defend themselves.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Hear, hear.

Deputy Niall Collins: It is a little late now.

An Ceann Comhairle: Remarks cast here could affect people's reputation. I am not suggesting that has been done here this morning. I ask people to be conscious of the fact that people are entitled to their reputation.

The Taoiseach: The Government has nominated Mr. Kevin Cardiff, Secretary General at the Department of Finance for appointment to the European Court of Auditors. Mr. Cardiff will attend at hearings of the European Parliament and will, presumably, following his success there take up his job in March 2012. Mr. Eoin O'Shea's term of office will expire in February 2012.

Mr. Cardiff carries with him a long career of distinguished public service here and the credentials to do a first class job in respect of the European Court of Auditors. I can assure Deputy Ross that the process followed in respect of appointment of Mr. Cardiff's successor will be an open TLAC process, internationally advertised with the interview board comprising of an external chairman with business experience and will be fully open and accountable in respect of the person to be appointed as Mr. Cardiff's successor. This is as Members would wish. This will be nothing like the recommendation made in 2004 by Deputy Ross following the appointment of Mr. Burrows to the Bank of Ireland, at which time the Deputy, in criticism of that appointment, suggested that Seán Fitzpatrick of Anglo Irish Bank would be far too dynamic for the role.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: Deputy Ross should do himself a favour and stop while he is ahead.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Ross who has one minute to reply.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Does the Taoiseach have any more pages on that?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Ross, please.

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Members to settle down.

Deputy Shane Ross: Perhaps the Taoiseach will reply to my question.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Hear, hear.

Deputy Shane Ross: Will the Taoiseach respond positively to the suggestion that the nominee should appear before a public session meeting of an Oireachtas committee to be challenged on his or her qualifications for this particular job so that the public can be reassured as to his or her qualifications and that people appointed to key positions in the Civil Service are not appointed behind closed doors?

The Taoiseach: The Committee of Public Accounts is not an appointing body for persons such as this. The Deputy will be aware that Secretaries General are the Accounting Officers for Departments and appear on a regular basis before Oireachtas committees. When the TLAC process has been concluded and a person has been nominated, I, and I am sure the person who will be successful, will have no difficulty with him or her appearing before a committee to discuss his or her credentials for this particular job.

I believe that this is, as the Deputy correctly points out, an important position for the future. The person appointed will be heading up the Department of Finance at a time when Ireland is at a crossroads in terms of economic challenges, which requires that he or she be of outstanding quality. It is hoped that following completion of the process, including international advertising and structured interviews, the person appointed will have no difficulty attending at any committee to discuss the work of the Department of Finance and his or her credentials for the job, which will be necessary for the country anyway.

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 17, statements on the pre-European Council meeting of 23 October; and No. 18, Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) (No. 2) Bill 2011 — Order for Report, Report and Final Stages. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later than 9 p.m. tonight and shall
11 o'clock adjourn on the conclusion of Private Members' business, which shall be No. 29, motion re community and voluntary sector (resumed), which shall be taken at 7.30 p.m. or on the conclusion of No. 18, whichever is the later, and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 90 minutes; the proceedings in relation to No. 17 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 65 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply: the statement of the Taoiseach and of the main spokespersons for Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group, who shall be called upon in that order and who may share time, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case and a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply, which shall not exceed five minutes; and the Report and Final Stages of No. 18 shall be taken today and the proceedings thereon shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 7.30 p.m. by one question which shall be put from the Chair and which shall in relation to amendments include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Finance.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal that the Dáil shall later than 9 p.m. tonight agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 17 agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 18 agreed to? Agreed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am disturbed by trends emanating from the Government regarding social welfare recipients, from the comments on lifestyle choice by the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Burton to today's comments by the Taoiseach on scams. It must be reiterated that the majority of social welfare recipients are not scammers and are in a difficult position because of the economic crisis. Headlines about €1 billion cuts in the welfare budget and so on are not good enough.

Will the Taoiseach give a clear timetable for the publication of the comprehensive spending review? We are reading about it every day in the newspapers. The House deserves an opportunity to debate this independent review. When is the social welfare Bill expected to be published?

The Taoiseach: As normal, the social welfare Bill will be published after the budget. The process concerning the comprehensive spending review will come before the Government next

week and then the dates will be laid out. I can give the Deputy an exact timetable next week if he raises it again.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Will we have the review in advance of the budget?

The Taoiseach: Yes.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What about the presidential election?

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: That will be before the budget.

Deputy Jerry Buttimer: The election that Deputy Martin's party does not care about.

Deputy Robert Troy: Neither does Fine Gael judging by its choice of candidate.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The presidential election will be before the budget.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I meant how the publication of the review will fit in with the presidential election.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Thank you, gentlemen.

I understand we will have sight of the Keane report some time around now.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Yes.

The Taoiseach: Yes, it is on its way.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: Deputy McDonald cannot wait to get her hands on it.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The 100,000 people, both in families and individually, in mortgage distress need to know the Taoiseach will do much more than simply issue guidelines for the banks. I hope this report's recommendations will be ambitious and creative.

Earlier, the Taoiseach said two days would be assigned for a debate on this report next week. How much time will be given over those two days?

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: As much time as Deputy McDonald wants.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Will the Minister for Finance be available throughout all the debate and participate in a question-and-answer session?

Deputy Emmet Stagg: How much time would Deputy McDonald like?

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Two days would be a start.

The Taoiseach: The economic management council established the Keane group to examine the issue of mortgage distress and repayment difficulties. It was requested that its report would contain recommendations as distinct from theories as to how to deal with these issues. The Deputy can read the report in a few minutes.

As I already said, this report will not be the repository of all wisdom on this issue. The debate will take place next Tuesday and Thursday and the House will sit late on both occasions. We will accede to further requests for more time. I want every Member to have his or her say about cases involving constituents because each circumstance will be different. Every Member

[The Taoiseach.]

is aware of the distress and the anxiety for those caught in this bind. We want to ensure the debate is as comprehensive and as inclusive as possible.

I have asked the Chief Whip to be as flúirseach with his time as is possible. We will have a comprehensive debate on Tuesday and, again, on Thursday with the House sitting late on both occasions. Taking into account Deputy Michael McGrath's Debt Settlement and Mortgage Resolution Office Bill, every Member will have his or her say on this matter.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Will the Minister for Finance be present for the debate?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Several Ministers will be present.

The Taoiseach: Yes, the Minister will be here.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: When will the Construction Contracts Bill 2010 be introduced in the House? I am disappointed it was not introduced by the previous Government. It is never more needed than it is now, however. Today, south Tipperary lost a company, Jer Ryan Electrical Contractors Limited, with the loss of 142 jobs in Clonmel.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no need for the Deputy to expand on his question about legislation.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: This company employed 300 people during the height of the boom. It was concerned about the passage of the Bill. When will it be brought before the House?

The Taoiseach: The Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Deputy Brian Hayes, is working on this Bill. It is hoped to take Second Stage during this session.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Those under 25 years of age in receipt of the maximum rate of jobseeker's allowance for their age are being refused medical cards because it is not the same as the maximum rate for those who are over 25. There is a need to amend the ministerial order to remove the anomaly contained in the 2009 medical card-GP visit card national assessment guidelines. Will the Taoiseach direct the Minister for Health to amend those guidelines and remove that anomaly?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy cannot raise that on the Order of Business.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Yes, I can because the Order of Business covers ministerial orders.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is secondary legislation.

Deputy Denis Naughten: A ministerial order is within the terms of the Order of Business.

Regarding No. 82 on the legislative programme, the health (miscellaneous provisions) Bill, over 50 patients are on hospital trolleys in Galway University Hospital awaiting admission. At the same time, inpatients at the hospital from County Roscommon will not be transferred back for treatment to Roscommon County Hospital at which there are vacant beds.

An Ceann Comhairle: Okay, Deputy.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Will the Taoiseach ask the Minister for Health to intervene directly to transfer those Roscommon patients back to Roscommon hospital and, by doing so, alleviate the overcrowding in Galway?

An Ceann Comhairle: What legislation are we talking about?

The Taoiseach: There is no legislation in this regard.

An Ceann Comhairle: Then we cannot deal with it.

The Taoiseach: I will ask the Minister for Health to respond to the Deputy's query about this matter.

On yesterday's Order of Business, Deputy Naughten raised a question about an announcement on slurry spreading which is of considerable importance to the agricultural sector at this time. The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government will make an announcement on this matter today.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: We hope it will be positive.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is this a case of looking after Deputy Naughten?

Deputy Brendan Howlin: It is about looking after everyone.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: When will the legislation for a temporary credit guarantee scheme be introduced?

The Taoiseach: I expect it will be introduced in this session.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Having briefly read the Keane report, many people will be disappointed with the lack of urgency in its recommendations. Many of them leave it to the banks to deal with those matters between lenders and the Central Bank. Some will go some length in addressing concerns such as split mortgages, however.

The Minister for Finance has already given a commitment that the necessary legislation to give effect to the Keane report's recommendations will be introduced before December. Is the Government committed to introduce the necessary legislation before the Christmas recess, so some of those 90,000 mortgage holders can benefit from some of the report's recommendations?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Pearse Doherty must be the Speedy Gonzales of the House if he can read the Keane report in seven minutes. I suggest he read it again.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I have had a copy of the report longer than that.

The Taoiseach: The report contains a series of recommendations on which the Government intends to act quickly. There will be a two-day debate on the report next week, during which we can hear the Deputy's views. Whatever necessary legislation arising from the Government's decisions in this regard will be enacted as quickly as possible.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: The Minister made a commitment that it would be before Christmas, however.

The Taoiseach: The legislation will be implemented as quickly as possible.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: We look forward to Deputy Doherty's suggestions.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We already have a Bill ready in this area.

The Taoiseach: Those affected by mortgage distress cannot afford to wait. We want to act as comprehensively, as quickly, as responsibly and as effectively as we can. That is why we do not have a moment to lose.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: It is urgent yet the Government has already had eight months to deal with the issue and still has done nothing.

Deputy Noel Grealish: Is the Taoiseach aware of this morning’s announcement by Aer Arann that it will withdraw its services from Galway Airport, resulting in the loss of 180 jobs? Will the Taoiseach ask the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to intervene in this matter?

An Ceann Comhairle: I suggest that the Deputy apply for a Topical Issue debate on this matter.

Deputy Noel Grealish: These job losses will cost the Exchequer approximately €20 million in social welfare payments.

An Ceann Comhairle: This is not on the Order of Business.

Deputy Noel Grealish: The State granted the airport approximately €2 million, yet the Minister has refused to fund the airport from the end of this year.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will need to find another way to raise this matter. It is not on the Order of Business.

Deputy Noel Grealish: Will the Taoiseach ask the Minister to intervene in some other way to save the jobs of 180 people at Galway Airport? Will the Taoiseach intervene?

An Ceann Comhairle: The matter is out of order. I call Deputy Bannon. If Deputy Grealish applies to have it raised as a Topical Issue, I will consider it.

Deputy James Bannon: Noise pollution is an increasing threat to rural and urban peace. When will the noise nuisance Bill be before the House? I welcome the Taoiseach’s statement that there will be a commonsensical approach to farming in terms of the spreading of slurry.

The Taoiseach: There is a lot of noise around these days.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: There is no noise in Mullingar Barracks now.

The Taoiseach: I do not have a date for the noise pollution Bill but I hope Deputy Bannon will be pleased when he hears the announcement regarding slurry by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Deputy Michael McGrath: So we will need to legislate for another matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Durkan.

A Deputy: Noise pollution.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Who said that?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I am sorry for keeping the Deputies opposite in expectation. On promised legislation, what progress is there on the heads of the judicial council Bill?

The previous Administration promised, faithfully for many years, the mental capacity Bill, which it deemed important. The Bill will incorporate into law the Law Reform Commission’s report on vulnerable adults and the law.

The previous Government considered another matter for a long time and achieved nothing, namely, the housing Bill to provide for the rationalisation of housing agencies and to strengthen the regulatory framework for social housing, an aspect the previous Administration forgot about. Have the heads of these Bills been discussed and, if they are to be progressed, when will that be?

The Taoiseach: The heads of the judicial council Bill were approved in July 2010. It is expected to be published early next year. The heads of the mental capacity Bill were approved in September 2008 and it is expected to be published early next year also. The heads of the housing Bill have not yet been approved.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I thank the Taoiseach.

Debt Settlement and Mortgage Resolution Office Bill 2011: First Stage

Deputy Michael McGrath: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to reform the law on personal insolvency; to provide for a non-judicial debt settlement arrangement process concerning personal debt; to provide for a non-judicial mortgage resolution order concerning mortgages over family homes; to provide for a debt relief order for personal debt where a debt settlement arrangement or bankruptcy is not appropriate; to reform the law on the enforcement of personal debt, including individual enforcement mechanisms; to provide for the establishment of a debt enforcement office, which includes a debt settlement and mortgage resolution office; to provide for the licensing and regulation of personal insolvency trustees and debt collection undertakings; and to provide for related matters.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill being opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): No.

Question put and agreed to.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

EU Summits: Statements

The Taoiseach: I am pleased to have this opportunity to brief the House ahead of the next meeting of the European Council in Brussels. As the House is aware, this was to have taken place next Monday. However, on Monday President Van Rompuy announced that he would convene the meeting of the European Council and that of the Heads of State or Government of the euro area a week later than originally planned. This is to allow time to finalise a comprehensive strategy for the euro area. In a number of key areas, the extra time will mean that we have a more complete picture available to us when we meet to take the necessary decisions.

The report of the troika mission to Greece will assist us in deciding what further elements may be necessary to address the situation there. This will have a read across to what may be necessary in terms of bank recapitalisations and how we should achieve them. ECOFIN will

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have time to have a further meeting, which has now been convened by the Polish Presidency, and the euro group will also meet.

When President Van Rompuy contacted me on Monday to alert me to the change, I told him that I did not have any difficulty with his suggestion if it was his assessment, as President, that further time was needed to get things right. In such a case, we should take that time and use it to best effect. I also said to him that it was important that all member states be involved in the discussions as we prepare for the European Council.

As the House will be aware, meetings of the European Council have, in recent times, been dominated by efforts to address the immediate challenges that we face. By necessity, our work has been driven by crisis resolution and the needs of the immediate situation. As a result, we are now better equipped than in the past to deal with problems when they arise. I am sure the House will agree, however, that it is essential that leaders take the time to take a longer term perspective to ensure that Europe has the right policies in place to generate growth and job creation and to deliver greater economic stability in the future.

Next week's meeting will be important in that regard. When we meet, we will discuss economic policy, including growth enhancing measures, economic governance and the external aspects of our economic policies. We will also prepare the Union position for the meeting of the G20, which will take place in Cannes in early November. Finally, we will finalise an EU position ahead of the Durban conference on climate change.

It is, of course, entirely appropriate that economic issues should be the focus of our meeting. The challenges facing Europe are being felt around the world, including in the US and emerging economies. While it is vitally important that member states, including Ireland, continue their efforts towards consolidation and structural reform, we must also intensify our efforts to secure sustainable and job creating growth. This requires determined joint action. I expect that our discussion will work towards identification of a number of priority areas for fast-tracked action. I hope that these will be as specific as possible and that we will identify those measures most likely to have a significant impact on growth and jobs. The Commission in particular has been giving careful study to this matter.

The Single Market, as Deputies are aware, is one of the Union's greatest strengths. As an exporting country, it is of immense value to Ireland. Despite decades of work, however, it remains incomplete. In April of this year, the Commission brought forward what it called a Single Market Act designed to fill in some of those gaps. In doing so, it identified twelve levers that it believed could have real impact on our current situation. These include measures that will have real resonance here, such as access to funding for small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, and creating the right regulatory environment to allow business to thrive. They also include measures that can help exporters looking to develop markets in other member states, including measures to boost consumer protection in a way that helps to build confidence in cross-border transactions, modernising the framework for public procurement, and plans for the digital single market, including the facilitation of e-commerce and cross-border use of online services, which are growing in importance on a daily basis. All efforts should now be made to drive this work forward with real purpose.

Energy and innovation are also areas with enormous potential to contribute to growth. In February of this year, the European Council offered suggestions on how work should be advanced. Although I do not expect a discussion of substance at next week's meeting, I do expect that we will agree to revisit our commitment to take stock of progress in December and March of next year, respectively. In this regard, a priority should be given to putting in place an EU-wide venture capital scheme.

This work must be accompanied by a genuine commitment by all member states to creating stable and sustainable economies across the Union. As the House is only too well aware, Ireland's economic choices are in large part determined by the strictures of our programme with the EU and IMF. However, through the Europe 2020 process and under stability and growth rules, non-programme member states have also submitted national reform programmes and have had these scrutinised under a process of peer review. These plans were collectively assessed by the European Council in June, when we endorsed country-specific recommendations proposed by the Commission.

There is an urgent need for action at European Union level, but we should not lose sight of the fact that much decision making in the area remains at national level. Our economies are highly interdependent and our fates hang closely together. To restore international confidence in Europe's economy, we need to ensure that commitments entered into at EU level are acted on swiftly and comprehensively by each member state. It is, therefore, vitally important that the recommendations made in June are now fully reflected in national decisions on budgetary policy and structural reforms.

There are other interesting possibilities on the table for the meeting of the European Council, including a temporary increase in co-financing rates for EU funds, accompanied by a prioritisation of projects focusing on growth, competitiveness and employment. It is also proposed that the European Investment Bank be asked to examine the possibilities for further contributing to boosting investment in Europe, including through optimal use of Structural Funds in countries facing particular difficulties, the leveraging of EU budget resources, and the facilitation of access to finance for small and medium enterprises. I welcome these proposals and hope there will be agreement to take them forward as a matter of urgency.

The European Council will also consider the external aspects of the Union's economic policy. Europe needs to ensure it is in a position to promote and defend its interests in the wider world. There are things we can do to contribute to our growth potential, both in the short and longer terms. As an exporting country, Ireland has a very strong interest in this debate.

While concluding the Doha round must remain a priority, a realistic assessment must conclude that agreement is not on the immediate horizon. Therefore, we need to attach renewed priority to bilateral and regional agreements, particularly with strategic partners and those whose markets are expanding at significant pace. This work should focus on lowering trade barriers, opening market access and ensuring the appropriate environment for investment and the protection of intellectual property. Public procurement is also an area of key importance.

As the House will be aware, after protracted discussions difficulties between the Council and the Parliament on the technical details of the six legislative measures to strengthen economic governance in the Union have recently been resolved, and the legislation is now being finalised. I welcome this. It will allow a much higher degree of surveillance and co-ordination, contributing towards sustainable public finances and greater economic stability throughout the Union.

In addition, we are moving towards completion of the first Europe 2020 cycle. We have adopted the euro plus pact, to which the European Council will return in December. Taken together, this is a significant and tangible policy response to the crisis Europe is facing. Unfortunately, it is too often dismissed or underestimated by those who may not appreciate the extent of what has been achieved, or the speed with which it has been put in place. Of course, there is always scope for more to be done.

We need to see the changes to the EFSF, introducing greater flexibility, take effect. As the House is aware, Ireland completed its process of adoption in good time prior to the end of last month. Ratification and entry into force of what has been agreed will put important new possibilities in place, including enabling the EFSF to intervene in secondary markets, to under-

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take precautionary lending, and to contribute to bank recapitalisation through loans to governments in non-programme countries.

In July, the Heads of State or Government of the euro area countries asked President Van Rompuy, in consultation with the Presidents of the Commission and the euro group, to come forward with specific proposals on how to improve working methods and enhance management in the euro area. Following bilateral consultation with all interested parties, I expect President Van Rompuy to report to the meeting of euro area heads following the meeting of the European Council.

Although President Van Rompuy has yet to make his proposals known, I expect they will focus on what can and should be done in the short term and what is for more medium to long term action. I also expect he will seek to balance the need for tighter co-ordination and discipline among countries in the euro area with greater commitment to mutual support. It will take fine judgment on his part to come up with balanced and acceptable proposals.

As the House will be aware, Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy, following their meeting at the weekend, have also stated they will come forward with proposals, some of which may require treaty change. Again, we do not yet know what they have in mind and I await their suggestions with interest. However, I will make two observations. Any suggested treaty change, even if only intended to enhance the operation of the euro area, is a matter for the 27 EU member states, not just the 17 that are currently part of the euro area. We are all a part of the Union, and I would not like to see a situation evolve where there are two categories of membership. The second is that, as I have already made very clear, while I am open to giving any suggestions serious and detailed study, treaty change is not something that should be approached lightly.

We have taken a great many steps to ensure greater co-ordination in the euro area, some of which are only now beginning to take effect. We need to give them a chance to work, to take stock, and to see what further steps need to be taken. We need to explore what is already possible under the existing treaties, pushing right up to their limits if need be. The question we must ask ourselves is what measures need to be put in place. Only then should we consider how to do so.

There are a number of other items on the agenda for next week's meeting of the European Council which are worth mentioning here. The Council will discuss preparations for the G20 meeting in Cannes on 3 and 4 November, and will confirm policy positions for the Union. The Union wants to see the G20, which is meeting under its French Presidency, send a strong growth-oriented message aimed at restoring global economic confidence. We are looking to see an outcome that is concrete, with targeted specific actions, to respond to the serious challenge of the global economic downturn. Of course, in recent months Europe has been in the news in this regard. It is also an occasion to place the European response to the related problems of sovereign debt and difficulties in the banking sector in a global context. This alone marks out the meeting as an important occasion in the calendar ahead.

In addition to placing growth at the top of the agenda, the Union seeks continuing reform of the international monetary system; a strengthening of regulation of markets and financial services; measures to counter the excessive volatility of commodity prices; and to deliver global recovery and sustainable growth. The European Council will also prepare the Union's position ahead of the conference on climate change that will take place in Durban from 28 November to 9 December.

The House will also be interested to know that tomorrow morning, ahead of the meeting of the European Council, I will meet the President of the Commission, Mr. Barroso, in Brussels.

I will convey to him our support in two vitally important areas. The first of these is that we need the community method, which is the traditional way of doing business in the Union, to remain our touchstone for the future. It gives the Commission a key role as the guarantor of the treaties and the initiator of policy proposals. This is not an academic point. It is a matter of real importance for a small member state like Ireland. We do not want to see a Union where the largest member states dominate the agenda by dint of their size or economic importance. That is not a balanced or durable arrangement. As I pointed out, when the Heads of Government meet we sit as equals and not as leaders of countries with larger or smaller populations. We need a Union where the equality of all member states is fully respected, in reality as well as on paper.

The second message will be my strong and determined support for the Commission's efforts to focus energies on jobs and growth. In this, the Commission's agenda is Ireland's agenda, and I will commit our personnel to working hand-in-hand with his.

I hope the EFSF issue will be sorted out in Slovakia later this week as reports indicate.

The issues I have outlined are important ones for us as we approach the important meetings that will take place in Brussels, and I look forward to briefing the House again and having a discussion after I return when the meeting concludes, as is now the norm.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This delayed summit marks the last chance for Europe's leaders to tackle the enormous and growing crisis which is facing the eurozone. Europe needs them to agree a dramatic package of supports and the revision of failed policies. The alternative is damage to the economic and political fabric of the Union which may take decades to undo. An unforgivable amount of time has been wasted by leaders seeking easy ways out or clever ways of appeasing national sentiment. The process of halting and half-hearted actions has managed to escalate the crisis. It is more than two months since it became clear that existing deals are inadequate and that the Greek situation could engulf Europe. The contagion which forced Ireland and Portugal out of the bond market has not been contained and confidence has not been recovered. Larger and more systemically important economies are now on the edge with rising concern about bank capitalisation adding an extra layer of instability.

There has been a succession of regular and emergency summits which issued claims to have drawn a line under the crisis. Each summit has been followed by the crisis becoming worse. Today, even Jean-Claude Trichet, the high priest of orthodox financial policy, is warning that Europe is on the edge of disaster. There is one overwhelming message before this summit, which is to act decisively or be prepared for the consequences. There is no room remaining for delay.

As the crisis has escalated so too have the measures required to defeat it. Europe needs the summit to deliver on a series of specific agreements. It must allow Greece to reduce its sovereign debts to a sustainable level; provide for the recapitalisation of banks in order to take account of these and other debt write-downs; ensure that the funds available are large enough to tackle all current and potential needs; commit to the reform of Euro governance which tackles the actual causes of the crisis; and end the destructive limiting of negotiations to a couple of the larger countries and begin to involve all member states.

The failure of Europe's leaders to have an inclusive and active dialogue is at the heart of the escalation of the crisis in recent months. Detailed discussions between France and Germany has always been a valuable part of achieving progress on big European issues. These two countries have often had conflicting policies but bilateral negotiations are essential in helping the functioning of the institutions of the Union. However, this co-operation has never been so exclusive of other countries and never before has it included issues which affect so many coun-

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tries in such a profound way. No major reform of the Union has ever been achieved in this manner. It should be realised that European ideals cannot be reinforced by acting against them.

Since the beginning of the year there has been intensive contact between different countries in an effort to find a way forward. In February, the key principles were agreed, these being, debt sustainability, sound bank capitalisation, larger and more flexible funding and improved co-ordination. For reasons which are still unclear, the March 11 summit confirmed these principles but delayed their implementation. There were many fine statements about a resolve to act decisively but in reality there was little or no decisive action. The Ministers for Finance signally failed to finalise arrangements while market pressures were allowed to grow again.

The Heads and State and Government, who should have been holding an intensive series of meetings, stepped back and had few direct contacts. The Taoiseach's policy of non-intervention is more inexplicable today than ever. Seven months since taking up office, he has still not met a eurozone leader away from the margins of a major summit. In April he announced that he would lead a major diplomatic offensive but none has followed. In advance of the July summit he neither met nor telephoned any other leader. Having told the Dáil that he had not tabled proposals for the summit, he emerged from it claiming to have skilfully delivered an interest rate cut four times the level of what his Government had been asking for. Once again, spin rather than substance was the priority. The attempt to claim credit for actions taken has trumped the more difficult work of trying to shape events. The last time the Taoiseach had more than a snatched conversation with his good friend, Chancellor Merkel, was when he flew to Berlin for an electoral photo opportunity. Given that he has abandoned most of his policies from that time, the Chancellor is clearly in need of an update.

As the issues have become more serious, the leaders of Europe appear to be spending less time directly engaging with each other. Franco-German co-operation is welcome but it alone will solve nothing. The failure to consult others in a meaningful way makes it more difficult for governments in countries such as Slovakia and Finland to persuade parliaments and citizens to show solidarity with other countries. The Prime Minister of Slovakia has been left to sell a deal to Parliament in the face of a perception that this deal is being imposed on Slovakia. Given that there is no sense of the country having been involved properly in discussions, even pro-European Union parties feel free to attack it.

The Taoiseach's meeting with President Barroso is no substitute for an effort by him to promote Ireland's policies directly to other Heads of State and Government. Given that President Barroso has not been at either Franco-German summit, he is in no position to negotiate about its outcome. The Taoiseach should use this summit to insist on a return to the *communitaire* approach among leaders. If they do not get back to working together there can be no successful outcome.

The first item for agreement at the summit must be the substantial restructuring of Greek debt. The scale and pace of the budgetary adjustment being implemented by the Greek Government is enormous. There have been problems but yesterday's agreement with the EU and IMF confirms that Greece is moving forward with necessary adjustments. Greece's particular difficulties are being made significantly tougher because of the constraints of eurozone membership. The lack of the options of devaluation or unilateral restructuring puts a major limit on its ability to come out of the crisis. The attitude that everything is the fault of the Greeks shows an ignorance of the facts. Europe is Greece's problem just as Greece is Europe's problem. Helping Greece is a proper recognition of the duties of a currency union which freely admitted Greece as a member.

The contagion argument is bogus if restructuring is done at the same time as providing a credible firewall for others. The markets have traded for some time on the assumption of a partial default. A large section of the bondholders made purchases at rates which had default priced in. On a more fundamental level, the market can see when a debt is unsustainable. Denying the inevitable merely increases its likely impact.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Denying the inevitable like Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It will be a bad outcome if the summit finishes without a comprehensive and generous plan for Greek debt.

The summit must also provide a mechanism for recapitalising many more banks in recognition of both the Greek position and the fact that reserves need to be higher on an ongoing basis. German, French, Italian and Spanish banks are under pressure, as well as those in smaller economies. This reinforces the idea that financial regulation is a trans-European issue and not one which can be brushed aside as a problem for the periphery. It is a mark of this Government's abandonment of its pre-election policies that "Labour's Way" and "Not a Red Cent" were followed by the complete adoption of the restructuring proposals being prepared by its predecessor. Indeed, it has even gone so far as to try to claim to have developed these proposals. This is merely another irrelevant political game but what is highly relevant is that the recapitalisation policy is showing the potential to work and is helping to restore confidence, albeit slowly.

As the Government knows but chooses to ignore, agreement to burn many bondholders was sought last year but this was rejected by the key funders. Unilateral action was not and is not an option. The argument we were faced with last November was the risk of contagion which could be a European equivalent of the collapse of Lehman Brothers. The collapse of Lehman's happened at a time when there was no planning for recapitalisation and no decent information about the exposures of different banks. If Greek sovereign debt is restructured and if banks have reserves which meet rigorous stress tests then this contagion fear is no longer valid. The Taoiseach must insist at the summit that the proposal to restructure Irish bank debt should now be agreed.

For the bank and sovereign bailouts to restore confidence, they must be backed up by a dramatically larger fund. Half measures have not worked. Only when markets know there is sufficient funding available to support larger countries will they feel more secure in lending to them. If this requires the leaders to have a direct conflict with the ECB about leveraging already agreed funding, then so be it.

These measures relating to Greek debt, recapitalisation and adequate funding are what is required to deal with the crisis in hand. They will address the lack of confidence and will provide certainty that the members of the eurozone have taken actions which are proportionate to the crisis in hand.

It appears the summit will also be presented with proposals concerning the reform of governance within the eurozone to include not only increased co-ordination but also a substantial increase in central fiscal powers. This has nothing to do with tackling the crisis at hand and threatens to distract the Union, wasting time in interminable and possibly futile discussions. On top of this, many of the proposals do nothing to address the core weaknesses of the currency union which have been exposed over the last three years. They owe more to a pre-crisis agenda than one which has critically engaged with the evidence of what has gone wrong.

This crisis is not one which would have been prevented by greater co-ordination of fiscal policies. Throughout the decade before the recession, the European Council, Commission and Central Bank produced report after report about the fundamental strengths of the Irish econ-

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omy and regularly praised our fiscal policy. In 2007, a detailed research report on Ireland by the OECD predicted medium-term growth of 5% per annum. Increased co-ordination will be based on the same expertise; it is no panacea.

Those who care to look back can see that it was Germany and France in 2004 who led the way in breaking agreed deficit limits and who brushed aside criticisms of their actions. The idea that this is a crisis caused by a wild periphery which ignored the advice of the restrained centre is superficial nonsense. The Stability and Growth Pact has comprehensively failed and an agenda which is based mainly on ways of strengthening its enforcement will also fail. For example, there has been no consideration of the absurd provision that the punishment for a country getting into budget trouble should be to make those troubles worse through fines. The example of the currency union of the United States is instructive, in that the Federal Government has never had some of the controlling powers being proposed for the eurozone.

One glaring omission from the debate has been the need for a radical reform of the working of the ECB. It is a young institution which is as arrogant as it is powerful. It has made an enormous number of bad policy decisions over the past few years. It has followed the most inflexible and orthodox policies of any major central bank, inflicting substantial pressures on countries and citizens in the process. If one wants to see a bank out of touch with reality all one needs to do is to read a speech given to the London School of Economics by Jean-Claude Trichet in June. At length, he praised the ECB's work in the past decade, admitting no error whatsoever in any policy area. He bizarrely talked about achieving a "precision landing" for European inflation and he justified being the last central bank in the world to keep raising interest rates after the recession had started. He followed this with a defence of raising them again this year, just as the recession took another turn for the worse. Four months later he is warning the leaders of Europe that the financial system is on the edge of a precipice.

The ECB's mandate must change. Employment levels must be included in addition to inflation. In changes which do not necessarily require treaty amendments, the ECB needs to be given increased powers to oversee national financial regulation. A hawkish approach to bank capitalisation and risk management is far more relevant to addressing the causes of the current crisis than a hawkish approach to inflation.

The debate about reforms should first start with a proper consideration of the many factors which led to today's crisis. Simply saying, "Let's have a fiscal union" is not a policy and is certainly not an answer. There is much which can be done within the existing treaties, in particular on financial regulation. There are also significant administrative changes which would help, including a greater diversity of advice and oversight from within the institutions. Any attempt to rush structural decisions will take a long-term issue and use it make to the short-term crisis worse. Let us deal with the issues in hand and not complicate them.

The silence of the Government on most of these issues has been striking. There has been no detailed statement of the Government's policy. Are we supporting Greek debt restructuring? Are we demanding that bank bondholders be burnt? What institutional changes are we supporting? Have we tabled any policies for discussion? The Taoiseach and the Tánaiste have delivered a few comments on the side of media events, but there has been little else. I note today's contribution was strongly nuanced to try to move the Taoiseach away somewhat from those comments, but as yet we have not heard any substantive statement on the issues Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy have put on the table following their summit.

The Taoiseach: We do not know what issues are on the table.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Equally, the Taoiseach and Tánaiste have not initiated a round of contacts with eurozone colleagues. One meeting with the Commission President is not an adequate preparation for such an important Council summit. This summit may well be Europe's last chance. There is a desperate need for decisive action and real leadership. It has been missing for most of this year. The crisis has been allowed to become an emergency. Time has now run out and this summit meeting has in its hands the future of the euro and the hope of many millions throughout the Union.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I wish to share time with Deputy Brian Stanley.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is agreed.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: There is a financial crisis in Europe, one that is fast becoming a political farce. The spectacle of yet another Franco-German summit in recent days sends a clear message to the world about the current status of the European Union as a so-called partnership of equal sovereign states. Ireland's citizens have been forced to accept punishing austerity budget after budget over recent years. Along with the citizens of Greece and Portugal, we have been forced to bail out the banking system in the core, powerful European countries and have this labelled something else to the rest of the world.

Our elected political leaders are reduced to playing the bold child who must sit on the stairs until their disappointed parents are satisfied that they have learned their lesson. That is the level of influence this Government now has on EU policy. We were once in a lead role, but were reduced to the chorus line. It would now appear that we walked off the stage and now sit in the audience. We are spectators to the decision-making of others. This Government has allowed the partnership of equals that was Europe to be reduced to the sole ownership of Germany and France.

Last weekend, we were told of a Franco-German summit that would resolve the European crisis. Were we invited? Were our views sought? Was the Government consulted? By the end of the weekend, we were told that a deal had been reached that would resolve the crisis. Were our views sought? Was the Government consulted? We were then told that the summit was postponed and that no deal had been reached. Were our views sought? Was the Government consulted? A two-handed farce and we are the audience. We are now told that President Barroso has a plan, will unveil it today and will tell the Taoiseach tomorrow. Were our views sought and was the Government consulted by Barroso? A two-handed farce and now a one-man show. It would be funny if the stakes were not so high.

The economic and political world is looking in, wondering what is going on. What line will the EU agree to for the G20? Will it be the French way, the German way or President Barroso's way? We know for sure that it will not be Eamon Gilmore's and Labour's way. This lack of clarity at a European-wide level is matched only by the confusion within this Government. We have had the Taoiseach say "No" to treaty change, the Tánaiste claiming rather sheepishly that there is no need for a referendum but that the issues could be dealt with under the existing treaty and yesterday, the Minister of State, Deputy Creighton, opened the possibility of treaty change. While this circus is ongoing, we have unemployment continuing at 14.4%. Almost half of those on the live register have been unemployed for a year or more. We have 80,000 young people on the live register and at least 40,000 of our people are expected to emigrate this year.

I say to the Taoiseach that another way is possible. It is about putting the needs of our people before the needs of the bankers. A number of key steps must be taken at European and national level if we are to have any hope of delivering social and economic recovery. First of all, we need honesty, a word not used lightly in the banking world. We must honestly assess the level of banking undercapitalisation. The EU stress tests are not robust or honest,

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as demonstrated as one banking crisis follows another. On the basis of the most recent round of crisis meetings in Brussels and Frankfurt, it is clear that the critics of the European Banking Authority were right and that the extent of the black hole at the heart of European banking is not yet clear. Rigorous and compulsory stress tests are now required as a matter of urgency. Once we know the full extent of the problem, we can begin to act.

The banks must shoulder their responsibility. They must be forced to write down the cost of their bad debts as a prerequisite to any recapitalisation. The cost of recapitalisation should not be borne by ordinary taxpayers, particularly given the crippling levels of austerity being imposed on people across the EU.

This is an issue not only in respect of EU-wide debt. The same approach should also be applied by national Governments with regard to their own banking sectors. Sinn Féin has long argued for a significant write-down of banking debt imposed on the State by Fianna Fáil and maintained by this Fine Gael-Labour Government. The Greek Government has managed to secure significant private sector participation in its debt restructuring yet our Government has failed to secure the same. It is not credible for the Minister of Finance, on behalf of the Government, to claim that a similar deal cannot be secured for Ireland. The changes that have been achieved to date, which have led to some assistance to the Irish people, have been due to the crises in Greece, Portugal and Italy. Negotiating such a write-down, including the Anglo Irish Bank promissory note of over €74 billion, must be a priority for the Government in any talks on a long-term solution to the eurozone crisis.

Following a robust assessment of levels of debt and the debt write-down by banks, there is a need to begin the process of recapitalisation. An enlarged EFSF is not the vehicle for meeting the funding requirements of cleansed banks. Rather, the ECB must become the lender of last resort for the European banking system. The ECB is already performing this function in a number of countries, including in Ireland. Rather than printing euros to buy the bonds of European economies, the ECB would be better placed to redirect these facilities to stabilise the European banking system. These measures will only deal with the banking crisis. However, we need to promote economic growth and employment as complementary and concurrent to action taken to deliver jobs and economic growth.

The EU must once and for all abandon the orthodoxy of austerity. It is failing and leads only to hardship and recession. The banking crisis has led to a crisis of under investment. Each round of austerity further reduces investment in the domestic economy, forcing more people out of work. In the absence of private sector investment, we need the State to fill the investment vacuum. We need a Europe-wide stimulus programme to compliment stimulus programmes in individual member states. The European Investment Bank has twice the lending capacity of the World Bank. It must use that capacity with national Governments to increase the level of investment and create employment and build our infrastructure.

I have laid a path that must and should be followed at a national and European level. We have choices to make and we can continue as spectators to the farce that is enveloping the EU institutions. Regardless of our differences now, we share a common republican heritage, a republican heritage in which our leaders were told that no change was possible, that we were not in control of our destiny and that we should know our place. Yet history tells us that we always have choices to make and that these require leadership, determination and leading from the front. Wolfe Tone recognised it when he met with his comrades on Cave Hill in Belfast. The leaders of 1916 in Dublin knew that when they set out on Easter Sunday morning. Bobby Sands knew it as he lay alone in his hospital bed. The Taoiseach has highlighted what needs to be done in his speech to the Institute of Directors when he said:

“We will regain our economic sovereignty. We will restore the good name of Ireland among the nations of the world. This is my mission. This is the Government’s mission. This is our mission. And there will be no rest until we succeed.”

If we are to achieve this, we must begin to act. We must assert the interest of the Irish nation. We can put the brake on the idea that Europe is led by Germany and France. We can make it clear in the coming summit that we will not countenance further losses of sovereignty and that it is the will of the people of this sovereign State. It is not that of Germany, France, bankers or the President of the EU but the people and the Government must act on the will of the people. We will end the process of being spectators and will begin to assert our national interest. It is time that we began the process of shaping a Europe that serves the people and it is time for the Government to act and assert the will of the Irish people. Our sovereignty is not in the gift of others. We need to assert our sovereignty. I hope this Government will act but I travel more in hope than expectation.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I thank the Taoiseach for attending the Chamber in advance of the EU Summit. It gives Deputies such as me the chance to address the issues that will arise. My colleague, Deputy Padraig Mac Lochlainn, has raised the issues relating to the financial crisis. However, the summit will also finalise the European Union’s position for the Durban conference on climate change to be held on 28 November. There is an opportunity to shape the policy on an issue that has an impact on the global community and our nation.

Ireland is known throughout the world for its natural beauty and for the health and goodness of our natural produce yet, as a small island community, we are overly dependent on imported fossil fuels, which accounts for almost 90% of our fuel. This dependency undermines our environment and our economy. We are at the mercy of oil and gas producers and we have sold ourselves short on our rights in areas such as the Corrib basin. The energy costs for our people, our environment and our industry are unsustainable. An example is the recent 20% increase in domestic gas prices.

As a small nation, we have a wealth of potential sources of renewal energy in tidal and wind power. EU studies have demonstrated that we have more potential for these forms of sustainable energy than any other European country. We need to support and incentivise the use of such energy. Research has demonstrated that through wind power alone Ireland could become an exporter of sustainable energy to the rest of Europe. However we need to get the investment and infrastructure in place. This type of energy could be tapped and used for the benefit of our industry and our people.

These changes would have an impact not only on our economy but on our natural environment. I ask that the Government seeks to raise the EU’s target on reducing CO² emissions from 20% to a more ambitious 30%. Studies have shown that a 10% increase in the target would reduce Europe’s oil and gas bill by over €40 billion per year, while simultaneously encouraging a much-needed uptake in green technologies. A legally binding 30% target would inevitably encourage the move to cleaner renewable energy and subsequently increase fuel security, which is very important. Given our natural assets, this move would benefit Ireland greatly.

Climatologists now agree that the existing commitments and pledges made under the Copenhagen Accord and formalised within the Cancun Agreements, are insufficient to meet the objective of limiting the overall global annual mean surface temperature increase to 2°C. It is clear that more needs to be done and action needs to be taken directly and quickly. The issue of climate change is a pressing issue for Ireland, for our people and our prosperity. An approach to reduce carbon emission would be good for the globe, good for all of us and good for our country. We are uniquely situated to lead on sustainable energy. I ask the Taoiseach to push the issue for a reduction of 30% in emissions at the EU Council meeting.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I propose to share time with Deputies Clare Daly and Shane Ross. Is it not time to admit that the routine of being the best boy in the European class is not working? The mounting evidence, whether in Greece, the latest figures on Irish bond yields, the downgrading of Irish growth forecasts or the growing awareness that the European economy will contract, means that this is not working. No matter how much the Taoiseach submits, promises to be the best boy and imposes austerity, it is not working.

Is the postponement of the European Council meeting not symbolic of what is going on in the EU? Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy postponed the meeting so they can hatch a plan that suits their interests. President Barroso, who is an unelected Commissioner, orders the Taoiseach to Brussels to tell him what they have decided.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: The meeting was scheduled before they met. That is the Deputy's conspiracy theory out the window.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The European Council meeting will just be a rubber stamp for what they have decided, which is that they want the power to ram more austerity — more economic shock therapy — down our throats and those of other European states. It seems the only thing the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste are worried about is that the people of this country might have a say about that. They are not worried about the fact the European leaders want more power to ram austerity down the throats of workers, the vulnerable and the poor, they are not worried about the fact they are demanding the sale of our State assets, but they are desperately worried that there might be a referendum in which the people of this country would have some say, because they know that if there was the people would say “No”.

The Taoiseach: That is rubbish. We want to use the decision the people made when they had their say already — to use the tools we have.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Taoiseach had his chance to speak.

This strategy is shameful and humiliating. It might be forgivable if the strategy of the EU, the ICB and the IMF was showing any sign at all of working, but it is not working. This week we saw all the evidence. The austerity in Greece is crucifying its economy. Its growth has collapsed and because of this, its unsustainable debt is even more unsustainable and unpayable. Because of this, the contagion will spread to France and across the rest of Europe. More bank bailouts will be required for the big European banks and therefore more austerity will be required as ordinary people in Europe are expected to pay for it. This will result in further contraction of the European economy, and the Government's hopes of an export-led recovery will disappear like snow off a rope. The markets are now saying that is what they think will happen. The Government's beloved markets are saying that Ireland cannot have the growth it hoped for because the European economy is going to contract due to the continued policy of austerity and bank bailouts.

There is a contrast to all this, as we have said over and over for the last few months, and that is what is happening in Greece. The Greek people have fought back and, as a result, the bondholders did get burnt, to the tune of 20%. They got what we did not get. It might be a 50% burning of the bondholders. Today, they got their €8 billion, even though they did not implement the austerity measures because of the Greek resistance.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is eating into his colleagues' time.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We submit and impose shock therapy and we get nothing, while the Greeks, because they resist, get something. Is it not time to stand up and say “No”

to this economic madness? We should do what the people in Greece and in Wall Street are doing, which is to protest and resist and demand a strategy that puts jobs and economic growth first.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: So protest. There is nothing stopping the Deputy from protesting.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is worried about his re-election.

Deputy Seamus Healy: There are a number of things we know. The first is that there is now, if we did not know previously, a national and Europe-wide economic and social emergency. We know that the behaviour and treachery of the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government has led to huge attacks on lower-income families and poor people generally in this State, and we know now that through the EU-IMF deal we have lost our sovereignty and, to a large extent, our independence. We know the current Government has embraced the deal negotiated by the previous Government and is imposing the same attacks and austerity on low and middle income families and the unemployed. We also know the policy of austerity has not worked and is not working, and that it is leading to major job losses throughout the country. In Clonmel, 125 jobs were lost yesterday, and our Army barracks and acute psychiatric unit are under threat. That is happening right around the country. Austerity is simply not working. If one goes down the high street of any town in the country one finds shop units vacant and more closing by the day. This is because people simply do not have money in their pockets. Something like €14 billion has been taken out of the pockets of ordinary people by the previous Government and by this Government, and the result is 450,000 unemployed.

Surely it is time we recognised the folly of what has been going on and introduced a stimulus to the economy. Surely it is time wealthy people in this country and throughout the EU paid their fair share, which they are not doing. There is no asset tax and no wealth tax in this country, despite their existence in many other EU countries and many states in the USA. The wealthiest 5% of people in this country have assets worth around €250 billion, and these must be taxed, because we cannot have a situation in which ordinary people are absolutely fleeced while those who are hugely wealthy get away scot free. That is the message for the European Council meeting on 23 October.

Deputy Clare Daly: The developments over the weekend at the Franco-German summit have raised the possibility of changes to the treaty and a consequential referendum here. I would like to put on record my disappointment with the Taoiseach's comments over the weekend that such a referendum would not be welcomed. I can fully understand that it would not be welcomed from his perspective because if there was such a referendum there is absolutely no doubt it would be defeated. It would give a chance to the Irish people to voice their opinions on an agenda of selling off State assets and the prospect of cuts of a billion euro to social welfare, which was announced today.

The Taoiseach: That was not announced today. There was conjecture in the newspapers about it. Where was the announcement made?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: He did not deny it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It was well leaked.

Deputy Clare Daly: Let the jury pass judgment on that when it happens.

The Taoiseach: Where was the announcement made?

Deputy Clare Daly: The prospect is out there. We will wait and see.

Deputy Micheál Martin: *The Irish Times*.

Deputy Clare Daly: We will wait and see whether it materialises.

The Taoiseach: Excuse me, Deputy. When was the announcement made?

Deputy Clare Daly: Is the Taoiseach saying this will not happen?

Deputy Micheál Martin: Really.

The Taoiseach: Where was the announcement made?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Is it not going to happen?

Deputy Clare Daly: It is not going to happen. If the Taoiseach is denying the newspaper reports, I am delighted.

The Taoiseach: On a matter of clarification——

Deputy Clare Daly: Can I make my comments?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy said an announcement was made today.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach knows how it works.

Deputy Clare Daly: Yes. It appeared in the national newspapers——

Deputy Peter Mathews: Who knows where announcements may be?

The Taoiseach: Where was the announcement made?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Can we have some order, please?

Deputy Clare Daly: It appeared in today's national newspapers. If the Taoiseach is denying it, I am delighted.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is always very clear in her comments. Where was the announcement made?

Deputy Clare Daly: *The Irish Times*.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Can we have some order, please? The Deputy has the floor.

Deputy Clare Daly: I thank the Acting Chairman.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for her clarity.

Deputy Clare Daly: I like the Taoiseach's diversionary tactics, but the reality is——

The Taoiseach: It was the Deputy who mentioned it.

Deputy Clare Daly: ——that people in this country are entitled to a referendum should changes be proposed to the treaty.

I also note the Taoiseach said he would not like to see a two-tier Europe. It is a bit late for that. He may aspire to sit there as an equal, and his chair might be the same size, but he is definitely not a member of the top table. The real divide in the eurozone is not between the big countries and the small countries, although that exists, but between the big transnational business interests and the ordinary people, no matter where they are, who are paying the price through austerity. What we really have here is a crisis of the economic system and a crisis of neoliberalism.

In July, the Taoiseach and the other eurozone leaders told us they had a package that would stabilise the Greek debt crisis and avert a default. Now the Council meeting has been delayed because the troika report is not ready; they have not decided what verdict will come from their visit. Incidentally, it is an important lesson for Irish people to consider what has been foisted on the Greek population through the additional austerity measures: a property tax, more public sector job losses on top of the plan to sack around 150,000 civil servants, draconian wage cuts and so on. These policies can only result in economic and social catastrophe. The Greek economy is contracting. The question the Taoiseach needs to ask is when will the lunacy stop. Austerity is not working in Greece. How will it yield different results in Portugal, Ireland or indeed Belgium, where the newspaper headlines this morning are about the Dexia bank crisis?

The only solution the eurozone leaders are putting forward is more of the same. The six-pack measures are an anti-democratic attempt to ram through, over citizens' heads, more vicious austerity. As other speakers observed, this approach ignores the reality that Greek debt is unsustainable and a default inevitable. Strategists close to the investment banks and other financial interests are clear on that point. The solution is not a recapitalisation which protects bondholders and speculators but rather genuine, democratic accountability and public ownership of the banks which gives citizens a proper say in how resources are invested. They must be invested in people, not profits and speculation.

Deputy Shane Ross: I find myself largely in agreement with my Independent colleagues on this issue. I do not know whether the Taoiseach noticed the headline in *The Irish Times* yesterday, “Kenny called to talks with Barroso over euro zone crisis”. We are suffering a type of national humiliation in terms of what is happening between us and Europe. The Taoiseach should not be called to any talks by a civil servant in Brussels. The sub-editor who devised this headline in *The Irish Times* was clearly indicating his subliminal perception that we are the servants and Barroso the dominant force in the relationship. That perception is accurate. What has happened in recent months is that Ireland, because of our economic dependence on Europe, is dancing to the Sarkozy-Merkel tune. We are dancing to the tune of the Commission; we are dancing to the tune of Merkel and Sarkozy; and we are dancing, unfortunately, to their political agenda.

The reality of what is happening in Europe is not so much economic as political. The agenda is being set by the French elections in May next year and the German elections in 2013. An effort is being made by both the German Chancellor and the French President to delay matters to the extent that they do not have to make any decisions which might be electorally damaging for them. Ireland is playing to that particular agenda and hoping to piggyback on the situation. One need only consider what happened this morning in Dublin — if it has not yet happened, it will do so in a few minutes. When Deputy Clare Daly talks about big business and big government aligning with the large powers in Europe, she is absolutely correct. Ireland is, unfortunately, playing its part in that.

The Irish Banking Federation is hosting its annual conference today at which a speech will be delivered — via video link, because he is unable to attend in person — by the European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, Mr. Olli Rehn. This tells us that big govern-

[Deputy Shane Ross.]

ment, big banks and big business are aligning behind a similar agenda. I will be interested to hear the message from Mr. Rehn to the banks. My guess is they will pat each other on the backs, as they always have done and always will do. As Deputies Clare Daly and Richard Boyd Barrett observed, citizens are being forgotten in the agenda which is going forward. There is a political agenda which means that those who are in power, in positions of strength and status, will remain there. There is an electoral agenda to preserve Sarkozy and Merkel. Finally, there is a big business and big bank agenda to save the large banks.

The idea of a referendum is pooh-poohed by everybody on the other side of the House. The great strength of a referendum is not that it would necessarily be binding on the Government but that the Government would be able to go to the high tables of Europe with a mandate in that regard. The Government should not be frightened of a referendum. Rather, it should seize the opportunity it presents.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Lucinda Creighton): I thank Members for their contributions to this important debate. I represented the Government at yesterday's meeting of the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg. It is the responsibility of the Council to prepare the work of each European Council meeting and it was agreed yesterday that we would meet again next Saturday, in advance of the rescheduled European Council meeting on 23 October. We heard from the President of the European Council, Mr. Herman Van Rompuy, about his plans for that meeting. He was interested to get a sense from Ministers of their reactions to the shape which the draft conclusions for the European Council are developing. There was a broadly shared view that the draft conclusions struck a correct balance across the range of issues. These were set out by the Taoiseach earlier and include a most welcome focus on jobs and growth. It has been repeatedly said in this House that there must be a balance in terms of moving away from a constant focus on austerity to a greater consideration of stimulus measures and growth prospects. That will be a key focus for the European Council meeting.

Mr. Van Rompuy also briefed Ministers on his ongoing work to develop concrete proposals on how to improve working methods and enhance management in the euro area. He and his team have conducted an extensive round of bilateral consultations with all member states and other interested partners, including the European Commission. As the Taoiseach noted, Mr. Van Rompuy's proposals in this regard are awaited. The time leading up to the European Council meeting later this month will be put to good use in allowing Mr. Van Rompuy and his team to ascertain the fullest possible picture of the needs facing the euro area, which will inform his proposals. The Government, like all member state Governments, will feed into that process. We will avail of the opportunity to put forward our position at the eurozone and ECOFIN meetings that will take place towards the end of next week and at the General Affairs Council meeting on Saturday.

The draft conclusions also highlight the critical importance of the external aspects of Europe's economic policy in terms of boosting our growth potential into the future. There are concrete actions the EU can and should take, such as focusing on bilateral and regional trade agreements, as well as the overall prize of concluding the WTO Doha round of trade talks and developing the EU's economic ties of trade and investment with those countries in our own neighbourhood. The Taoiseach outlined these issues in detail earlier. Given the ongoing difficulties with the Doha round, there is a strong awareness of the need to focus on these regional and bilateral arrangements and to intensify efforts in that regard.

As well as addressing preparations for the European Council meeting on economic policy issues, the General Affairs Council also addressed itself at yesterday's meeting to the prep-

aration of an agreed EU position for the G20 summit which France will host in Cannes at the beginning of November. This puts forward an important and credible deadline for the European Council to come forward with a much more substantive response to the current crisis in the eurozone. It is a natural deadline.

I have limited time in which to respond to Members' points. Deputy Micheál Martin urged that the Government, particularly the Taoiseach, engage in more bilateral initiatives. I assure him that work is ongoing. It is not true to say the Taoiseach has not had bilateral meetings with other Heads of Government other than on the fringes of European Council meetings. For example, he has had bilateral meetings with the Hungarian Prime Minister, Mr. Orbán, and the Polish Prime Minister, Mr. Tusk, in Dublin.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What eurozone Ministers has he met?

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: He has had bilateral meetings in recent weeks with six eurozone leaders and will travel to Berlin and Paris in November. That work is ongoing. All Ministers and Ministers of State have been engaged in intensive bilateral work.

Deputy Micheál Martin: They have not.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: Yes, they have. Several Ministers, including myself, have travelled to Paris and Berlin on numerous occasions.

Deputy Micheál Martin: How many eurozone Finance Ministers has the Taoiseach met in the last eight months?

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: The Minister for Finance has engaged in numerous bilateral meetings, as has the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. The Deputy is incorrect in his claims.

Deputy Micheál Martin: What I have said is factually correct.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn makes a fair point regarding EU banking stress tests. The more comprehensive stress testing of Irish banks has stood up to scrutiny far better than the EU-wide stress tests. No doubt the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, will have something to say about that as time goes on.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): The Minister of State's time is up.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: I ask for the Acting Chairman's indulgence. Some of the other contributions ran over time——

Deputy Micheál Martin: They did not.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: ——and I very much wish to make a final point. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett said that being the best boy in the class is not serving Ireland's interest and that we should instead behave like the Greeks, for which we will receive our reward. The Deputy voted against the European Financial Stability Facility, EFSF, Bill which has assured that we have a significantly reduced interest on our debt repayments.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Minister, the other Deputies kept to the time limit.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: The General Affairs Council yesterday approved the European Financial Stability Mechanism which will result in a saving of approximately €6 billion for this country in the very near future. To say that——

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Minister, you are now nearly——

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: ——significant progress has not been made is untrue. I would have wished to respond to many other points but we might have an opportunity to do that after the European Council meeting at the end of next week.

Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) (No. 2) Bill 2011: Order for Report Stage

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

Question put and agreed to.

Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) (No. 2) Bill 2011: Report and Final Stages

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

In page 18, line 28, to delete “and” and substitute the following:

“(c) shall consult with the Credit Union Advisory Committee (within the meaning of section 180 of the Credit Union Act 1997) where the proposed regulations relate to credit unions, and”.

On Committee Stage I undertook to consider the provision of a consultative role for the Credit Union Advisory Committee, CUAC, in the making of regulations regarding the resolution fund. Following consultation by my officials with the chair of the CUAC I am now proposing an amendment to that effect.

The CUAC is a statutory body charged with advising me as Minister on credit union issues. It is therefore appropriate that it should be consulted in regard to regulations which will affect the credit union sector. I also undertook to consider a similar role for the CUAC on the intervention conditions. However, following consultation with the chair of the CUAC I do not propose to make such an amendment. It is important that the Central Bank is able to act independently in taking resolution actions subject to the carefully drafted intervention conditions in the Act. The requirement to consult in this way could delay necessary Central Bank action.

On Committee Stage, Deputy Michael McGrath, Deputy Pearse Doherty and others argued this strongly. It is a good proposal and therefore I have come back with this Report Stage amendment to meet their requirements.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I welcome the Minister’s response to Deputy McGrath’s suggestions on Committee Stage. Consultation with the credit union movement is essential, particularly with the issues that are arising. I thank the Minister for that.

Amendment agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Amendment No. 2 in the name of the Minister may be taken with amendment No. 18 as they are related.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 23, after line 46, to insert the following:

27.—(1) Unless the Bank provides prior written consent, a transferor shall not dispose of any asset or liability which is to be transferred under a transfer order, except in the ordinary course of its business, during the period beginning with the delivery of the written notice under *section 26(1)* or the date on which the transferor otherwise becomes aware of the proposed transfer order for the purposes of consultation under *section 26(4)*, whichever is the earlier, and ending on the date of effect of the transfer order under *section 48*.

(2) The officers and employees of a transferor shall comply with *subsection (1)*.

(3) If the Bank is of the opinion that a transferor is in breach of *subsection (1)* or has taken steps that would likely lead to such a breach, the Bank may apply *ex parte* to the Court for an order compelling compliance with that subsection.”.

The purpose of amendment No. 2 is to prevent the dissipation of assets and liabilities by a transfer where those assets and liabilities are to be transferred under a transfer order. If the Central Bank is of the opinion that a transfer order is in breach of this provision or has taken steps that would likely lead to such a breach, it can apply *ex parte* to the High Court for an order compelling compliance.

Amendment No. 18 makes a similar amendment to the Credit Institutions (Stabilisation Act) 2010. The inclusion of these provisions will help to ensure that a transfer can take place as smoothly and successfully as possible. It is to ensure that what is intended in the section can be done and would have the force of the court behind it if there was failure to comply.

Amendment agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Recommittal is necessary in respect of amendment No. 3 as it does not arise out of committee proceedings. Amendments Nos. 4, 14, 15, 17 and 19 are related and may be discussed with amendment No. 3.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendment No. 3.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 28, to delete lines 25 to 27 and substitute the following:

“(b) the value of the shares acquired by or disposed of by the member—

(i) as at the date or dates on which the shares were acquired or disposed of, as the case may be, and

(ii) as at the date on which the transfer order concerned was made.”.

The purpose of this amendment is to provide that in an application to set aside a transfer order, where the applicant is a member of the institution the court will be permitted to take into consideration the value of any shares acquired or disposed of at the date on which the order was made. This information will be considered in addition to when an applicant became a member, when he or she increased or decreased his or her shareholding in the institution concerned, and the value of any shares acquired or disposed on the dates of acquisition or disposal. It is based on the principle that the court should be permitted to take into account the behaviour of an applicant when considering a challenge.

The same amendment is proposed for section 60 which addresses set-aside of special management orders — amendment No. 4 — and for those sections of the Credit institutions (Stabilisation) Act 2010 that address set-aside or direction orders — amendment No. 14; special

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

management orders — amendment No. 15; subordinated liabilities orders — amendment No. 17; and transfer orders — amendment No. 19.

Amendment No. 19 also deletes section 37(5) of the 2010 Act which relates specifically to credit unions. This reflects the fact that upon enactment of this Bill the credit unions will no longer fall within the scope of the 2010 Act, therefore, the section in question becomes redundant. It is to ensure that when the court is making a decision it will have all relevant information. This section had specified what we consider to be relevant in terms of acquisition of shares and shares transactions. This moves it along a another little bit on further examination so that the court has the fullest possible information on these issues before it makes an order.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill reported with amendment.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 51, to delete lines 10 to 12 and substitute the following:

“(b) the value of the shares acquired by or disposed of by the member—

(i) as at the date or dates on which the shares were acquired or disposed of, as the case may be, and

(ii) as at the date on which the special management order concerned was made.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Amendment No. 5 is in the name of the Minister. Amendment No. 11 is related and may be discussed with amendment No. 5.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 64, line 31, to delete “by the Central Bank”.

These amendments are required to address a technical issue with the wording of section 88 and of item 3 of Schedule 2, Part 4, which amends section 74 of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009, as published. Any disposal pursuant to an order will not in practice be made by the Central Bank although the Central Bank will be proposing the order. It is therefore necessary to remove the words “by the Central Bank”. It looked as if the Central Bank would be acting in such circumstances. Where the action is taken under the instruction of the Central Bank it is not the agent who will be acting and in view of this we wish to delete “by the Central Bank”. It is a purely technical amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Amendment No. 6 may be discussed with amendments Nos. 7 to 9, inclusive. Members should note that if amendment No. 6 is agreed, amendments Nos. 7 to 9, inclusive, cannot be moved.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 6:

In page 80, to delete lines 5 to 32 and substitute the following:

“

1	Section 87(3)	<p>After paragraph (d), insert:</p> <p>“(e) require the credit union to raise within such period as may be specified and maintain such reserves or other financial resources or to maintain such non-financial resources, as may be specified;</p> <p>(f) require the credit union to take such steps as may be specified to strengthen its systems or controls;</p> <p>(g) require the credit union to apply a specified policy for making provision for such debts or treatment of assets, as may be specified, for the purposes of capital and reserve requirements;</p> <p>(h) require the credit union to restrict or limit its business, operations or activities, as the Bank considers necessary, to reduce risks inherent in its activities, products and systems;</p> <p>(i) require the credit union to provide a statement in writing to the Bank of the steps it will take to comply with any regulatory direction imposed under this section or with any other requirement imposed on a credit union under this Act;</p> <p>(j) impose limitations on the acceptance of members’ savings or the employment of assets;”.</p>
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Section 87 of the Credit Union Act 1997 was amended on Committee Stage to enhance the existing powers of the Central Bank to issue regulatory direction to credit unions. A number of concerns were raised by Deputies and credit union representatives that the powers concerned were too broad and open to interpretation. In response to those concerns I asked my Department to brief and consult with the Commission on Credit Unions, the Credit Unions Advisory Committee, the Irish League of Credit Unions and the Credit Union Development Association.

The text of the amendment was revisited on foot of those consultations to address the genuine concerns raised. I believe the text of the amendment proposed meets the financial stability needs of the Central Bank while providing for a balanced and proportionate approach from a credit union point of view. Feedback from the credit union representatives on this text has been very positive.

The Credit Union Act 1997 does not currently provide an appeal mechanism for the credit union regulatory directions. I intend to ask the Commission on Credit Unions to examine this issue and make appropriate recommendations for consideration in the Credit Union Bill to be published later this year.

This was a matter of lengthy debate on Committee Stage. An amendment was moved by me in effect to give the same powers of resolution in respect of credit unions as the bank would get under the Act in terms of other financial institutions. It was somewhat of a blunt instrument and after the debate, on consideration, we decided to refine it further in consultation with the stakeholders. We have agreement now from the credit union movement that what is now being put in on Report Stage is appropriate and acceptable to it.

There were also suggestions from various Deputies that we will put an appeal mechanism in place but it was not possible for me to get an appeal mechanism drafted, even if it was appropriate to do so, in time for Report Stage. The Commission on Credit Unions continues to sit and will present its final report in April. We are referring the issue of an appeal to the commission.

Deputy Micheál Martin: An appeal.

Deputy Michael Noonan: Yes, it is an appeal against the action taken by the Central Bank to intervene in a credit union. There is no appeal mechanism now. The pros and cons are as follows: If one has an appeal mechanism, we delay the bank from going in, which it may have to do as a matter of urgency. On the other hand, it may be appropriate in certain circumstances to have somebody else take a second look. That is the weight of the argument. Since the Commission on Credit Unions is considering issues such as this, we are referring this matter to it and we will consider its recommendation in due course.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): Amendment No. 6 is being discussed with Amendments Nos. 7 to 10. Amendments Nos. 7 to 9, inclusive, are related and alternative to amendment No. 6.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I welcome the opportunity to discuss this Bill.

I am sure the Minister is well aware of my overall concerns and that Sinn Féin Party members will not be supporting the legislation, as our concern is with the State injecting its own money into this fund. As nobody knows what the future holds, this could be another blank cheque for the restructuring of the banking sector. We have tried to deal with this fundamental principle at earlier stages. While my party will not be voting for this Bill that does not stop us from engaging constructively with it. I note that we are the only party that has submitted Committee and Report Stage amendments.

The Minister has always engaged with us in dealing with the Bill. While we have not always been happy with the outcome, we acknowledge the thorough engagement. I appreciate that the concerns I raised in my amendments on Committee Stage have been taken on board and that after genuine consultation with the credit union sector, the Minister tabled amendments on Report Stage, which is a very satisfactory outcome. For that reason, I will withdraw my amendments.

I think the Minister's statement in the Seanad on the recapitalisation of the credit union at a cost of between €500 million and €1 billion has caused alarm. As the figures were not put in context, there was no justification for it. This has unsettled credit union members and created negative consumer confidence. It appears the Minister made his assessment on the information given by the Central Bank, which is based on the unpublished and by all account poorly conducted research on the credit union movement. It appears from media reports that selected journalists are being briefed on that research, which I think paints a confusing picture for many people. I understand that only a very small number of credit unions will need financial assistance and will need to be dealt with immediately. The broader issue of restructuring and regulating credit unions must be left to the Commission on Credit Unions and the Oireachtas, without unnecessary interference from the regulator. The financial position of a very limited number of small credit unions must not be used by the regulator to impose an agenda on the credit union movement that is not in keeping with its community bond and not for profit ethos.

I express my dissatisfaction with the way in which the regulator is imposing lending restrictions on credit unions without any clear criteria or rationale in a manner that is completely and utterly inconsistent and in the majority of cases, clearly out of synch with the robust financial position of the credit unions concerned. We know this is driving people who relied on credit union loans for small events to go to moneylenders who are charging an annual percentage rate of more than 180%.

The Minister's performance has been in two halves. First we had his very positive engagement on credit unions, but his out of the blue comments in the Seanad, based on biased information that is out of date, caused panic in the credit union sector. Since he made those comments I have heard Government spokespersons refer to the tiny number of credit unions that

need support and restructuring. The Minister has an opportunity to calm the nerves; we have had a crisis of confidence in the banking sector and we do not need the same in the credit union sector. We know that a tiny number of cases in the credit union sector need assistance, but the figure of up to €1 billion being required to deal with it, is disputed. It seems it will not be in that region.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I welcome the Minister's response and his engagement with the stakeholders. He admitted that the position on Committee Stage was somewhat of a blunt instrument, but having heard the debate in the House and the concerns expressed externally, he has been prepared to refine it and refer the issue of appeal to the Commission on Credit Unions. This provides an opportunity for further reflection on the issue and to get the balance correct. We must be realistic and accept that the unprecedented crisis has impacted on credit unions. The credit union movement is vital for people on the ground. Credit unions provide vital credit to working families in different contexts. Anything that strengthens the credit union movement, and gives certainty and security to credit union members, the public in general and to depositors is to be welcomed. I do not think we can pretend that everybody has escaped the impact of the crisis. They have not, and as a result we must be realistic in our approach and get the balance right between the regulatory impact and the sustainable operation of credit unions across the country.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I applaud the Minister for seeing sense in his consultation with the credit union movement. His decision to refer this particular aspect to the Commission on Credit Unions is wise. It is important to note that in our democratic model we have Opposition and Government sides, but the backbenchers on the Government side have a democratic role to play in Government. I reiterate my thanks to the Minister for taking our concerns on board. This was a wise decision. The credit union movement is in a healthy state, with over €1.7 billion in reserves, €12 billion in assets, personal loans of €5.6 billion and personal savings of €11 billion, which means that the total membership of 2.7 million people have average savings of €4,000. That is indicative of a very healthy credit union movement. The credit union movement is very important in peripheral areas of our constituency, where it provides not only an economic framework but also a socio-economic model which is beneficial to communities. I know that in certain sectors, for example, students are finding it more difficult to get loans, but the credit union is a very important resource.

The debate on this Bill is an example of democracy working. The Irish League of Credit Unions put forward a very good case and it is very much aware that the Commission on Credit Unions is a good model for it to work through. They are open to new regulatory frameworks. It is very important and I know the Minister will be working very closely and liaising with them. The voices of those of us on the backbenches were heard and I thank him.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I thank all Deputies who contributed, in particular Deputies McHugh and Doherty and the leader of Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Doherty will recall we had a short recess on Committee Stage during which members were contacted by members of the credit union movement. The sequence of events was that as the Bill was proceeding the Central Bank asked for additional powers of resolution to be applied to credit unions, which was done by way of amendment very late in the process. I understand the amendment was only circulated the day before the discussion took place. While it had been scrutinised, it did not have the benefit of a second look after reflection which normally happens with good legislation. I was very pleased with the interaction between Deputies. There is no politics or ideology in a Bill like this. We try to have the best legislation

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

we can. If suggestions come from the Opposition, I am quite prepared to accept amendments or redraft them to make sure the spirit of what Deputies say is included in the Bill.

As there was some controversy on Committee Stage, rumours began to fly, most of which were not true. We had a free-flowing question and answer session in the Seanad and when I was asked a direct question about credit unions, I felt the easiest thing to do was to tell people what was happening. The interim report of the credit union commission is due for publication which will give the situation context. When I was in the Seanad there was a special meeting of my parliamentary party to discuss credit unions. I was contacted by Deputies from different parts of the House with different allegiances who wanted to know what was happening. The easiest solution was to tell them what the situation was and that there would be recapitalisation of the credit union movement.

It may have caused concern for credit union management but it did not cause concern for credit union depositors or shareholders because they immediately knew the State was prepared to invest a quantum of money their investment was secure, which was my intention. The interim report of the commission will be published on Friday by the commission. Deputies will get a lot of additional information and context on Friday about the situation.

Rumours can be quite damaging. Stories circulated that people would not be able to enjoy Christmas because the traditional temporary lending which they availed of from credit unions to pay for Santa Claus would not be available. It was reported that limits were so low credit unions would not be able to lend to the traditional creditors who sought loans at Christmas. That is not true.

It is true that the regulatory authorities have issued limits on the amount of lending that can be engaged in by credit unions. Some 50% of credit unions are subject to lending restrictions at the current time. Almost all credit unions with lending restrictions have a maximum individual loan size restriction. Claims were made in the Seanad and in newspapers that the Registrar of Credit Unions placed restrictions of approximately €1,500 per saver on a number of credit unions. It is not case, even though it is widely believed that it is.

Some 70% of credit unions who have restrictions placed on them can lend up to €20,000 or more to an individual member. Only nine credit unions are restricted to loans of less than €10,000 to an individual member. Just one credit union is restricted to lending less than €5,000. The figures of €1,000 and €1,500 to which people referred are fictional. Facts always kill rumours and, therefore, I am trying to communicate as many facts as possible. I am very glad the commission's report will be available on Friday because it will give everybody who is interested in this debate a factual basis for the discussion to proceed.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: I thank the Minister. I do not want to have a debate on credit unions but I look forward to reading the commission's report on Friday.

There is no problem with caps on lending being imposed when they are needed. However, the problem is some of the blunt instruments that are being used. At a time when we want to encourage lending in the economy and the Minister is having difficulties with banks meeting the lending requirements laid down, the idea of telling a credit union it cannot lend more than €10,000 to an individual does not make sense. A person may earn €250,000 per year, but because he or she has a car loan from a credit union in excess of €10,000, he or she cannot take out another loan. It is a blunt instrument which does not make any sense. Unfortunately, people are being caught in a spiral.

I will not second-guess the Minister on dampening down the concerns and fears created by the rumour mill. A report which is outdated remains unpublished and proposed recom-

mendations that are unfounded. It used criteria that are not required. The contribution made by the Minister in the Seanad was based on the report. Rightly or wrongly, there is concern that the regulator will restructure credit unions to an extent that is not required to try to impose more control over the movement. While there is no doubt there is a need for some restructuring, there should be a balance. I and many other credit union members and managers are concerned. We will have a chance to debate the issue in the report is published.

Deputy Tom Fleming: I am a member of a very viable credit union. There is great concern among the officer board and members which I am sure reflects many credit unions across the country. They feel they are in a straitjacket because of the regulations imposed by the current regulator. They are prohibited in many cases from lending to very worthy applicants because of the current restrictions.

Many people who wish to borrow money are in the SME sector or need to make household improvements and have very good credit ratings. Families who have been long-time members of the credit union have excellent credit ratings. What is happening will affect people's credit ratings in the future. Credit unions do not object to regulation as long as it is balanced and appropriate.

Apart from the economic difficulties, the actions of the regulator are exacerbating the problems of credit unions and their members. The new lending situation is imposing individual loan limits irrespective of the creditworthiness of members. The regulator specifies the total amount of loans that can be issued in each month and links total loans issued to cash received without reference to assets, reserves or liquidity. The liquid cash available in my credit union totals €30 million but it is restricted.

All commercial business loans have been banned which affects the self-employed, tradesmen and farmers. Specific loan terms in addition to existing limits under the 1997 Act have been imposed. All these restrictions threaten the viability of credit unions by adversely affecting their most important source of income — loan interest. Curtailing their ability to lend curtails their ability to generate income, which is their lifeblood. Members with good repayment records are being forced in County Kerry to turn to money lenders. We cannot allow that situation to continue. In existing loans, there is inflexible interpretation of the rules on the bad and doubtful debts. Credit unions are unable to respond to members' need to reschedule loans and there is an overemphasis on writing off loans when long-term restructuring could resolve issues. Current income and potential future income is being eroded, draining the lifeblood of the credit unions and shrinking loan books. Action is needed and I welcome what the Minister is trying to do. A more flexible approach from the regulator is necessary as it is to allow the credit unions greater discretion to carry out their duties.

I ask the Minister for Finance to take these matters on board and will provide any information I have that might be helpful to him when it comes to amending the regulatory instruments.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I welcome the Minister's efforts since Committee Stage to come up with appropriate amendments that are generally accepted; that approach is to be welcomed.

The main point I am hearing from credit unions since the Committee Stage debate is an acceptance on their part of appropriate regulation and intervention. They are of the view that the scale of the problem is not as great as the Minister indicated in the Seanad. That remains to be seen and the detail of it must be worked out. It is important we bring certainty to the regulation of credit unions as quickly as possible but it is essential that as far as possible credit unions retain as much decision making power locally as possible because they know their customers best and a regulator setting particular limits in Dublin might not be the best way to

[Deputy Michael McGrath.]

go. There should be sufficient discretion at a local level where the credit union will know members personally and can make appropriate decisions, particularly when banks are not meeting the credit needs of the economy and our citizens.

The role of the credit unions is more important than ever now. I urge the Minister to continue to liaise with the sector and the representative bodies to come up with a framework that meets general acceptance. There are clearly credit unions in difficulty that need assistance but the vast majority are in good health and we should not unnecessarily interfere with their business model that has worked so well for many decades.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: I welcome amendment No. 6. The credit union movement provides a vital role across the economy, particularly through their local ethos. That must be balanced by ensuring the credit union movement is financially sound. I welcome the appeal mechanism that is being considered by the commission and the Minister. An appeal mechanism might allow the regulator to do his or her job but allow an appeal after any examination. That would allow the regulator to do his job while allowing the credit union to put forward a case according to its circumstances. Such an appeal mechanism might work. Overall, we are all committed to the retention of the ethos of the credit union movement while balancing it with financial stability, collectively and individually. The credit union movement does outstanding work and I welcome this amendment.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I thank Deputies for their contributions. We all share the same objective; we want the ethos of the credit unions to continue while we want them to be solid and have deep roots in the modern financial world as they work in their communities.

Sometimes when only a few Members are in attendance in the Dáil, we think no one is listening and that the views expressed have no influence. I assure Deputies the regulatory authorities are aware of the views that were expressed on Committee Stage and will be aware of the views being expressed here as well. Deputies must not think they are not influencing the wider debate, they are.

There will be opportunities arising from this. Today we will finish Report and Final Stages and the report will be published on Friday. The report provides factual data from the Grant Thornton report and will give an up to date factual base for future debates. The level of detail in the report is admirable and will offer a clear view of the position of the credit union movement.

The report also makes a series of recommendations. The recommendations are for everyone but particularly for the Minister for Finance in terms of the legislation we are preparing for publication around Christmas. In the meantime, the commission will continue with its work because this is the interim report. It will then examine the wider issues of the place of credit unions in the financial services industry in future. It will issue a final report around Easter of next year with a final set of recommendations which we hope to incorporate into law. In the meantime, the Central Bank is the regulatory authority. The structure is the Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Elderfield, the regulator, and specifically Mr. O'Brien, the registrar of credit unions. They are aware of Deputies' views and they keep up to speed on them.

I hope by this time next year we will have done good work where credit unions will be adequately provisioned while continuing with the ethos they always had, serving particular communities without too much dislocation. That is the objective.

Deputy Thomas Fleming raised particular cases. I have come across these arguments before and many of them were put forward by credit union management. They are not to be dismissed for that reason because who would know the state of credit unions better than management?

We do not want, however, the situation to emerge where there is a conflict between the interests of management and the interests of depositors and share holders. Our primary purpose must be to protect those depositors and shareholders. There are good managers and bad managers and a few cowboys around. Part of the process will be to shake that out.

Deputy Fleming’s contribution was laid out in a coherent manner. The commission is subject to submission from Members of the Oireachtas and the public. The Deputy should send a copy of his script to the commission and ask it to reflect on the issues raised and measure them against practice in other parts of the country. He could have an interchange with the commission as well as with me in the House.

Otherwise I am confident we have met the concerns raised on Committee Stage. I point out to Deputy Doherty that we covered consultation with the CUAC in the first amendment.

That is also included, in so far as the formation of regulations is concerned. Most of what is left is technical in nature.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments Nos. 7 to 10, inclusive, not moved.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 11:

In page 81, lines 12 and 3, to delete “by the Central Bank”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 12:

In page 81, between lines 18 and 19, to insert the following:

“

1	Section 2(1), definition of “articles of association”, paragraphs (a) to (c)	Substitute: “(a) in the case of a credit institution that is established by charter, its bye-laws, and (b) in the case of a credit institution that is a building society, its rules;”.
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”.

Amendments Nos. 12, 13, 20, 21, 22 and 24 are being proposed to reflect the fact that upon enactment of this Bill, the credit unions will no longer fall within the scope of the Credit Institutions (Stabilisation) Act 2010. Therefore, these amendments delete those parts of the 2010 Act that were specific to credit unions.

The role of the 2010 Act is being taken by this Bill. References to credit unions will be removed from the 2010 Act.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 13:

In page 82, between lines 6 and 7, to insert the following:

5	Section 3(c)	For “the Central Bank Act 1971, the Building Societies Act 1989 or the Credit Union Act 1997”, substitute “the Central Bank Act 1971 or the Building Societies Act 1989”.
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Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 14:

In page 83, to delete lines 53 to 56 and substitute the following:

“(b) the value of the shares acquired by or disposed of by the member—

(i) as at the date on which the shares were acquired or disposed of, as the case may be, and

(ii) as at the date on which the direction order concerned was made.”.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 15:

In page 85, to delete lines 7 to 10 and substitute the following:

“(b) the value of the shares acquired by or disposed of by the member—

(i) as at the date on which the shares were acquired or disposed of, as the case may be, and

(ii) as at the date on which the special management order concerned was made.”.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 16:

In page 85, to delete lines 23 to 26 and substitute the following:

“even though the making of that order would have the consequences of affecting (including reducing) the rights enjoyed by subordinated creditors before the order, but nothing in this subsection shall be taken as requiring the Minister to consider the possible adverse consequences of the order on the interests of a particular creditor or class of creditors of the relevant institution or to consider any submission made by a creditor on behalf of that creditor, a class of creditors or creditors generally.”.”.

The reason for this amendment is to achieve consistency between this Bill and the Credit Institutions (Stabilisation) Act 2010 with regard to the making of an order which might have the consequence of affecting the rights enjoyed by creditors before the making of the order.

The amendment provides that the Minister shall not be required to consider possible adverse consequences on the interests of a particular creditor or class of creditors or to consider any submissions from creditors when making a proposed subordinate liabilities order.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 17:

In page 87, to delete line 34 and substitute the following:

“(b) the market value of those subordinated liabilities—

(i) as at the date or dates referred to in paragraph (a), and

(ii) as at the date on which the subordinated liabilities order concerned was made.”.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 18:

In page 87, between lines 43 and 44, to insert the following:

“

34	New section	After section 33, insert: “Relevant institution not to dispose of assets, liabilities. 33A.—(1) Unless the Minister provides prior written consent, a relevant institution shall not dispose of any asset or liability which is to be transferred under a transfer order, except in the ordinary course of its business, during the period beginning with the delivery of the written notice under subsection (4) of section 33, or the date on which the relevant institution otherwise becomes aware of the proposed transfer order as part of the process of seeking its consent under that subsection, whichever is the earlier, and ending on the date of effect of the transfer order under section 34(7). (2) The officers and employees of a relevant institution shall comply with subsection (1). (3) If the Minister is of the opinion that a relevant institution is in breach of subsection (1) or has taken steps that would likely lead to such a breach, the Minister may apply <i>ex parte</i> to the Court for an order compelling compliance with that subsection.”
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Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 19:

In page 89, to delete lines 41 to 44 and substitute the following:

“

		(b) the value of the shares acquired by or disposed of by the member— (i) as at the date or dates on which the shares were acquired or disposed of, as the case may be, and (ii) as at the date on which the transfer order concerned was made.”
42	Section 37(5)	Delete.

”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 20:

In page 89, after line 57, to insert the following:

“

44	Section 39(5)	For “a credit union or a building society”, substitute “a building society” in each place where it occurs.
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”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 21:

In page 90, line 5, to delete “a credit union or a building society” and substitute “a building society”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 22:

In page 90, lines 16 and 17, to delete “the Building Societies Act 1989 or the Credit Union Act 1997” and substitute “the Building Societies Act 1989”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 23:

In page 90, between lines 42 and 43 to insert the following:

“

46	Section 47(1)	For “the Companies Acts, the Building Societies Act 1989 or the Credit Union Act 1997”, substitute “the Companies Acts or the Building Societies Act 1989”.
47	Section 50(2)	In paragraph (g), for “(S.I. No. 490 of 2009).” substitute “(S.I. No. 490 of 2009);”. After paragraph (g), insert: “(h) to dispose of some of the assets or part of the undertaking of the relevant institution, subject to such terms and conditions as are specified by the Minister, where, in the opinion of the Minister, the disposal is required in order for the relevant institution concerned to achieve— (i) a ratio the subject of a requisition under section 23 of the Central Bank Act 1971, (ii) a requirement as to the composition of the assets or liabilities of the relevant institution as specified by the Bank under section 23A of that Act.”.

”.

This amendment will amend the Credit Institutions (Stabilisation) Act 2010 as follows. Item 46 removes the reference to the Credit Union Act 1997 in section 47(1). This reflects the fact that upon enactment of this Bill the credit unions will no longer fall within the scope of the 2010 Act. Therefore, the references to that Act become redundant.

Item 47 adds a new paragraph (h) to section 52 and makes a consequent amendment to paragraph (g). The covered banks are required to dispose of certain of their loan books to meet the loan to deposit ratio set by the Central Bank. To facilitate this process, the Minister has been provided with additional powers pursuant to this amendment to instruct the banks to dispose of assets to meet these ratios.

The issue of a requirement by the Minister pursuant to new paragraph 52(h) will allow a covered bank to take actions to meet its loan to deposit ratio without causing technical default under its contractual arrangements.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Michael Noonan: I move amendment No. 24:

In page 91, between lines 17 and 18, to insert the following:

“

49	Section 53(a)	For “the Companies Acts, the Building Societies Act 1989 or the Credit Union Act 1997”, substitute “the Companies Acts or the Building Societies Act 1989”.
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“

Amendment agreed to.

Bill, as amended, received for final consideration.

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

Deputy Pearse Doherty: While the recent amendments have made the legislation stronger and better, there is still fundamental concern regarding the fund. There is a need for a bank resolution Bill. While many of the tools in the Bill are unlikely ever to be used in the case of a bank, I believe they will be used in relation to credit institutions. They need to be there. We have advocated the inclusion of some of them but there remains a fundamental flaw in the Bill. The Minister for Finance, on behalf of the State, can inject our money into the fund, which would lead to the restructuring of the banks. It would be remiss of me and my party to support such a mechanism not knowing what the final cost would be of a major restructuring of one of the larger institutions if, God forbid, that were necessary some time in the future.

On that basis I oppose the passage of the Bill.

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 104; Níl, 25.

Tá

Bannon, James.
 Barry, Tom.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Burton, Joan.
 Buttimer, Jerry.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Byrne, Eric.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Joe.
 Coffey, Paudie.
 Collins, Áine.
 Conaghan, Michael.
 Conlan, Seán.
 Connaughton, Paul J.
 Conway, Ciara.
 Coonan, Noel.
 Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.
 Costello, Joe.
 Cowen, Barry.
 Creed, Michael.
 Daly, Jim.
 Deasy, John.
 Deering, Pat.
 Doherty, Regina.
 Donohoe, Paschal.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Dowds, Robert.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Farrell, Alan.

Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Anne.
 Fitzgerald, Frances.
 Fitzpatrick, Peter.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Fleming, Sean.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Griffin, Brendan.
 Hannigan, Dominic.
 Harrington, Noel.
 Harris, Simon.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Heydon, Martin.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Humphreys, Heather.
 Humphreys, Kevin.
 Keaveney, Colm.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kenny, Seán.
 Kyne, Seán.
 Lawlor, Anthony.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 Maloney, Eamonn.
 Mathews, Peter.
 McCarthy, Michael.
 McConalogue, Charlie.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McFadden, Nicky.

Tá—*continued*

McGrath, Michael.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McLoughlin, Tony.
 McNamara, Michael.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.
 Mulherin, Michelle.
 Murphy, Dara.
 Murphy, Eoghan.
 Nash, Gerald.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Nolan, Derek.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Feargháil, Seán.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Donovan, Patrick.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Reilly, Joe.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.

Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Phelan, Ann.
 Phelan, John Paul.
 Quinn, Ruairí.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Brendan.
 Sherlock, Sean.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Spring, Arthur.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Troy, Robert.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Twomey, Liam.
 Varadkar, Leo.
 Wall, Jack.
 Walsh, Brian.
 White, Alex.

Níl

Boyd Barrett, Richard.
 Collins, Joan.
 Colreavy, Michael.
 Daly, Clare.
 Doherty, Pearse.
 Ellis, Dessie.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Luke 'Ming'.
 Fleming, Tom.
 Halligan, John.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Higgins, Joe.
 Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.

McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McLellan, Sandra.
 Murphy, Catherine.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Brien, Jonathan.
 O'Sullivan, Maureen.
 Pringle, Thomas.
 Ross, Shane.
 Stanley, Brian.
 Tóibín, Peadar.
 Wallace, Mick.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Catherine Murphy.

Question declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Bill will now be sent to the Seanad.

Sitting suspended at 1.20 p.m. and resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Ceisteanna — Questions

Priority Questions

Employment Levels

1. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons employed in the economy at the end of quarter four in 2010; the number employed at the end of quarter one in 2011; the number employed at the end of quarter two 2011; the estimated number of persons that have emigrated in each of these quarters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28951/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton) (Deputy Richard Bruton): The latest quarterly national household survey, published by the Central Statistics Office, CSO, on 15 September, shows that 1,823,200 people were in employment at the end of the fourth quarter 2010. At the end of the first quarter of 2011, 1,804,200 people were in employment. At the end of the second quarter of 2011, the numbers in employment had increased to 1,821,300. This increase of 17,100 is the first increase of significant scale. It is influenced by seasonal factors. However, even on a seasonal basis it represents an increase in private sector employment for the first time since the recession started.

Data on emigration is available from the CSO only on an annual basis. Net emigration in the year to April 2011 was 34,100, similar to the level in 2010. However, gross emigration in the year to 2011 was 76,400, an increase of almost 11,000 on the previous 12 months. Almost half of these were non-Irish nationals, reflecting the diversity of our population and labour force in recent years.

Net migration has always been a characteristic of Ireland's labour force. Movements reflect the state of the Irish labour market and the availability of job opportunities. The past three years have seen a major loss of employment which has been reflected in rising outflows and falling inward movements.

The slowdown and reversal of the employment trends in the course of 2011 is encouraging. However, the recovery is fragile. This is why the Government has set economic recovery and job creation at the heart of its work programme. This drives the work of my Department and other key Departments, as we seek to provide a better future for our young people and our society.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: It would appear from the figures given by the Minister, in which he takes a great deal of satisfaction, that fewer people are in employment now than when the Government introduced its jobs initiative. When the initiative was introduced the rate of unemployment stood at 14.2% while now it stands at 14.4%.

What percentage of those on the live register have been unemployed for more than a year? What percentage of the total unemployment figure comprises the under-25 age group?

Deputy Richard Bruton: With respect, the Deputy's original question related to the number of people at work and that is the data with which I provided him. I do not have to hand the percentages he is seeking on those out of work.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Will the Minister make an educated guess as to the figures?

Deputy Richard Bruton: I do not regard these figures as a cause for great adulation. However, in the past three years when the Deputy's party was in government, 350,000 jobs were lost. While the small increase of 17,000 jobs in the last quarter does not represent a source of great joy, it shows the labour market is stabilising. I am also encouraged by growth trends in exports and manufacturing output and other significant indicators of a pick-up. This is a fragile recovery and more will have to be done to bolster our efforts in this area.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: Will the Minister accept his jobs initiative has failed? In net terms, no new jobs have been created while the unemployment rate has gone up. Will the Minister agree it is not too far off the mark to say one in two on the live register has been unemployed for more than 12 months? Am I far off the mark saying youth unemployment now stands at over 30%? Will the Minister agree every projected rate for economic growth over the next two years will still be insufficient in creating more employment?

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Deputy is not correct as most forecasters are predicting a turnaround in employment. Growth projections are fragile and are very uncertain. The job trends are not evidence that the jobs initiative is not working. Up to 17,100 extra people are at work at the end of September compared to the end of June. The jobs initiative began in July, so the employment trends do not prove it has been a failure.

The jobs initiative includes various schemes, such as Jobstart, involving 2,000 people, and Springboard, with 6,000 in education projects, which are recording successes.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: They are not jobs, however.

Deputy Richard Bruton: All I am giving the Deputy is what he asked for in his question. I am not trying to be smart in pretending there are successes through some subterfuge. These figures are signs of a fragile recovery and need to be built on.

Job Protection

2. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the contact he has had with the management and staff of Aviva Ireland; if it is his priority to retain these jobs in the economy here. [28928/11]

Deputy Richard Bruton: Aviva is undertaking a review of its operations in response to a significant reduction in demand for insurance and pensions products. Aviva has found it necessary to review its Irish operations to ensure its cost base is in line with domestic demand to ensure sustainability.

Industry figures show that motor and home insurance has dropped by over 20% in the past two years. Also, life assurance and pensions have dropped by over 30% due to concerns over long-term savings, people cancelling or reducing pension policies. This has impacted greatly on Aviva’s operations in Ireland. The fall in the Irish market has led to the present restructuring review which the company’s European management is leading.

Aviva has been undertaking major restructuring across all of its markets. In recent years, Aviva staff numbers in the UK have dropped from 33,000 to 20,000 and the company’s total workforce has dropped from 56,000 to 36,000.

I have met with Aviva’s chief executive officer for its worldwide operations, its European director as well as the chief executive officer of Aviva Ireland. The meeting was part of an ongoing process of contact between senior Aviva management and myself. I expressed the Government’s concern about the impact on employment and urged the company to seek solutions that minimised the impact on jobs. I also offered it the support of my Department’s agencies.

The company briefed me on the ongoing review of the Irish business and the challenges and opportunities that present themselves in the light of market conditions here and organisational changes across Aviva Europe. The company confirmed Aviva remains committed to the Irish market and would seek to minimise the impact on jobs as a result of the review. It also reiterated that no final decisions had yet been arrived at.

IDA Ireland is in contact with the company at both corporate and local level with the intention of mitigating the impact of any potential negative outcomes following the review. IDA Ireland is also in dialogue with the company concerning potential future opportunities around the company’s significant international business.

I will continue to keep in close contact with the company as this review progresses.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Morale is very low among Aviva staff who have been left in a financial and economic limbo. UNITE, the trade union, contacted Aviva management over a week ago but still has had no return contact. Employees are still awaiting the publication of the company's review. Will the Minister agree it is important management consults fully with the employees as soon as possible to let them know what will happen to the company's Irish operations?

It is important to be proactive in this matter. There is no point shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. Has the Minister considered working with Aviva to address other costs which negatively affect the company such as upward only rents and rates? The Aviva Stadium is paid for by the Irish end of the company's operation when it is creating marketing benefits for Aviva Europe. Can Aviva Europe take on some of the stadium's costs?

Deputy Richard Bruton: I understand and appreciate the anxiety of the company's staff. There has been much media speculation about this matter, which is one of great concern. I urge the company to consult with its staff. The review process is not yet complete according to my clear understanding from the company, but I see no reason for not engaging with staff.

We are taking a proactive approach to this matter and cost issues relating to property have been brought to our attention. In this respect, the IDA will assist the company in any way it can. We will seek the best outcome, but this is a difficult time for the company and its market has soured.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I seek clarification on the upward-only rent reviews in which the company is engaged. I do not want to be defeatist, as these jobs can be saved even at this point in time. Given the example of Dell, has the Minister a plan B for these workers and has he consulted the European Global Fund, EGF, in any preparatory sense?

Deputy Richard Bruton: An application to the EGF would be premature at this stage. It depends on the content of any restructuring. For the fund to be involved, outsourcing beyond the EU would be required.

I will not discuss a commercially sensitive matter, but the company has alerted us to some cost issues. We are attempting to assist it in that regard. This matter is not related to the upward-only rent review legislation on which the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter, is working.

Job Creation

3. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation his strategy for job creation in County Waterford in view of the 575 job losses announced at the Talk Talk call centre in the city and almost 3,000 redundancies in the city in the past four years; if he will establish a dedicated task force to address Waterford's local economy; the estimated time frame for the establishment of such a task force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24431/11]

Deputy Richard Bruton: As the Deputy is aware, I held a series of meetings with company management, workers, public representatives and business following the TalkTalk closure announcement. The message from local stakeholders was clear, in that County Waterford had not benefited from advances in the good times and had been badly affected in the more difficult times of late. On foot of that I instructed my agencies to put together an action plan for the south-east region to assess its strengths and weaknesses, identify sectoral opportunities, carry out an audit of activities and structures of the agencies and assess the scope for collaborative initiatives with local bodies.

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It is clear that the region, despite all of its strengths, has not been as successful as we would all want. Job losses and unemployment levels are above average. Both short-term and long-term action is necessary.

The agencies have reported back and I am considering their responses with a view to introducing actions to address the specific employment problems affecting the south east. This approach is more appropriate than establishing a task force, given the timeframe of the site closure, the need for swift action and the fact that a large amount of analysis has been undertaken in the past.

I am determined to give Waterford the priority it correctly deserves. We need to take a hard look at this to see how we can better support enterprise in the south east and set out the actions we can take in the near and longer terms. As the various reports from the State agencies include commercially sensitive information, I will not be able to publish them as received. However, it is my intention to make known the additional activities and plans for enterprise support in the near future.

I acknowledge the support of Cabinet colleagues, in particular the Ministers for Social Protection and Education and Skills who responded immediately. FÁS and the Department of Social Protection's staff immediately engaged with TalkTalk workers. The Minister for Education and Skills indicated that work on the proposal for a technological university, which is to be explored as part of the programme for Government, is being accelerated. Clear criteria will be developed for that opportunity, which arose in discussions.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

The Minister for Education and Skills has submitted an application under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, EGAF, to assist workers who lost their jobs.

While it is clear that Ireland is operating in a difficult economic environment, there are still investment opportunities in global markets and the IDA will continue to compete vigorously for projects for Ireland and the south east. In particular, the IDA has begun marketing the TalkTalk facility and the skill sets of the workers internationally.

Deputy John Halligan: As the Minister is aware, the 575 jobs are gone. Of the workers and their families I spoke with last week, 12 people had found new employment.

I am not levelling direct criticism at the Minister. He is relatively new in the job and he went to County Waterford and did his best. This debate will be broadcast on WLR FM shortly. I do not hesitate to state that there is no criticism of the Minister, but there appears to be an abysmal failure on the part of the job creation agencies in Waterford. In particular, the IDA has been unable to deliver substantial or sustainable jobs to Waterford. The statistics laid before the House last year say it all. Of the 190 prospective investors that visited Ireland last year, only three were brought to Waterford by the IDA. This was in spite of the IDA's considerable budget. The south east is losing more jobs than it is creating. This situation must be examined.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: A question, please.

Deputy John Halligan: I have two questions. I welcome that there will be an action plan, but I would like to see a more detailed analysis of it. I hope it will involve business people, job agencies and trade unions. When will the action plan be ready to be laid before the House or the relevant people in Waterford?

My second question is on a broader issue. It appears that many companies, even though they are in profit, are leaving the State to make further profits. TalkTalk is an example. It made €160 million in profit. TEVA Pharmaceuticals made a profit of €600 million in the six months prior to the day it announced it would let 300 people go.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will revert to the Deputy.

Deputy John Halligan: We give companies finance to start off. Can anything be done to stop those that are making profits from leaving the State for no reason and making people redundant?

Deputy Richard Bruton: I thank the Deputy for his comments. I have found the support of public representatives — Deputies Coffey, Conway, Deasy and Halligan — council members and the general business community helpful in this process.

Deputy Halligan asked a number of questions. I am concerned about the statistics on the performance of IDA site visits. It would be appropriate to consider designating Waterford in the way Limerick was designated, as that brought advantages. I hope to introduce proposals in the near future. I will introduce actions to be taken rather than discussions to be held with different interests. I hope some of those actions will involve collaboration with other groups in the region that could assist.

The wider question on companies moving is a difficult one. Regarding the IDA's performance, there is a turnaround. Over time, lower skilled positions have tended to move out. For Ireland to remain strong, we must add new skills, research and development and product lines. In this way, we will remain relevant and competitive for companies. We cannot stop movement or outsourcing, as we live in a global economy. We must seek to position ourselves to be competitive. Overseas companies drive significant levels of dynamic development in Ireland. We need their investment and we must keep abreast of trends to take maximum advantage.

Deputy John Halligan: I welcome the Minister's action plan, but it must be seen. Time is not on Waterford's side. Given the substantial job losses in recent years, we need an action plan now. It can be a task force or an action plan — I am not tied to either — but it must show the thousands of unemployed people in Waterford that there is some hope for the future.

Another blow this past week saw the VEC relocated to County Wexford because of cronyism.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is a different issue.

Deputy John Halligan: That move would have sat well with the previous Government. It was disgraceful.

Deputy Richard Bruton: There must be balance in this debate. Yesterday, I visited Genzyme, which is investing €150 million in an incredible state-of-the-art plant. It is being regarded by the parent company taking it over as a jewel in its crown, to use the CEO's words. The mayor, Councillor Pat Hayes, was very clear that Waterford is very much open for business and wants to see opportunities developed. The actions I will take will be to try to build on the strengths of Waterford. It is easy to be negative about what is happening in Waterford but really good things are also happening there and we need to emphasise these also.

Industrial Development

4. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation his plans to introduce the home to export programme, local trade and investment teams to develop better

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trading relationships with emerging economies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28952/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Sean Sherlock): The programme for Government sets out clearly that Ireland's economic recovery must be export-led and commits us to achieving the maximum growth in exports. Enterprise Ireland will spearhead this work.

A potential exporters' unit is currently being operationalised in Enterprise Ireland. It will offer a new service delivery and model of engagement for new and existing client companies. Along with the provision of business-related toolkits, including export toolkits which will be delivered in part on-line, the division will provide tailored export capability building workshops, modules and programmes for companies entering new markets as well as access to mentors. A new series of guides to markets is also being introduced with a focus on practical information aimed at new exporters. This will be available even to companies who do not meet Enterprise Ireland's normal employment test of having at least ten employees. The intention is to widen the range of companies which can graduate to other established programmes focussed on exporting opportunities.

Such programmes are tailored to a company's stage of export development. They include the international selling programme and the excel at export selling workshop series as well as first flight workshops and mentor services. As well as training programmes, Enterprise Ireland helps companies retain the services of industry experts to support market expansion and development. The going global fund also supports established but domestically-focussed companies to explore opportunities on the international market. Through its client knowledge services offer, Enterprise Ireland allows client companies and potential exporters access to a comprehensive library of sector and market intelligence and information on doing business overseas. Enterprise Ireland has also developed detailed third-party legal and tax contacts in priority markets which can be accessed by new exporters, as well as organising and engaging business networks in all markets wherever possible. It recently launched the second call of its very successful graduates 4 international growth programme.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. I am very interested in what is happening in Enterprise Ireland. The reason I raised the question is that the programme for Government contains a number of specific commitments to improve our export performance with particular reference to the BRIC countries, such as the establishment of an export trade council, a home to export programme, a source Ireland protocol, and local trade and investment teams interacting with people in the BRIC countries to expand our export footprint there. Perhaps this has more to do with the Minister for Finance, but there is also a specific commitment in the programme for Government to exempt service companies from value added tax if they export more than 90% of what they produce. Where are we with regard to these specific commitments in the programme for Government?

Deputy Sean Sherlock: Enterprise Ireland has a dedicated high growth markets unit in Dublin to provide further assistance to client companies doing business in a range of countries including Brazil, Russia, India and China. Trade missions support this work. Under the programme for Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has taken particular responsibility for trade promotion. This means the diplomatic service is fully engaged in promoting trade and plans have been developed for each of Ireland's target markets. The Tánaiste chairs the new export council which brings together the focus of this work.

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation is engaged in developing trading opportunities in emerging economies through the negotiation of free-trade agreements between the EU and third countries and improved opportunities for exporters can also emerge from reductions in tariff and non-tariff barriers through trade and regulatory discussions between the EU and China, Russia and Brazil.

To answer the question, it is an ongoing process and one must speak to the figures. Between 2004 and 2010, merchandise exports from Ireland to Brazil, Russia, India and China rose by approximately 122% and in the same period services exports to those countries rose by 688%. Another key example of this success is the fact that Ireland now has a significant trade surplus with China, which is a dramatic turnaround from the position only four years previously when we had a deficit of approximately €2.9 billion.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I thank the Minister of State for acknowledging the success we enjoyed as a country during the administration of the previous much maligned Government with regard to building up trade with the BRIC countries.

The latest figures available to me for July — the Minister of State may have more recent figures — show exports were worth just over €7 billion which is a decrease of 10% compared with the same month last year. When adjusted for seasonal factors, exports in July were down 12% from June. In addition to this imports increased which narrowed our trade surplus. Is the Minister of State concerned about this? Is it just a blip or has the situation turned around?

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I understand that for the year to date exports have increased by approximately 6%—

Deputy Willie O’Dea: There was a dramatic drop in July.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: The overall year to date figures show an increase from last year and exports from indigenous industries have increased by approximately 10%. The omens are good on the export side. The creation of the export trade council, which arises from the trade, tourism and investment strategy, signals a clear intention by the Government, as per the programme for Government, to drive exports even further in the countries I mentioned earlier. The new council’s membership includes the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Leo Varadkar, and the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Jan O’Sullivan, and senior representatives from the relevant agencies and Departments. This derives from a previous policy which was borne out of common sense and will continue. There is greater emphasis, and the figures bear this out, to drive exports in the so-called BRIC countries.

Public Procurement

5. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the steps he has taken to reform the public procurement process in order to allow Irish business a better opportunity at successfully applying for public contracts. [28929/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Perry): Last July, the Minister, Deputy Bruton, established a steering group on SME access to public procurement, to examine what more can be done to improve SME participation in tendering for public contracts. The steering group comprises the key players in the public procurement arena, including the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the National Procurement Service, Enterprise Ireland, InterTradeIreland, and the Department. It is tasked with identi-

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fyng the failings in the current system and driving changes that will further open up the process and provide a level playing field for SMEs.

The group is examining concerns from the SME sector which points out the procurement process has been shown to impose unnecessary or disproportionate obligations on tendering companies that can see them fail at the first hurdle, when a more pragmatic approach on the part of the contracting authority might allow an experienced company to tender. Sometimes the tendering companies are disqualified on the basis of a very rigid application of criteria, with little hope of having the buyer's decision overturned. Indeed, no formal appeals mechanism is in place in the public procurement system, although this is now being addressed.

The high level group on business regulation, which I chair, has also been examining barriers — of which there are many — to participation by SMEs in public procurement and has provided direct input from the SME sector to the deliberations of the steering group.

On receipt of the steering group's initial report, the Minister, Deputy Bruton, asked my officials to develop a number of actions for implementation which could improve SME access to procurement in the short term. These include the identification of specific areas in the public procurement guidelines which continue to present difficulties for SMEs, the strengthening of Enterprise Ireland's engagement with procuring authorities, and the identification of areas where collaboration between tier 1 principal contractors and pre-qualified tier 2 SMEs could be developed in the procurement process.

Initiatives already in place to help SMEs get more opportunities in public procurement include guidelines from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for procurement with practical suggestions and a ten step guide, a dedicated procurement team in Enterprise Ireland, the website *www.procurement.ie* and a standardised suite of procurement documents. I hope these allay concerns.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: It is often stated the Government does not create jobs. However, it does, and €16 billion worth of public contracts in the previous year created tens of thousands of jobs in the market.

This had a multiplier effect of approximately one to three. Some 25% of State contracts are awarded to small and medium enterprises whereas the European average is 38%. With all due respects to the Minister of State, I heard much about the existing problems, the reasons for them and the steps that are to be taken to ameliorate them, including trading supports. Will he consider creating a key performance indicator for public procurement organisations to ensure that 40% of all contracts are awarded to small and medium business?

Deputy John Perry: In 2008 a total of 70% of Irish public procurement contracts were awarded to foreign companies. A significant number of contracts which are below the EU threshold are advertised at national level and notice of contracts worth €25,000 or more are placed on the Government's e-tender website. A multiple of further contracts worth less than €25,000 are advertised more locally and this provides opportunities for small and medium enterprises. I acknowledge the significant difficulties. A majority of contracts are in the health sector.

I refer to the issue of opening up access to contracts to small companies. Of the total of 65,000 companies registered on the e-tender portal, 75% are Irish small and medium enterprises. The perception is that they are not winning contracts and much needs to be done to open up access to the contracts worth €15 billion and to allow sub-contractors to qualify. It is to be hoped that the criteria which includes a pre-qualification of having done work with the main supplier can be removed. There are significant opportunities for small and medium business. The Minister,

Deputy Bruton, is working closely on this issue of opening up opportunities to enable the participation of small companies.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The EU has stated that 25% of public procurement contracts should be awarded to small Irish business with 38% being the EU average. In the North of Ireland, Conor Murphy, MLA, stipulated that a certain number of local apprentices should be employed on such contracts and in Scotland it is stipulated that a certain amount of the contract must be sub-contracted to social enterprise. It is in the gift of the Government to decide that a certain percentage of contracts are given to SMEs. Since our percentage figure is so low as against the European average of 38%, the Government should stipulate that 40% of all public procurement contracts go to SMEs.

Deputy John Perry: Deputy Tóibín is correct. Many issues will have to be dealt with such as, risk aversion of contracting bodies, buyers committed to procurement processes, focus on the lowest cost and the long-term value, overly restrictive pre-qualifying criteria, no policing of guidelines and further training requirement for procurement officers. The Government is aware of the issues that have prevented that important EU average figure being achieved and is working decisively to address the issue. I chair the high level group on business regulation and the Minister, Deputy Bruton, has a task force working on reducing the restrictions. I assure the Deputy there will be dramatic changes and his concerns will be taken on board.

Other Questions

Ministerial Travel

6. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of civil servants or other staff from his Department who accompanied him on his recent trade mission to the United States; the number of civil servants from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who accompanied him on this mission; the cost of the mission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28837/11]

Deputy Richard Bruton: On my recent trade mission to the south eastern states of the USA, involving a detailed programme of events in Atlanta, Georgia, Miami, Florida and Raleigh and Charlotte, both in North Carolina, I was accompanied by my private secretary and by one other official from my Department who has responsibility for trade matters. The net cost of this mission was approximately €49,000 and this was borne by Enterprise Ireland. No civil servants from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade travelled from Ireland but the Atlanta-based Irish Consul General accompanied me to several of the events and meetings.

The trade mission involved over 60 Irish companies who are clients of Enterprise Ireland and its aim was to widen the export footprint of Irish exporters by exploring new opportunities in these fast growing south eastern states. As the United States is already one of Ireland's most important trading partners and the largest export market for Irish goods, sustaining export growth there is essential in the continuation of our drive towards export-led growth.

The Government is keen to build on our existing export successes on both the east and west coasts of the US and to pursue further export gains that can be achieved by breaking new ground in other parts of that country. The mission was about showcasing Irish products and services to new areas of the USA.

In the context of this mission, I also met, in association with IDA Ireland, senior representatives of Bank of America to discuss issues arising from their plans for a withdrawal from the

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Irish and UK credit card market which has implications for the employment of their existing staff here. In addition, I also pursued other foreign direct investment prospects on behalf of IDA Ireland and I also facilitated a Bord Bia food promotion initiative.

As those states are home to institutions and colleges with a renowned reputation for scientific research, especially the North Carolina research triangle, I also facilitated contacts for Science Foundation Ireland and for some Irish companies and educational bodies which were developing their relationships with relevant contacts there.

Ministerial-led trade missions are an integral part of this Department's work to develop and expand Ireland's exports to existing and new markets abroad. It has been the experience of my Department and of the companies participating in such missions, that the presence of a Minister enhances the opportunities for the companies involved and achieves a higher level of recognition and access for companies to the various target markets.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I thank the Minister for his reply and I am sure he works very hard. The cost of these trade missions should be kept to a minimum but I must question why no official from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade accompanied the Minister. As he said in a response to an earlier question, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is central to trade promotion. Is this a form of branding exercise? How many civil servants have been transferred from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to the Minister's Department to deal with trade? Has the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade any significant input into such trade missions or is this work still firmly in the grasp of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation?

Deputy Richard Bruton: On the contrary. The south eastern states of the United States have been designated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as a key region for trade opportunities. The Department opened the first consular office in Georgia since 1933. The office supported me throughout the entire visit. The consul general is a very talented and expert person. We do not need to bring numbers in order to make an impact. Our approach is to ensure that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has a presence on the ground and its representatives do other work besides trade promotion, although this is regarded as a primary task. I was impressed by the number of contacts with business and political contacts that have been established by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through its consular office. We built on this work as this is a collaborative process. One does not need to have a large staff complement and a wide-ranging entourage to make an impact.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I have never been in favour of big entourages. I asked the Minister how many officials have been seconded to his Department from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to deal with trade. The Government made a specific commitment that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade would be centrally involved in the promotion of foreign trade. How is this reflected in the deployment of officials in both Departments?

Deputy Richard Bruton: That is the subject of a later question and I do not wish to upstage the Member who tabled it. In answer to the Deputy's query, it is a small number of officials. Enterprise Ireland undertakes much of the planning of these trade missions by organising an array of companies which are relevant to the development of trade opportunities in these target markets. We work with the diplomatic representation and this is how the collaborative process evolves. This is not a competition between my Department and the Tánaiste's Department. The number of staff seconded is small but this reflects the fact that much of the spade work is done by Enterprise Ireland with regard to companies with relevant contacts and by the locally-based officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Business Supports

7. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation if he will develop financial supports to businesses to encourage them to keep staff gainfully employed instead of having to let them go. [28881/11]

Deputy Richard Bruton: Job creation is central to our economic recovery and the programme for Government has job creation at its core. The role of my Department is to ensure that we have the right policies in place that will support and grow our enterprise base in order to facilitate both job creation and job retention. On a national basis, the jobs initiative announced on 10 May focuses our limited resources on measures that offer the greatest potential for expansion and employment creation in the domestic economy. There are 200,000 companies employing up to 900,000 people in the domestic economy and our job is to kick-start the initiative there because the sector is the backbone of the domestic economy. Initiatives such as the reduction in the VAT rate and the reduction in the low rate of employers' PRSI were designed to keep people gainfully employed. During the most acute phase of the recent recession, grants were offered to exporting companies to help them adapt to the difficult conditions. Some companies have used part-time working as a way of adapting to temporary falls in demand and receive support from the Department of Social Protection.

Very many of the programmes operated by the Department's agencies are designed to help businesses develop their product range, open up new markets or improve their skills and processes in order to keep people in employment. For example, Enterprise Ireland provides a range of supports to assist companies, especially SMEs, to meet the challenges of exploiting new business opportunities, thus sustaining jobs. These include research and development grants; programmes to improve productivity and processes; management development and mentoring; and supports to enter new export markets. The Minister's recent trip was all about exploring the huge potential in that regard.

The Government's work in restructuring the banks to create two pillar banks capable of lending into the domestic economy is central to our strategy for job protection. The Government has recognised that there still is market failure in providing finance to SMEs and we are working on the early introduction of a temporary partial loan guarantee scheme which will help.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: On a weekly basis, small businesses are going out of business and the jobs lost weekly are almost equivalent to the number of jobs lost in TalkTalk. This is a silent annihilation of businesses and the jobs involved. Each time a business closes and a person goes on to the live register, it costs the State €20,000. If we remove a person from the live register, there is a saving of approximately €13,000. Germany and other countries have a subsidy system whereby the Government gives the business a subsidy to employ an individual, perhaps on a short week or for three days a week. Can our Government not do something similar? If, for example, €500 million was spent over three years on such a programme, this would save the State €500 million net, because many of those people would not be going on to social welfare. This would also give the State the opportunity to provide training and up-skilling for these individuals on the two days they are not working.

Deputy John Perry: The Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Burton, has introduced an internship programme which has been very effective as can be seen by looking at the uptake and the opportunity provided by the scheme for SMEs. The 200,000 small companies that employ 900,000 people are the backbone of our economy. We must recognise the services and manufacturing sectors and we have a deep understanding, respect and concern for them and will provide a service to them as they form a critical mass for the economy. I have spoken to several employers on the issue of the internship programme and I know that some changes will

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be made that will encourage a greater retention of staff beyond the nine-month period. The real job of government is job retention and to keep every business possible open.

The micro-finance fund to be introduced by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, will be critical, as will the partial loan guarantee and the ring-fencing of €20 billion for the two banks to be lent to SMEs over the next three years. Our job is to ensure access to credit. However, a question that must be taken into account is whether companies are viable. Banks will not give money to companies that are no longer viable. Our job is to ensure confidence and credit in the economy. We have the highest rate of savings ever and must ask people to “Buy for Ireland” and encourage them to spend locally, because banks will not give money to a company that is not viable.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Government has told the banks to deleverage €70 billion and it has told them to give €6 billion to small businesses. The two objectives are mutually exclusive and cannot be achieved at the same time. With regard to the national internship programme and unemployment, we have almost 500,000 people on social welfare, but only 5,000 positions are being provided on the national internship programme. If the problem is as big as Kildare Street, the solution is the same size as this glass. The mismatch between the scale of the problem and the solutions attempted by the Government are incomprehensible. There is no match between the problem and the solution when there are only 5,000 internship places for 500,000 unemployed.

Deputy John Perry: I come from a business background where it is said: “No problem, no business.” There will always be problems, even if the Deputy assumes it is as easy as he assumes it is to solve the problem. The Government has clearly come up with a radical plan to encourage business people to hold onto staff. It has done the same with regard to the banking issue, through placing John Trethowan in charge of the credit review office. It has also ensured that the two pillar banks will be observed over the next three years so that the €20 billion that has been ring-fenced for SMEs will be dispensed. We also have the partial loan guarantees. I am on the ground with regard to business and it is not as simple as the Deputy thinks it is to solve the problems.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The credit review office has only dealt with 30 cases this year.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We must move on.

Deputy John Perry: It is not a simple issue. Deputy Burton has initiated a very good internship programme and I guarantee there will be a lot more placements on it.

Job Creation

8. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation if he has had any involvement in the establishment of the New Era in view of its job creation remit; the role he will take when the agency is established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28842/11]

Deputy Sean Sherlock: On 29 September last, the establishment of NewERA was announced by the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Minister of State Fergus O’Dowd, who has special responsibility for NewERA. The Government took the decision to establish NewERA to reform the manner in which Government manages its shareholding in the semi-State companies. It is one of the key commitments in the programme for Government and is central to our plans for investment.

NewERA will initially be established on a non-statutory basis as a shareholder executive within the NTMA. It will have responsibility for reviewing capital investment plans of the commercial semi-State companies from a shareholder perspective and will identify possible synergies between investment programmes of different State companies. The companies in question are the ESB, Bord Gáis, EirGrid, Bord na Móna and Coillte.

The decision to establish NewERA is an important element in the Government's strategy to create jobs and promote economic growth. The operation of NewERA will be overseen by the Cabinet committee on economic infrastructure, of which the Minister, Deputy Bruton, is a member.

The Government is doing everything it can to create jobs and improve Irish infrastructure. Part of this is to ensure that critical infrastructure is put in place to allow enterprise to grow now and in the future and take advantage of the opportunities which arise in traditional and emerging sectors.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I deduce from the Minister of State's response that the most extraordinary situation now exists and that something which is central to the Government's job creation programme will only involve the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in a peripheral way. He will be a member of the Cabinet sub-committee which will discuss these issues in a general way and sign off on them, but the other Ministers mentioned are the ones who will be centrally involved. I find this very strange, but perhaps the Minister of State can allay my fears.

When NewERA was first mooted by the Fine Gael Party, the target was 105,000 jobs. Does that remain the target or has the target moved? Is there any target now.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: The fact that Deputy Fergus O'Dowd is the Minister of State with responsibility for NewERA is incidental in terms of this being a whole Government approach to the issue. We should not underestimate the fact that the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, is on the Cabinet sub-committee. There is a corporate view at Government level between the two parties of Government of the need to ensure we have an entity that will carry out a corporate governance function from a shareholder perspective and that will report to the relevant Ministers and be overseen by the Cabinet committee on economic infrastructure. The bottom line is that it is a whole of Government approach. Through NewERA, the Government is taking control of the infrastructure as per the semi-State companies involved.

Regarding the second part of the question on the jobs target, the key emphasis is to ensure we get it up and running. We must get the key strategic infrastructure fund in place through the NPRF and we must become more efficient in terms of how we run these companies. Infrastructure is the key at this point.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I am glad the Minister of State has confirmed that the jobs target has disappeared. When this programme was first mooted in November 2009, the proposed expenditure was €18.2 billion. It subsequently dropped to €7 billion and it is now at €2 billion or 10% of what it originally was. The funding for this appears to come from the sale of strategic State assets. The troika has not yet given permission to invest the proceeds in that way. Why was there a public announcement of NewERA, with expenditure incurred in setting it up and allocating staff, when there is no guarantee that the body will be able to spend any money arising from the sale of State assets?

Deputy Sean Sherlock: There is a commitment in line with obligations to the troika in respect of non-strategic State assets. Deputy O'Dea is aware of why we are in that position. The key issue is that, following the appropriate legislative changes, resources will be channelled from

[Deputy Sean Sherlock.]

the NPRF to productive investment. We are talking about productive investment in the Irish economy. I realise there may not be a specific target of a number of jobs. Although one of the parties in government set out a specific target as part of its manifesto, there is a programme for Government and a clear convergence in terms of what both parties are trying to achieve. We must be mindful of targets and ensure we have an efficient organisation in NewERA to manage infrastructure and investment in partnership with the NPRF, using the strategic infrastructure fund, which will be the forerunner to the strategic infrastructure bank.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Many of us on this side of the House believe that the move to sell State assets is a shameful betrayal of the public interest. However, given that the Government and the troika are determined to go through with it, can the Minister of State be more specific about the jobs created from this process? From the answer to Deputy O’Dea, should I take it that we do not know many jobs we will create, what projects we will engage in and the funds available to NewERA until the troika gives us permission and gives us the answers to these questions? Can the Minister of State be more specific on his role in deciding the projects, the amount available for the projects, and the number of jobs created?

Deputy Sean Sherlock: Discussions with the troika are ongoing this week in respect of the issue. We are ensuring that we can leverage State assets to create jobs. Deputy Boyd Barrett has a political philosophical view on selling State assets that must be respected but there is a process of engagement with the troika in which commitments are given by this Government, which is sovereign. We are not going to disavow those commitments but, as a Government, we are in the business of seeking to ensure we can get out of this economic morass. The sale of State assets is one mechanism by which we can do this. We want to create an efficient tool called NewERA so we can ensure that we can leverage the assets to create jobs. I cannot give an exact answer of pounds, shillings and pence for the number of jobs we can create.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: The Minister of State should guess.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: The assets will be used in a way that seeks to leverage them to create jobs and we have not maximised the potential of those State assets heretofore.

Job Losses

9. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the extent, if any, to which he has examined possible reasons for job relocation from this jurisdiction to other areas in Europe and around the globe in respect of high, medium and low skilled employment over the past six years to date; if any evaluation has been done regarding the number of enterprises in each of the aforementioned categories in order to determine the main reason for such a move; his plans or proposals to address any issue arising in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28852/11]

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he has studied the reasons for relocation from this jurisdiction and for whatever reason over the past five years; the degree to which specific steps can be taken to address such issues with a view to minimising any such relocations in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29122/11]

Deputy Richard Bruton: I propose to take Questions Nos. 9 and 88 together.

There are many differing and complex factors that can influence a firm’s decision to relocate in today’s modern globalised economic environment. Companies adjust their plant and utilis-

ation strategies to address matters such as accessing new markets, moving production nearer to customers, meeting firm or market specific customer relationship issues, in addition to business takeovers and consolidations.

Recent jobs losses that have occurred in the FDI sector in Ireland are largely the result of the continuing restructuring process that is ongoing in Ireland and other developed economies, driven by competitive pressures and technological change. This results in jobs at the lower end of the value added scale being either phased out completely or relocated to lower cost locations.

An analysis of closures in the IDA portfolio of companies over the period 2005-10 shows that the majority of the closures were in areas such as metals and engineering, print and packaging, textiles, and plastics and rubber. The remainder of closures were spread across more vulnerable parts of sub-sectors that are growing overall, such as ICT, international services and chemicals. In many instances, it is not possible to distinguish between jobs that are made redundant as a result of technological change and those that relocate to lower cost locations.

The IDA strategy, Horizon 2020, is focused on winning as many new jobs as possible each year and giving equal priority to maintaining existing jobs. On a daily basis, the IDA is working with its clients, making every effort to retain their operations in Ireland and minimising job losses. The IDA continues to play a key role in both encouraging and assisting its client companies to move up the value chain in terms of carrying out higher skilled operations and expanding their presence in Ireland. The IDA's aim is to retain existing clients, improve the quality of employment opportunities in Ireland and increase the positive economic impact.

The IDA actively encourages its clients to engage in transformation initiatives, and is assisting them in programmes to improve company-wide competitiveness, enhance the use of new technologies, grow the skills of the business, engage in research, development and innovation, develop new business processes and make company operations more energy efficient.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

For much of the last decade, company relocation has been positive overall for Ireland. The IDA has continued to attract and retain high value investments from leading global corporations. The combined influence of Ireland's improving competitiveness, our commitment to maintaining our 12.5% corporate tax rate, the development of our national infrastructure, the Government's investment in science, technology and innovation, and our strong skills base has been instrumental in this regard, and will continue to attract and increase the level of inward investment in Ireland. To date in 2011, the IDA has announced investment decisions which will create over 4,500 jobs in the Irish economy as the investments come on stream.

IDA's focus will continue to be on high end manufacturing, global services and RD&I across a wide range of sectors. In particular ICT, digital media, international financial services, internationally traded services, life sciences and clean tech are poised for further growth.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Over the past five years or more, there has been a steady outflow of jobs to other jurisdictions for a variety of reasons. Some of these are jurisdictions within the EU, some are outside. Has a stringent and forensic evaluation of the causes given for the suppression or relocation of such jobs been carried out? Has the Department engaged with the firms concerned with a view to identification of those issues? To what extent has a plan been put in place to address the issues arising therefrom? For example, the case of Jacob's Biscuits comes to mind. The firm relocated from this jurisdiction to an adjoining jurisdiction, where the costs should not be all that much greater. Given the need to encompass within our economy all levels of skills and accommodate them within the labour force, can the Minister indicate whether his Department will lead the campaign to identify the issues with a view to addressing them in the short term?

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Deputy is right, there is always a careful analysis of each closure, and the IDA seeks to work with companies to prevent that where possible. In many of these cases, however, the cost competitiveness comparisons are significant. This applies even to the UK. Over recent years there have been adverse cost comparisons between some Irish locations and some UK locations. Over the last two years there has been a significant improvement in unit wage costs in Ireland compared to other countries, and we are seeing developments and advantages due to this. Companies that were struggling are doing better as a result.

There is a range of issues here, as I said in my reply to the question. It is never one issue. Some companies have located service centres here, which will survive if they become more sophisticated over time, add value and become more integral to their companies. If they are allowed to become slightly marginalised from the central operations of the company they are vulnerable, and small cost differences can then undermine them. That is one analysis. However, the reason I pointed to the programmes run by the IDA is that they are built on that analysis. It is the application of new technologies, the introduction and upgrading of skills, investment in research and development, examination of the business process, and deeper involvement in the business — for example, if a centre is providing customer support, it could move to other areas of involvement with the business — that copperfasten the survival of businesses.

Deputy Mick Wallace: Would the Minister agree that for a long time the Government has concentrated on foreign direct investment? It is great that we have foreign investment here; unfortunately, however, there is always a temptation for such companies to move to countries where their costs are lower. For too long, we have not concentrated enough on indigenous industry. This is a major problem for us. In Wexford, where 20,000 people are already unemployed, 80 jobs have been lost at Sola ADC Lenses. I have not seen much effort being put into the creation of indigenous industry in the Wexford area and in Ireland generally. This is a major problem. It would be a feather in the cap of this Government if it changed track and put far more resources and effort into the development of indigenous industry.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I still have a problem — as I am sure the Minister has — with some of the relocations. For whatever reason, companies have decided to move to other jurisdictions. How can we address those issues? For example, is it a question of costs, such as energy costs? If it is something else, such as access to markets, what can be done to address that in the short term? Now is when we need do this.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I do not want to be smart, but each case is different. For example, the work being done by TalkTalk, which is very much in the news, had dropped by something like 40% within the group. As a result, that fairly narrow range of services was no longer required, and the centre moved to another location because business, generally, was down. In other cases, one can seek to broaden the base of the company to future-proof it against changes. There is no single explanation that can apply in all cases. The challenge for the IDA is to work with companies. It is no secret that the IDA was engaging with TalkTalk with the aim of implementing training programmes to strengthen its base. We need to examine these issues continually.

To comment on Deputy Wallace's point, it is not an either-or situation. However, I accept his point that we have failed to develop a strong indigenous engine of growth. This is something we need to consider seriously. It is true that Enterprise Ireland has been successful with high-potential start-up companies, of which there are 80 this year. These are very dynamic companies. However, we do not yet seem to be able to increase the size of them to the kind of scale to which other countries have built them. We need to consider the obstacles to that. Are they

policy obstacles, or is there an issue with the way in which we fund companies? We need to think hard about that.

In addition, we have not penetrated sufficiently broad export markets with our indigenous companies, which have tended to stay within a narrow geographical area. What we are seeing in this recession is that they are doing exactly that. Much of our success in this recession is due to indigenous companies. As the Minister of State, Deputy Sherlock, just said, growth in indigenous exports this year will be 10%, and this will exceed growth in foreign-owned companies. They say necessity is the mother of invention, and we are seeing indigenous companies become much more inventive.

Job Protection

10. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Jobs; Enterprise and Innovation the basis on which Industrial Development Agency Ireland engaged with the management of Aviva; his views that it is unprecedented that the IDA would engage with a company before it's staff were even notified of any threat to their jobs. [28873/11]

Deputy Richard Bruton: IDA Ireland engages with Aviva both here in Ireland and at its corporate headquarters in the UK to understand the company's strategy and business development needs and to win investment and jobs from the company for Ireland. The IDA regularly engages with companies that may be contemplating restructuring in order to help protect employment. This is the primary basis for the IDA's engagement with all international companies and it is an approach that has served this country well for more than 40 years.

Aviva is undertaking a review of its operations in response to a significant reduction in demand for insurance and pensions products. Industry figures show significant drops in both home insurance business and pension and life assurance business, which has greatly affected Aviva's operations. The fall in the Irish market has led to the present restructuring review, which is being led by the company's European management. This is against the background of a reduction in staff numbers in the UK from 33,000 to 20,000, with the company's global workforce dropping from 56,000 to 36,000.

I met Aviva's CEO for worldwide operations and its European director, as well as the CEO of Aviva Ireland, as part of an ongoing process. I expressed the concern of the Government about the impact on employment and urged them to seek solutions that minimised the impact on jobs. I also offered them the support of the agencies of my Department. The company briefed me on the discussions that have been taking place. It remains committed to the Irish market. The representatives reiterated that no final decisions had yet been arrived at.

I assure the House that the IDA's central role has always been to anticipate and understand the needs of businesses that have invested here, seeking wherever possible to prevent job losses where they might occur.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I understand the importance of the IDA engaging with the businesses themselves. If it was not, we would be here holding the Government to account. However, speaking to unions and workers' representatives, I have heard that many of them feel very much left in the dark in this whole process. They consider it strange that they were not told about the issues that would affect them, while the IDA was. Would the Minister not agree that since it is the future of the workers that is at stake, they should have been told before the IDA became involved? Also, the workers themselves could well be part of the solution to the problems that are affecting Aviva.

Deputy Richard Bruton: They are different relationships. The IDA is an investment agency of the State which seeks to work with companies to anticipate challenges they might meet and deal with them through updating of skills, research and development investment and other means of assistance that might strengthen them. It is routine for the IDA to make contact with companies and, where the possibility of restructuring comes to its attention, it will engage intensively with the company concerned. It is not for the IDA to seek to inform workers of impending changes, that is not its role. I understand the anxieties of workers in this situation but the issue of the company's communication with its workforce is different from the IDA's work with the company, which is ongoing and seeks to anticipate and, where possible, preempt changes. They are two different issues and the IDA is acting entirely appropriately. However, I appreciate the concerns of workers and I hope this review will serve to end their uncertainty as quickly as possible and allow them to contribute to a resolution.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: If the situation at Aviva goes wrong, it will mean job losses not only in Dublin but also in Cork and Galway. When one takes into account workers' families, thousands of individuals will be directly affected by these job losses. In effect, some €38 million will be taken out of the economy and the Government will have to spend an additional €20 million on social welfare supports. It is akin to the TalkTalk situation but in slow motion. The Government must take the opportunity to engage proactively with the company in order that the necessary changes can be made and these jobs retained.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I assure the Deputy we are doing everything we can. As I indicated in my reply, Aviva has been restructuring its operations in the United Kingdom and Europe. In other words, the proposals regarding its Irish operations are part of a broader trend. There has been a huge collapse in the company's business in the Irish market and a review is now in train. The company is seeking to come to terms with the difficult trading conditions that pertain in this country.

The IDA will support the company in any way it can but one must bear in mind that the IDA's chief remit relates to new opportunities, particularly those orientated towards export markets. For companies trading within the domestic economy, there is limited support available from the development agencies. We can support only certain types of activities and opportunities, and those are the ones the IDA will seek to influence.

Proposed Legislation

11. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide an update on the proposal to amend the law arising from the decision of the High Court in the case of EMI versus UPC; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28822/11]

Deputy Sean Sherlock: My Department recently carried out a public consultation in regard to this matter. The consultation document set out the background to the matter arising from the judgment issued by Mr. Justice Charleton in the High Court in the case of EMI Records (Ireland) Limited and others v. UPC Communications Ireland Limited. It indicated that it had been considered heretofore that injunctions, as required under Directive 2001/29/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 May 2001 on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society, known as the copyright or info soc directive, were already available in Irish law under subsection 40(4) of the Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000.

However, in the judgment referred to, Mr. Justice Charleton held that he was constrained by the wording of the 2000 Act and could not grant an injunction, as sought, in regard to infringement of copyright against an information service provider in the circumstances of "mere

conduit”, as set out in the EU e-commerce directive, 2000/31/EC. Accordingly, and for the avoidance of doubt, the consultation document indicated that it was considered necessary to restate Ireland’s compliance with the directives concerned. In proposing to do so, it was pointed out that the Department was particularly conscious of the importance of online content and digital businesses in the Irish context and that, accordingly, it was simply seeking to ensure Ireland’s continued compliance with its obligations under the relevant EU directives, following the decision of the High Court in the aforementioned UPC case.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

The consultation document also contained the text of a proposal to amend the Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000, by means of a statutory instrument under section 3 of the European Communities Act 1972, which had been drawn up after careful consideration and in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General. Arising from the public consultation, more than 50 submissions were received from interested parties. Several of these submissions contained legal argument in regard to the issue, including, in at least one case, advice of senior counsel, as well as detailed comments in respect of the draft statutory instrument which was published as part of the consultation process. These comments are being considered by my Department in conjunction with its legal adviser and the Attorney General’s office.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: The court case in question took place more than a year ago, since which we have been in something of a vacuum. There are thousands of jobs at stake, including 1,600 in Xtra-vision alone, not to mention all the other jobs in related areas. Moreover, looking to the future, it is the centrepiece of the Government’s economic policy to create jobs in the digital games area and so on. It is ten weeks since the Minister of State initiated the consultation process, which is welcome. I am asking, on behalf of the industry, and on behalf of the workers in particular, when the matter will be resolved.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I will not be held to a timetable because I want to give this matter the fullest consideration. There is more work to be done between my Department and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. Given that I have been in office only since March, I reserve the right to take more time on this issue. I do not accept the argument that there are jobs at stake. It is an issue on which there is an interaction between rights holders, the “mere conduits” — that is, the Internet service providers, ISPs — and the end users, of whom there are millions. We must ensure that we get the balance right and that the legislation is correct. I am conscious of the Deputy’s point regarding the gaming industry and Xtra-vision, but I intend to make haste slowly on this issue.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: I understand the Minister of State has had a meeting with the organisation representing ISPs. Is he prepared to meet representatives of the Irish Recorded Music Association, IRMA?

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I would be happy to meet all stakeholders on this issue.

Written Answers follow Adjournment.

Order of Business: Motion

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I move:

That notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders or the order of the Dáil today, the sitting shall be suspended on the conclusion of the Topical Issue debate; and Private Members’ Business, which shall be No. 29, motion re the community and voluntary sector,

[Deputy Paul Kehoe.]

shall be taken at 6 p.m. and, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 90 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Topical Issue Matters

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 27A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Derek Keating — given that the National Transport Authority, which reports directly to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, has approved plans by Dublin Bus to change radically the public transport bus routes serving Clondalkin, Lucan, Palmerstown, Newcastle, Saggart and Rathcoole, which will affect in excess of 60,000 people who need public transport to access business in Dublin city, attend hospital and other appointments and, more importantly, get to their places of employment; that this has been done without consultation with the travelling public or reasonable notification to those affected and is causing extreme distress to the travelling public; that a new No. 13 bus was introduced from the Clondalkin area travelling across to Ballymun; that next Monday it is planned to change significantly all the No. 78 and No. 79 routes without notification, and that the No. 66, No. 25 and No. 26 routes were changed without notification; to call on the Ceann Comhairle to assist in establishing the facts on the basis that in excess of €70 million is paid from the Exchequer per year to the National Transport Authority in order to support public transport policy; (2) Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív — an ga atá ann breis airgid a cheadú le athchóiriú a dhéanamh ar Scoil Bhaile Nua, Maigh Cuilinn, Contae na Gaillimhe; (3) Deputy Dessie Ellis — the appalling housing conditions in the Balgaddy estate, Lucan, Co Dublin and the need for a co-ordinated response from South Dublin County Council and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to address the many outstanding structural problems that continue to damage the quality of life for the residents of Meile an Rí, Tor an Rí and Buirg an Rí; (4) Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett — the escalating accident and emergency crisis and the need to maintain accident and emergency units across the country; (5) Deputy John O'Mahony — the need to amend the criteria for eligibility for the back to education allowance which hinder applicants from taking up courses that might lead to employment; (6) Deputy Mattie McGrath — concerns regarding the composition of the Tipperary reorganisation implementation group established to implement the Government's plan for a unified county council in Tipperary and the perceived bias towards north Tipperary that exists as a result; (7) Deputy Paul J. Connaughton — the delay in making farm payments to farmers; (8) Deputy Joe Costello — the need for the Government to provide funding for Foróige to run its Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ireland programme; (9) Deputy Noel Harrington — that the construction of the Bantry town bypass on the N71, for which the planning and design process is complete and the land acquisition process is practically complete and merely awaits the announcement of funding; that this proposal is critical for Bantry as the construction of a new secondary school, due to be opened later this year, will increase the already significant congestion; that the project has been proposed for Bantry for as long as I was a member of Cork County Council, since 1999, and for a long time before this; and that it would qualify as a shovel-ready project, having completed the planning process and land acquisition stage; (10) Deputy Denis Naughten — the need for the Minister for Health to take steps to release all available trial vaccination records of children immunised in mother and baby homes, and immediately to establish a no-fault compensation scheme for those damaged by such vaccinations; (11) Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin — the imminent construction of flood defences on the Clontarf promenade and the potential reopening of the consultation process; (12) Deputy Paschal Donohoe — that a state-

ment be made on the regulation of the mortgage broker sector; whether the Government is satisfied with current levels of regulation; and whether plans exist to introduce new measures; (13) Deputy Michael McNamara — the revenue loss to the exchequer arising from the increase in off-licence sales and the decrease in on-premise consumption; (14) Deputy Billy Kelleher — to ask the Minister for Health to outline his plans to deal with overcrowding in accident and emergency departments during the winter months; (15) Deputy Charlie McConalogue — to ask the Minister for Health the date he expects the 24-hour national aeromedical co-ordination centre to be operational, given that it was due to be operational today; (16) Deputies Stephen Donnelly and Shane Ross — the fall in international rankings of Irish universities; and (17) Deputy Gerald Nash — the decision by Louth County Council to accept bottom ash at its landfill facility at Whiteriver, County Louth from Ireland's first municipal waste incinerator, operated by Indaver at Carranstown, County Meath, which will commence operations imminently.

The matters raised by Deputies Donnelly and Ross, Ó Cuív, O'Mahony and Connaughton have been selected for discussion.

Topical Issue Debate

University Rankings

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: My colleague, Deputy Shane Ross, is unable to be in the Chamber for this debate. We are all aware of the serious problems — arguably amounting to a crisis — facing the education sector at both post-primary and third level. I am interested to hear the Government's views, plans or ideas on what can be done to radically improve the performance and educational outcomes at secondary and tertiary levels.

The PISA report issued at the end of last year showed that Ireland has had the largest fall in educational standards in the OECD in a decade. Last week *The Times* higher education world university rankings included bad news for our universities. None of the ranking systems is perfect, but *The Times* process is seen by many as one of the best, if not the best. It showed Trinity College Dublin falling from position 76 to 117; UCD falling from 94 to 159; UCC and NUI Galway falling out of the top 300; and DCU and the DIT falling out of the top 400. We have also had various reports and statements from senior business people in Ireland, including senior management in large multinationals, expressing the view that Irish graduates are not faring well by comparison with international peers. This is of great concern to us all.

Part of the reason for the decline in performance at third level is that increased student numbers have coincided with decreased funding. Third level budgets have been reduced by up to 9% in the last three years and there have been staff reductions of 6%. At the same time, first year enrolments are up 15% since 2008, with a projected 30% increase in student numbers in the next decade. The Hunt report suggested that an additional €500 million would be needed to plug the gap in funding by 2020. That is a Herculean task in the current context. Also, there has been a report that the Higher Education Authority will state next month that our higher education system will be unable to compete internationally or deal with that projected 30% increase in student numbers without a quantum leap in funding. That is worrying for everybody.

There are some actions we can take to bring about a major change, and we need a serious change. We are not looking for a marginal change. We need to take a leap and I would like to see the Government set an ambitious target of, say, having two universities in the top 40 within five years. I do not know what the right target is but it should very ambitious.

[Deputy Stephen Donnelly.]

We must emphasise teaching. Conversations I have had with academics in some of our universities have indicated that in terms of career advancement teaching is not taken seriously, which is huge problem, and the level of training for academic staff to become outstanding teachers does not exist. We must hold academic staff more accountable. The students must be able to hold them accountable. The management within the universities does and, ultimately, the Government through the Higher Education Authority.

The Government could play a great role in helping the universities to fund-raise. Some of the universities that do very well in the United States, for example, have extremely sophisticated fund-raising mechanisms in place for their alumni. As an alumnus of an Irish university I do not see that happening. If the fees must increase I would like to see the Government provide grants along the lines of the United Kingdom model whereby a very low or zero interest grant is made which the graduates only pays back when their salary reaches a certain amount.

The professional management within the universities must be given the freedom and the control to motivate their staff, find the best staff, pay what is required to get the best staff and then hold that staff accountable to ensure change. I am interested to hear the Government's views on this issue.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): As Deputy Donnelly points out, the issue of rankings has been a hot topic in recent weeks as both *The Times* and the QS rankings have been published. Ranking systems in general must be interpreted with a certain degree of caution as criteria differences or even slight changes in the weighting given to a particular criterion between one set of rankings and another can have material differences on outcomes on different league tables. For example, Cambridge University came out top of the QS rankings while Caltech tops *The Times* latest higher education rankings.

This is evident when we examine the relative positions of Irish universities in these two rankings. Trinity College Dublin, for example, sits at No. 65 in the QS rankings but at 117 in *The Times* rankings. These anomalies generate significant debate around the relative importance attached to rankings criteria and on their capacity to fully capture the quality of what is on offer in a higher education institution. Notwithstanding these reservations, it is recognised that league tables are referenced by international investors, employers and students as a marker of quality across systems and, as such, they cannot be ignored. We can continue to draw some encouragement from the fact that two institutions in Ireland are still in *The Times* top 200 higher education ranked institutions and four Irish institutions were in the recently published top 300 QS ranked universities, out of some 15,000 universities worldwide.

There is naturally a focus on the fall in the ranking positions of Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin on *The Times* latest HE table, notwithstanding their continuing strong showings which places them in the top 1% of institutions worldwide. It must be recognised that efficiency improvements across Irish higher education institutions have been a necessary part of their response to the changed economic climate. In this regard, staffing reductions have been achieved simultaneously to increases in student numbers. These efficiency gains have been delivered for the benefit of Irish students and taxpayers. It is acknowledged they also have a related impact on the ratings of Irish institutions based on *The Times* HE ranking criteria, given that those criteria include direct input measures of staff student ratios.

Even in a climate of managing public service numbers and costs, it is important to emphasise that the operation of necessary staffing restrictions in the higher education sector has been implemented in an exceptional manner that maximises the latitude of institutions to fill front-

line posts and maintains their freedom to fill externally funded and revenue generating posts. While some higher education systems have invested heavily in elite institutions and adopted a policy of differentiated support for different tiers of institutions, our focus is on sustaining and advancing performance across the system.

In this regard, we can draw a degree of encouragement from the overall performance of the Irish system on *The Times* latest HE system performance tables which place Ireland firmly in the world's top 20. We are ranked 17th overall and are ranked 6th in the world relative to our GDP. It is also encouraging to note that in separate international measures of system performance, the Irish higher education system ranked first out of 28 countries in terms of the way international employers rate our graduates for employability. We also ranked highly for the efficiency of our system.

I am anxious to move the debate around the performance of our higher education system on to a more outcome focused space. The overall quality of the graduates we produce and the responsiveness of our institutions to a range of external demands is what we must concentrate on. The strategy we are now embarking on for the development and reform of higher education aims to enhance autonomy, innovation, accountability — to which the Deputy referred — and performance across the system. It is an important agenda and I thank Deputy Donnelly for raising it today.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: With respect, most of what I just heard from the Minister of State was a defence of the Irish third level system such as that we are in the top 1% worldwide. Is that the mindset when we have had this extraordinarily bad news in terms of international rankings in our secondary schools and our universities? I am worried to hear a Government which has just come into office and which does not have to defend anything because it did not run the system that got us into this position say that broadly we are okay, we are in the top 1% and we still have two institutions in the top 200. That does not ease my concerns. I am not hearing any vision, ambition or acceptance that this is an incredibly difficult and dangerous situation and that we must start to take bold moves.

There was a generic statement about autonomy and performance but I did not hear a single idea. I did not hear the Minister of State say that we are in big trouble, we have no money and student numbers are rising. Nor did I hear him outline the great initiatives the Government intends to undertake and that have been done in Oxford, Cambridge or some of the Ivy League colleges in the United States. If I was the chief executive of one of the large multinational companies here I would not take any solace from what I have heard.

Does the Minister of State accept that the situation is very serious? Does he also accept that we need a step change and that we must set a bold challenge for our universities? Can he outline some of the ideas he believes might start to get us to that position in the next 12 to 24 months?

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: I would not go as far as to describe it as a difficult and dangerous situation. The Deputy referred to the success in the international rankings of the Ivy League colleges in the United States in particular. One has to conclude that is because they are incredibly well funded through the alumni system, as the Deputy mentioned, and that is an area we must examine. I was speaking to two or three members of staff from one of our universities over the weekend and they suggested that is something on which we must seriously focus and that we did not genuinely tap into that source of funding in the past. I will take on board the Deputy's suggestion.

[Deputy Ciarán Cannon.]

I would argue that the Ivy League colleges are incredibly elitist. As far as I am aware the fees associated with them are particularly expensive and only a certain sector of the population in the US can gain access to those colleges.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: Not true.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: What we are trying to do here is provide for a high level of outcome across the third level sector and in further education in particular at a time when we have limited resources. As the system expands in coming years, which it will because the numbers entering third level are thankfully increasing, it is important that we maintain the focus on high quality outcomes. That will require some difficult decisions and the need for innovative and lateral thinking also. I assure the Deputy that this Government is more than capable of engaging in that kind of thinking but at all times we must focus on equity of access and the quality of outcomes.

I was in Singapore and Malaysia recently attempting to sell — it was not difficult — Irish higher education abroad, particularly in south east Asia.

We have a very valuable brand when it comes to international education. I concede that university league tables are used by some governments when assessing to which countries it should send their students. At the same time I recall meeting a business man in Singapore during that visit who said that the high skills levels that all Irish students have, irrespective of their background discipline, in communication, decision making and management makes them highly employable. We are providing a high quality of education across the whole system but I concede that we face challenges that need to be addressed by engaging in lateral thinking that the Deputies suggested.

4 o'clock

Oibreacha Athchóirithe Scoileanna

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Mar is eol don Aire Stáit, bhí muid ag caint faoin gceist seo ar 28 Meitheamh. Tá mé ar ais arís anois agus níl aon athrú ar an scéal. Bhí an Teachta romham ag caint ar oideachas tríú leibhéal ach is í fírinne an scéil ná an rud a shocraíonn cé chomh maith a dhéanann scoláirí ná an t-oideachas bunleibhéal. Tá na saineolaithe ar fad ar aon tuairim, má éiríonn le daoine oideachas maith bunleibhéal a fháil, éireoidh leo sa dara leibhéal agus sa tríú leibhéal freisin. Mar sin, creidim go bhfuil sé thar a bheith tábhachtach go ndíreoidh muid ar leibhéal na bunscoile.

Ní gá domsa dul siar ar scéal scoil an Bhaile Nua. Is scoil Gaeltachta í a bhí i gceist í a dhúnadh, ach níor dúnadh í. Tá ceithre oide sa scoil. Fuair an scoil deontas ón Rialtas deiridh le cuí a chur ar an scoil, ach tá seomra ilúsáidte ag teastáil. Dúirt an tAire Stáit liom anocht nach raibh an t-airgead ann leis an seomra a thógáil. Tá roinnt obreacha breise ag teastáil chomh maith — go hiomlán €790 le gach uile rud a bheadh le déanamh sa scoil. Cheana fein, tá an obair tosaithe ar an méid a bhí ceadaithe. Rinne mé scrúdú ar chaiteachas na Roinne, agus mar a tharlaíonn chuile bliain — ní eisceacht ar bith an bhliain seo — níl caiteachas na Roinne ag teacht i gcomhréir leis an méid airgid a bhí ar fáil. Tar éis 75% den bhliain a bheith caite, níl ach 71% den airgead caite ag an Roinn fós. Agus mar a tharla anuraidh, ag deireadh na bliana tabharfaidh an Roinn €16 mhilliún ar ais don Státchiste. Fós, táthar a rá nach féidir cúpla céad míle euro a thabhairt do scoil atá i mbun oibre i láthair na huairé agus a bhféadfadh an obair seo a dhéanamh roimh deireadh na bliana — jab ceart críochnúil — agus leis an seomra ilúsáidte agus na seomraí eile atá ag teastáil a chur ar fáil.

Mar a dúirt mé, tá an scoil seo i gceantar atá ag fás. Is ceantar é Maigh Chuilinn nach bhfuil ach deich míle nó 12 míle ó Ghailimh. Tá daonra an-láidir sa cheantar agus tá fás air agus is

scoil Gaeltachta atá inti. Is creidiúint í do phobal na háite agus do na múinteoirí sa scoil go bhfuil an stadás Gaeltachta coinnithe, ainneoin an méid brú daonra atá ar an cheantar.

Táim ag iarraidh ar Aire Stáit dhá rud a dhéanamh. Má dhéanann sé an chéad rud, ní gá dó an dara rud a dhéanamh. An céad rud atá mé ag iarraidh air a dhéanamh ná an t-airgead a cheadú. Tá an t-airgead ag an Roinn. Níl an Roinn ag caitheamh an méid airgid atá curtha ar fáil i soláthar na Roinne. Fuair mé freagra ar cheist pharlaiminte an tseachtain seo caite a dheireann nach bhfuil ag éirí leis an Roinn an t-airgead a chaitheamh. Tá an t-airgead ag an Roinn. In ainm Dé, ná tabhair ar ais don Roinn Airgeadais aon airgead, fiú tada é. Breathnaigh ag an am seo den bhliain ar na tograí beaga a bhféadfaí a dhéanamh go tapaidh — go bhfuil cead pleanála ann lena n-aghaidh agus a bhféadfaí a dhéanamh láithreach agus ceadaigh iad in ionad an t-airgead a thabhairt ar ais don Roinn Airgeadais.

An dara rud atá mé ag iarraidh ar an Aire Stáit a dhéanamh — má cheadaíonn sé an t-airgead, ní gá é a dhéanamh — ná cuairt a thabhairt ar an scoil. Thug mé cuireadh dó cheana cuairt a thabhairt ar an scoil. Nuair a fheicfidh sé láthair na scoile agus an obair atá ag teastáil agus na seomraí ranga atá sa scoil cheana féin, tá mé cinnte go n-aontóidh sé láithreach go mba ceart an t-airgead breise seo a chur ar fáil. Déanfar an obair láithreach agus cuirfear na billí isteach. Má cheadaíonn an tAire Stáit an obair seo tráthnóna inniu, rachaidh mé caol díreach ar ais chuig bord bainistíochta na scoile agus déarfadh mé leo go bhfuil sé fíor-phráinneach go mbeidh an obair seo réitithe agus na billí istigh roimh an Nollaig le gur féidir leis an tAire Stáit an t-airgead a íoc amach as an farasbarr airgid atá fágtha ag an Roinn i láthair na huaire sa gciste.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Táim ag freagairt na ceiste seo thar ceann mo chomhleacaí, an t-Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna, an Teachta Ruairi Quinn. Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an Teachta as an cheist a ardú mar go dtugann se deis dom an scéal mar atá se faoi láthair a shoiléiriú maidir leis an iarratas athmhaoiniú mór caipitil do Scoil Bhaile Nua, Maigh Cuilinn.

Mar is eol don Teachta, chuir údaras na scoile iarratas faoi bhráid ar mhaoiniú mór caipitil do shíneadhle haghaidh nuachóiriú agus oibreacha athchóirithe.

Mar chuid den phróiséas measúnaithe, sanntar rátáil banda do thionscadal faoi chritéir fhoil-sithe tosaíochta i gcómhair tionscadal togála ar scála mór. Ceaptar na critéir seo tar éis dul i gcómhairle leis na comhpháirtithe oideachais.

Gluaiseann tionscadal togála tríd an gcóras ar cóimhéid leis an rátáil banda a sannadh dó. Tá ceithre rátálacha banda ann ar fad, agus is é banda a haon an ceann is áirde agus is é banda a ceathar an ceann is ísle. Sannadh rátáil banda de 2.5 don tionscadal do Scoil Bhaile Nua.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department is forecasting an increase of over 45,050 primary pupils and 24,900 post-primary pupils by the start of the 2017-18 school year. In order to meet the needs of our growing population of school going children, we will have to establish 40 new schools, as well as extending a number of existing schools. The estimated capital cost of the establishment of the new schools is in the region of €380 million and the programme of delivery will include some PPP projects. There will also be additional school extension projects which will be needed to cater for the growing school going population. It is that context that the progression of all large scale building projects, including this project, from initial design stage through to construction phase will be considered and its progression is contingent on the availability of funding within the Department's multi-annual school building and modernisation programme and the competing demands for this funding.

Subsequent to the receipt of the major capital application referred to above, the school applied in March 2010 for one additional mainstream classroom. The Department approved a

[Deputy Ciarán Cannon.]

grant for this classroom in the amount of €100,000 and the school has drawn down 100% of the grant as the extension is complete. In addition, an ICT grant of €5,000 for the new classroom was also approved and the funding has been drawn down by the school. Scoil Bhaile Nua is a four teacher school and enrolments are stable. In September 2010, the school authority applied for further significant funding to replace a temporary classroom, expand existing classrooms and provide ancillary accommodation including a general purpose room. The school authority was advised that it was not possible to facilitate the request at that time. With the approval of the additional classroom, the school's accommodation will consist of four mainstream classrooms and a further room to be used as a multi-purpose resource room.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Having listened to the Minister of State's response it is clear he did not listen to what I said. It is clear the Department of Education and Skills did not make even cursory inquiries because this is a devolved scheme and has nothing to do with the major capital projects. It does not matter how many schools will be built next year or in the following years, the issue is, as I pointed out, that only 71% of this year's budget has been spent despite the fact that three quarters of the year is over. If the Department continues to spend less than its budget, it will wind up with a surplus of €60 million that must be returned to the Department of Finance. That money will not be available for next year's projects, as we both know.

My suggestion is that we take advantage of the fact that the builders are on the site. The Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Quinn, when in Opposition stated clearly it was a disgrace that prefabs were in use in any school. My argument is that by sanctioning the money now for the works that the school proposes, the work could be done and paid for by Christmas. If that money is not spent by the end of the year it must return to the Department of Finance.

This has nothing to do with the list of schools seeking funding for major capital projects. That is irrelevant. Any person with good management skills in the Department would give the go-ahead for a small top-up grant when projects with planning permission and builders on site request permission to get on with the job. The information on the demographic profile of the school-going population and the need for major capital projects is irrelevant to the case I was making.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: The Deputy raised the issue of an unspent capital budget in the Department as if it was a new revelation that had not been apparent to the Minister. The previous Government continued to accept this was normal practice over many years. In November 2010 it was established just over €50 million remained unspent in the schools building budget. It is a pity the former Minister did not try to access the money at that time for Scoil Bhaile Nua. The accommodation requirements in the Moycullen area, as referred to by the Deputy, have been studied and a close analysis has been done. It indicates there will be no requirement for any additional accommodation in the area in the short to medium term.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There is no GP room in the school.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: Despite what the Deputy said, the Department also considered that the school's existing accommodation, now that the extension is complete, is sufficient to meet its essential mainstream classroom and learning support needs.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There is no GP room in the school.

Deputy Ciarán Cannon: There are no GP rooms in many schools.

Adult Education

Deputy John O'Mahony: I thank the Minister for attending the House to debate this issue. I wish to put it in context. A lot of debate on social welfare in recent weeks has centred on eliminating fraud and fraudulent claims. I support the Minister's actions and ambitions in this area. I want to discuss the other side of the coin.

The Minister said she wants to eliminate fraud in order that people who deserve payments would receive them. I refer to the back to education allowance. When the unemployment crisis hit a number of years ago people were encouraged to upskill and go back to education. In many cases because of criteria that were suitable five years ago but not now people are not allowed to return to education. I could provide the Minister with many examples but I do not have time.

A young graduate who is qualified in heritage studies had a job for a few years in a county council. She has young children and lost her job. She has been in receipt of the jobseeker's allowance for the past few years. She now wants to do a simple PLC course to get a job in health care and work in a nursing home. She showed me letters which guaranteed her employment by next June if she was able to complete a course. She was five weeks into the course when her back to education allowance payments were suspended. She is now in receipt of the jobseeker's allowance again. By next June she will have no chance of leaving the live register and no job.

Removing the option will impact on people in such situations. People have served apprenticeships in building and construction and are on level 6 of a course, many of whom are in receipt of the jobseeker's allowance. They will no longer be in a position to receive the back to education allowance or avail of FETAC level 5 or PLC courses. Many were hoping to do so in order to upskill. As the rules currently stand, such people are expected to progress to third level education, which they have been out of for many years. It does not fit with what they need at this point in time.

In the past social welfare facilitators made recommendations but that system seems to be gone, something of which I am aware from speaking to such people in the past few weeks. I ask the Minister to examine the criteria. I am not trying to accommodate people who want to be eternal students and continue to do courses at the same level. I am referring to people who want to do courses that will help them to get employment, yet because they are currently outside the criteria they cannot be accommodated and will cost the State thousands of euro. Such people have no qualifications or employment as a result.

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 certain social welfare payments to continue to receive a payment while pursuing an approved full-time education course that leads to a higher qualification than that already held.

The number of participants engaged with the BTEA has grown steadily in recent years. In the 2010-11 academic year there were 25,032 participants costing just under €200 million, which represented an increase of 20.3% on the previous year and which comprised 20,808 participants. The 2009-10 academic year saw a dramatic increase of 79% on the previous year. As of 30 September 2011, there were 18,440 participants availing of the scheme. Final figures for the current academic year are not yet available as claims are still being processed. However, it is expected that the participation level will increase this year. The budget for BTEA in 2011 is €198.8 million, which represents an increase of over 10% on 2010 expenditure which was €179.85 million.

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

A person who wants to pursue BTEA will have to satisfy a number of conditions. These include being a certain age; being 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.

In general, to qualify an applicant must be in receipt of a relevant social welfare payment and be at least 21 years of age, or 24 years in the case of post graduate courses, prior to commencing an approved course of study. However, lone parents and persons in receipt of jobseekers payments can qualify at 18 years of age provided they are out of formal education for at least two years.

The qualifying period for the second level option of the scheme has remained at three months, in recognition of the need for more urgent intervention in the case of people who have not completed formal second level education. With effect from 19 July 2010, the period for which a person is required to be on a qualifying social welfare payment before accessing third level education under the BTEA was reduced from 12 months to nine. A two year qualifying period continues to apply to participants claiming illness benefit. Since 2007, people who are awarded statutory redundancy may access the BTEA immediately, provided an entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment is established prior to commencing an approved course of study.

A waiting period is considered essential given that the BTEA confers an entitlement to income support for an extended period and avoids establishing a pull factor to the live register. It is also considered necessary as it reduces unnecessary provision for those who will leave the live register in any event, in the context of targeting scarce resources at those who need it most.

State support for education purposes is grounded on the principle of 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 the 2010-11 academic year, of the 25,032 participants supported through the 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, there are options for those who wish to pursue part-time education courses. I do not know if this might be of assistance to Deputy O'Mahony's constituent but he might be able to do so while retaining his jobseeker's payment. He must apply at his local social welfare office and verify that participation in the course does not reduce his availability for work.

In the case of jobseeker's benefit, participation on a course does not grant any extension to the normal period for which jobseeker's benefit is paid. It should also be noticed that the Springboard initiative, administered by the Department of Education and Skills, which was announced as part of the Government's jobs initiative, is aimed at 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 re-skilling to enter employment. By way of the part-time education option, unemployed people on jobseeker's payments will be facilitated in retaining their payment subject to continuing entitlement within the broader back to education framework. The BTEA, in conjunction with other employment support schemes, will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure it continues to meet its objectives.

Deputy John O'Mahony: The key point in this example is that the present criteria discriminate against those with a university degree who cannot get employment who are trying to

reskill to find employment. The Minister made the good point recently that she does not want to facilitate those who see social welfare as a lifestyle choice. The example I have mentioned is forcing this person to stay on social welfare. The discretion with the social welfare facilitator has gone. In the long-term for this small group, there must be a way to facilitate them in a way that makes savings for the Department because it will take people off the live register.

Deputy Joan Burton: I appreciate Deputy O'Mahony's remarks. All the schemes operated by the Department are under review in the context of the comprehensive expenditure review. We are currently spending around €200 million on 25,000 people who are pursuing back to education schemes. There is a general educational principle that if people have reached third level and if there are others who have not completed second level, when it comes to the allocation of scarce resources, account must be taken of the latter. In the next few months, however, the labour services side of FÁS will be transferred into the Department of Social Protection. We will set up this new national service for social welfare entitlements and advice for those who wish to take up opportunities. In that context, I would be happy to look at this. I stress, however, that people who already have a third level education can look at the part-time option, particularly in VECs.

The Deputy appreciates that the back to education allowance is primarily for those who did not have the opportunity to complete second level or attend third level; it is for their progression. I understand the context in which the Deputy raises the issue and I will look at it when we are developing the national service.

Deputy John O'Mahony: These people are trapped at the moment and cannot get out of the trap.

Deputy Joan Burton: I heard the Deputy's remarks about the facilitators and they are an important source of information so I will talk to some of them.

Grant Payments

Deputy Paul J. Connaughton: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for the opportunity to speak on this and I thank the Minister for being here to reply.

In recent weeks I have been inundated with calls from farmers on the length of time it has taken to get payments such as REPS and AEOS payments, which have been through due process and paid out. It stems from a problem with the digitisation of maps and other issues and at this point it is difficult to understand how a new mapping system could be causing such lengthy delays. It causes great concern, anger and frustration among the farming community and I call the Minister to do whatever he can to rectify this issue as soon as possible.

As the Minister and those who have a knowledge of the farming community know, in many cases the money has already been spent, sometimes on compliance with the AEOS scheme or in the last number of months to purchase fertiliser or to make silage. This money may now be owed to contractors or co-operatives, putting huge financial pressure on farmers. Some farmers might also have family members at college who would be expecting this money in recent months and will have budgeted for it.

Another issue causing great frustration is the lack of feedback from the Department. Many farmers who have been on to me submitted their applications many months ago only to find recently there is a problem with the application now. Surely this information should have been relayed to the applicant immediately, easing the frustration and the backlog in the Department. I suggest a lack of communication between relevant sections within the Department is causing this information blackout for farmers. Also, the way of communicating with the Department

[Deputy Paul J. Connaughton.]

must be improved. Many farmers are being given a freephone number which leads them on a merry-go-round and leaves them with more questions than answers. They might have to telephone Portlaoise and then telephone another Department office, their file might be in one office and then they are told it is in another office. Instead of getting concrete answers, they are left asking where their files are and what point the application is at.

The biggest fear amongst farmers is that this delay will affect other payments such as the single farm payment, which is of huge importance to the farming community, and I ask the Minister to make sure the first 50% of this payment is paid out on time. I understand the Minister has only been in his position for a short time and I have no doubt he is still finding his feet but we must look to the future on this issue to make sure this does not happen again next year. I suggest a streamlining of the payment system so it could be centralised, which would make the processing of these applications more efficient so from the moment a person makes an application, he or she can easily track the file and any issues that might arise and if corrections must be made there would be an opportunity to fix them so the file could be resubmitted and payment received as soon as possible.

I thank the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for gaining a two week extension to the spreading of slurry due to extremely wet weather. This issue was causing great concern and a common sense approach has won out.

I congratulate the Minister on his first six months in the job and I know he is passionate about this industry and the potential that lies within it and I understand that these issues predate him getting the job. The agri-sector is doing well at the moment but for some farmers, especially those in disadvantaged areas, these payments are of huge importance and I ask the Minister to try and find resolutions to these problems as soon as possible.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): At the outset, I wish to state categorically that there are no delays in payments to farmers under the big schemes, the single farm payment scheme or the disadvantaged areas scheme. In the case of the single payment, the earliest payment date under the governing EU rules is 1 December, while in respect of disadvantaged areas, there is no regulatory payment date. It is generally recognised, however, and indeed acknowledged in the farmers' charter, that a payment target of late September of the year in question is the most realistic. These dates are not only being respected but the current level and date of payments is ahead of that schedule.

In the case of the single farm payment, it should be remembered that the earliest payment date provided for under EU rules is 1 December. As I am particularly conscious of the difficulties caused for farmers by the current financial crisis and am also acutely aware of the significance to the wider rural economy of the single payment, earlier this year I successfully sought the approval of the Commissioner to have advance payments made as and from 17 October, a full six weeks earlier than the normal commencement date. This is the earliest possible legal date for making payments; it is actually the start of the new EU financial year.

I am satisfied that arrangements are well advanced to ensure the maximum number of SFP applicants are paid their 50% advance payment as and from 17 October. Furthermore, total expenditure under the 2011 single farm payment will reach €1.2 billion by 31 December. This is much sooner than many other member states, who only commence their payments in December and who are then allowed to finalise them by the legal deadline of June 2012. Next week alone, €444 million will be paid out in single farm payments.

With regard to the disadvantaged areas scheme, Deputies will be aware that payments commenced, on target, on 22 September, with payments issuing to those farmers whose applications

had been confirmed eligible for payment at that time. I can confirm that my Department has, in the interim, continued to pay individuals as their cases became clear, with payment runs taking place twice a week. This is normal practice and will continue on an ongoing basis, as necessary.

I am pleased to note that payments worth in excess of €173 million have issued to date, representing almost 80% of applicants and are well ahead of the equivalent period in 2010. We are almost €50 million ahead of where we were this time last year. We are trying to drive efficiency and improvement in services this year compared with last year, and we are succeeding, both in single farm payment and disadvantaged area payment. This is despite the fact that I know some farmers are frustrated. Points of clarification are needed on mapping, stocking rates, eligibility and over-claims. We are redoubling our efforts to ensure those issues are ironed out as quickly as possible so that payments can be made.

For all payments that have a significant EU funding element, whether it is the single farm payment which is 100% EU funded or other schemes that are co-funded, we must cross every t and dot every i, and make sure that every map is properly digitised and that maps for schemes such as the agri-environment options scheme, AEOS, and disadvantaged area payments match the maps for single farm payments. Every payment we make will be audited and if we make mistakes we will be fined or our funding allocation will be reduced, which means less money for farmers.

I am aware there is frustration and I have had multiple meetings in my Department to try to ensure that we remove barriers to quick decision making and to get information back to farmers as quickly as possible in all schemes. I am also aware there is a particular concern in regard to AEOS, where payments have begun. Up to 3,000 people have received their payment for the last three months of last year, which were due over the summer. We have significant and complex mapping problems which need to be rectified, and are being rectified. Payments are being made, as we speak, on a twice-weekly basis. We will continue to redouble our efforts to make sure that happens.

AEOS is a new scheme. It was put in place by the previous Government. It is a much more complex scheme to implement and map than REPS was, for example. REPS was a dream scheme in many ways. The new scheme has, unfortunately, resulted in complex mapping and digitisation issues, which have taken time to resolve. We have put more resources, effort and emphasis on getting those issues resolved as quickly as possible, and I will continue to ensure that farmers, many of whom need and want this money and are relying on getting it, will be paid as soon as possible.

There is no lethargy or tardiness in my Department with regard to this issue. We are well ahead of last year's figures and will continue to try to improve efficiency, because it can be improved. We are well on our way to doing that.

Deputy Paul J. Connaughton: I welcome what the Minister has said, particularly his assurance that the single farm payment is on track. That will be welcome news. I also welcome his assurance regarding the problems of the digitisation of maps, whether for AEOS or REPS. I accept that the Minister and his officials are doing everything they can. The scheme predates his appointment as Minister. I accept that all barriers will be removed as soon as possible. I merely cite what farmers tell me. They say they are sent amendment forms which they return thinking they have fixed a problem, only to learn weeks later that the problem has arisen again. This is leading to frustration and anger.

I welcome the Minister's comments. I hope any delay in the digitisation of maps can be taken care of in the next number of weeks and those farmers who are due payment will receive it as soon as possible.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I understand from where the Deputy is coming. In his part of the country there is a high number of farmers who are reliant on REPS, AEOS, disadvantaged area payments and less favoured area, LFA, payments. The income from these schemes, which farmers rely on, is hugely important to rural communities, particularly in the part of County Galway the Deputy represents so well.

We are conscious of farmers' concerns. We saw their frustrations boil over this week, which was unfortunate. I understand the frustrations of the farming community. We are moving through the applications as quickly as we can. No effort is being spared. The proof of this is where we stand this year compared to where we stood last year in terms of overall payments. With regard to disadvantaged area payments, we are between €45 million and €50 million ahead of where we were last year. In terms of single farm payment, by the end of next week we will be more than €40 million ahead of where we were last year.

We have particular issues with regard to AEOS relating to the land parcel identification system. This takes paper maps which are sent to the Department, digitises them and puts them onto a computer so that the Department will have everyone's land parcels on computer and can process future payments more quickly. That is the purpose of digitising this information. We also need to digitise information so that we can directly compare maps that have been used for single farm payment with those used for AEOS. A huge number of maps have not matched up, so that field parcels do not look the same for single farm payments and AEOS payments. That is not because of a deliberate attempt to con the system. It is simply that the way maps were marked has caused conflicting information. This must be clarified because it will be audited. The last thing I want is for money that is currently available for AEOS payments to be reduced by the Commission because we are not seen to be doing our job efficiently.

The implementation of AEOS is particularly complex. We are in the first year of getting payments out. There have been teething problems and it has caused much frustration in the Department. The people who are in charge of resolving those issues are working incredibly hard to do that. I speak to them directly on a regular basis in an effort to be of assistance.

I assure farmers and those who represent them, as well as the Deputy, that my Department and I are well aware of the points he makes today. We are also keeping farming bodies aware of progress and stumbling blocks on a regular basis. There is not a lack of information or communication in this regard.

Sitting suspended at 4.40 p.m. and resumed at 6 p.m.

Message from Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Select Sub-Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport has completed its consideration of the Road Traffic (No. 2) Bill 2011 and has made no amendments thereto.

Private Members' Business

Community and Voluntary Sector: Motion (Resumed)

The following motion was moved by Deputy Brian Stanley on Tuesday, 11 October 2011.

That Dáil Éireann:

- recognises that the community sector is estimated to be worth €6.5 billion to the Irish economy, three times the size of the State's investment, proving that the com-

munity and voluntary sector is a cost-effective medium for the provision of many vital services;

- notes that the delivery costs of many of the services currently provided by this sector would be substantially greater if Government departments, the Health Service Executive (HSE) or private companies were to deliver the same level of service directly;
- notes that the community and voluntary sector provides essential services which the State and private sectors are unwilling or unable to provide;
- acknowledges that it is unacceptable for the State to abdicate its own responsibility for the delivery of vital services to the community and voluntary sector without providing adequate support and long-term security of funding;
- condemns the hollowing out of genuine community development by abolishing voluntary boards of management and placing control under partnership programmes which undermines local democracy and the bottom-up approach upon which community development is based;
- notes that the sector provides the equivalent of 50,000 full-time jobs, with large numbers of part-time workers greatly increasing the total number employed;
- recognises and supports the community and voluntary sector's right to engage in advocacy as a valuable contribution to policymaking;
- notes that there are 7,500 charitable, community and voluntary groups providing essential services to children, older people, people with disabilities or ill-health, vulnerable people, drug users, women, immigrants, travellers and other ethnic minority groups;
- commends the sector for being a tireless advocate for communities dealing with some of Ireland's most serious social and economic problems, and for working to empower marginalised communities to apply their own solutions to their own problems;
- recognises the potential of the community and voluntary sector, as both a service provider and an advocate, and further recognises that as unemployment rises and struggling public services are overwhelmed, community organisations are being pushed to fill the gap;
- rejects the disproportionate Government cutbacks inflicted on community and voluntary groups, particularly those which are as a direct result of speaking out against Government policies;
- notes that these cuts are targeting programmes that serve the most vulnerable in our society and deepen existing inequalities despite the acknowledgment in the Programme for Government that the community and voluntary sector has a 'vital role' in tackling poverty and protecting the most vulnerable;

- affirms that the community and voluntary sector needs to participate in decision making and must be able to monitor and challenge Government without fear of repercussions so as to fulfil a watchdog function on the political class;
- calls upon the Government to reverse the cuts in funding to the community and voluntary sector and move towards multi-annual funding in order to allow organisations to plan ahead and end the practice of funding bodies requiring the production of detailed business plans before giving any indication of the size of the budget available for the year in question;
- calls upon the Government to ring-fence €50 million per year from the Dormant Accounts Fund for the community and voluntary sector, ring-fence monies seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) for community development and community based drug projects and introduce a VAT refund scheme for charities;
- calls upon the Government to re-conceptualise and extend the Community Employment (CE) scheme by increasing the number of CE places available, including Special CE schemes;
- acknowledges that social enterprise has the potential to create 5,000 jobs a year and that community and voluntary organisations could benefit from the potential offered by social enterprise and calls upon the Government to support social enterprises' pursuit of social objectives, including job creation, which is a valued end in itself;
- calls upon the Government to implement the Labour Court recommendations and furthermore, to allow community and voluntary sector workers to negotiate their pay and conditions on a collective basis by introducing a mechanism involving Departments, employers and workers which establishes the right to collective bargaining; and
- calls upon the Government to establish an All-Ireland Consultative Civic Forum promised by the Good Friday Agreement, which would enable communities to engage with others across civic society and across the country and share information, learning and best practice on an all-Ireland basis.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

- “ — recognises that the community and voluntary sector plays a crucial role in supporting social, community, economic and cultural life throughout Ireland and is an important partner for the Government in delivering vital services;
- notes that in addition to its societal and cultural roles, the wider not-for-profit sector is also a significant industry in its own right, employing more than 100,000 people;

- notes that it is estimated that the sector has an annual turnover of €5.7 billion and generates €3.7 billion in wages and salaries per annum;
- acknowledges the responsibility of Government to protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities by maintaining its focus on front-line services, while working to keep the cost of delivering these services to a minimum. In this regard, the aim must be to provide simplified, easy-to-access, high quality services for those who require them;
- notes the Government's commitment to reviewing the delivery of services at local level and further aligning the functions of local development agencies with local authorities in order to improve service delivery from the point of view of the citizen;
- commends the commitment by the Government to reducing duplication of services, providing more efficient and effective local services, and ensuring greater democratic accountability in decision-making at a local level through, *inter alia*, the alignment of the local government and local development sectors in a way which builds on the strengths of both sectors;
- recognises that initiatives to improve services at a local level must be underpinned by a bottom-up community development approach, which will continue to ensure that communities, and the marginalised within those communities, are afforded the opportunity to influence and shape local decisions;
- notes that the fiscal difficulties facing the Exchequer, combined with an underdeveloped philanthropic and fund-raising capacity in Ireland, have had an impact on both public funding and private investment from business and individuals to the community and voluntary sector, at a time when the need for services is increasing;
- commends the Government for renewing the mandate of the Forum for Philanthropy and Fund-raising to support strategically the further development of both philanthropy and fund-raising capacity, with an interim report to be submitted to Government in October 2011;
- recognises that to attract greater funding from philanthropy and corporate investment, it is critical that there is an appropriate infrastructure to facilitate philanthropy and investment in this country, and appropriate regulation of the non-profit sector that promotes effectiveness, accountability and transparency;
- recognises that the community and voluntary sector can play an important role in the social and economic recovery of Ireland as a provider of valuable social services but also as a contributor to job creation and economic growth;
- is conscious of the meaningful role the community employment scheme and similar initiatives play in supporting services for communities and their contribution to providing work placements and meeting the needs of people affected by long-term unemployment and those most distant from the labour market;

- believes that opportunities exist to streamline the operation of these interventions with a view to meeting the commitments contained in the programme for Government for extending their reach and improving their effectiveness; and
 - notes that the St. Andrews Agreement commits the Northern Ireland Executive to supporting the establishment of an independent North-South consultative forum appointed by the two Administrations and representative of civil society and encourages the Government to continue its efforts towards the establishment of the forum.”
- (Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government).

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: Should we wait for a Minister?

An Ceann Comhairle: We are due to finish at 7.30 p.m.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: We would like the Government to hear what we have to say.

Deputy Dara Murphy: We are the Government.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Not that it really listens.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no obligation to have a Minister here. Members' contributions will be on the record. I call Deputy Donnelly, followed by Deputies Richard Boyd Barrett, Catherine Murphy, Joe Higgins and Seamus Healy, all of whom have two minutes each.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Can I call a quorum?

An Ceann Comhairle: A quorum cannot be called during Private Members' business.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: This is insulting. I would like that to be noted on the record.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: Can I call a quorum?

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Apparently, we cannot call a quorum.

An Ceann Comhairle: Not during Private Members' Business.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Okay.

Deputy Stephen Donnelly: There is only one valiant Deputy from the Government side present, which is extraordinarily disappointing given we are speaking about the community and voluntary sector. I welcome my colleague, Deputy Dara Murphy, and thank him for being here.

I would like to address briefly the issue of funding in the voluntary and community sector, which is at the heart of the motion we are discussing. There are four sources of funding, namely, the State, ordinary individuals, corporates and high net worth individuals. We are a nation of givers. As individuals we give often compared with our European colleagues. We gave more *per capita* for the Somalian crisis than did any other country in Europe. We are a nation of givers.

However, the McKinsey report on philanthropic giving published in 2010 showed that as individuals the total amount we give relative to our European counterparts is low. This is mainly because we give in an *ad hoc* fashion. We do not sign up to planned giving. Data from

the UK show that on average a person gives five times more in any given year if they sign up for planned giving. Not only has there been a drop in the State's contribution to the voluntary and community sector since the commencement of the recession, but between 1995 and 2005, funding from the State to the voluntary and community sector fell by €300 million. It is important to note that this is not new.

In terms of our corporates, namely, our business sector, the research shows that our businesses as a percentage of pre-tax profits give about one tenth of what businesses in the UK give. The level of engagement from our corporate sector, in terms of cash and what counts, is absolutely miserable. High net worth individuals typically set up foundations around the world. We have only three foundations of any significant size in Ireland, two of which are in pay down mode, which is causing huge concern in the voluntary and community sector. We have the lowest number of foundations *per capita* in Europe. While all of this indicates that we do not give anything like what our European colleagues give, it also shows huge potential for the voluntary and community sector. I call on the Government to examine these and to come up with some ideas. If anyone from the Government ever bothers to show up I can show them how the corporate sector and high net worth individuals can be encouraged to give more and how the voluntary and community sector can be given additional capacity to help them raise more funding.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: It is extraordinarily disappointing and pretty outrageous that the Minister has not bothered to turn up for this debate, which is about defending and protecting one of the most vulnerable sectors of our society. The Government amendment is a scandal in that it has diluted to nothing a very good motion put forward by Sinn Féin which articulates the views of the tens of thousands of people working in and benefiting from the community sector in this country. It is important to note that this motion essentially arises from what some of our most vulnerable communities and sectors of society have asked for, namely, protection of community employment, services and projects that are so vital to sustaining those communities. The Government's indifference to this motion and its dilution of it is indicative of its contempt for some of our most vulnerable sectors of society.

We are speaking here about projects and employment schemes that provide services for children, young adults, mothers, people with literacy and drug problems, immigrants and all other vulnerable sectors of our society in our most advantaged areas. These projects and employment schemes are a lifeline for those communities. Our society will be picking up the tab for years to come if the Government does not give us assurances that there will be no further cuts or, indeed, a reversal of cuts, in this area and that workers in this sector will be given the right to engage in proper negotiations so that they can at least have some chance of defending themselves against the brutal cuts that are being imposed on them. It will cost society and our most disadvantaged communities if the Government persists with the bludgeoning of these projects and workers.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It is not enough to pay lip-service to the community and voluntary sector which, when it comes to cuts, is the first to be hit. There is no certainty in this sector in which 50,000 people are working. There appears to be no strategy in terms of retaining what is essential. Many of these services are essential.

We are all aware of the appalling state of our finances. However, we need to spend money in the most effective way possible. I am all in favour of reform but I see no vision or blueprint for this particular sector, which is diverse and fragmented. The reason for this is that it has developed in response to local need. Often work carried out in developed countries by state agencies is done by the community and voluntary sector here. For example, much of the work around drugs has been developed in response to drug dependency in particular communities.

[Deputy Catherine Murphy.]

Ironically, it was during previous recessions in the 1970s and early 1980s that the drug epidemic commenced. Programmes were devised as a response to this but are now facing cuts. With Garda numbers being cut and treatment services coming under increased pressure, we are only storing up problems for the future. The diversity and fragmented nature of community and voluntary services are their great strength.

If the Government wants value for money, flexibility and multitasking from publicly funded groups, this sector will provide it. While it is difficult to imagine its disappearance, there is an expectation on the Government's part to have this work done on a voluntary basis which is simply unsustainable. On the doorsteps during the general election, people told us they want their tax moneys spent effectively with waste cut out and on the projects that need to be done. No blueprint has been drawn up for the community and voluntary sector, however. One must be drawn up if we want to retain some of the most vital services provided by the sector.

Deputy Seamus Healy: It is outrageous that ten minutes into this debate there is still no Minister present in the Chamber. While I accept someone could be delayed for a few minutes, ten minutes into a debate appears to be a deliberate affront to the Opposition and community and voluntary sector, the subject of this Private Members' motion.

I compliment Sinn Féin's extensive motion that goes to the heart of the work done by community and voluntary organisations. The sector provides services, many of which should be provided by the Government. I have a significant involvement in this sector through a child-care facility in Elm Park, Clonmel, and through the provision of services and residences for women suffering domestic violence. I commend all those who work in these areas.

However, this sector is now the target of budgetary cuts. It is the last area that should come under such a review while the cuts already implemented should be reversed. The Government refers to funding and financial difficulties. If it were serious about making moneys available for this sector, it would go after the very wealthy individuals with huge assets who are still not taxed. Sometimes I feel like a broken record when I raise this matter but if those individuals were taxed, there would be no need for cuts in this and many other areas.

Deputy Dara Murphy: I wish to share time with Deputies Hannigan, Kyne and Eric Byrne.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Dara Murphy: There is little in this Sinn Féin motion with which no reasonable person or politician could disagree. The community and voluntary sector is this country's most invaluable asset. I recollect the previous Administration attempted to audit the value to the State of the work done by this sector but had to abandon the task because it was so huge.

Unfortunately, the motion has to be amended because it contains several paragraphs that are too political. It also does not take into account the State's difficult financial position, created by Fianna Fáil, Members of which are not present in the Chamber this evening.

I agree with the motion's aspiration that voluntary and community services need to be delivered as close as possible to the end-user. The Government will examine the degree to which local authorities engaging on the ground with local communities have at their disposal the ability and the funding to assist this sector. I welcome the Government's commitment to looking after the voluntary sporting sector.

I reject the claim of disproportionate cuts to the community and voluntary sector. In fact, the reverse is the case. This sector is obviously delivering services which the Government is

unable to deliver, as happens in other European countries. However, we need to promote this sector because Ireland is just at the European average for numbers involved in volunteerism.

The suggestion of using dormant accounts funds and proceeds seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau, CAB, to promote prevention and treatment programmes in drug problem areas is very worthwhile. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien is aware of the benefits of such a suggestion in Cork's north side, having been involved with such community groups there. They provide value for money for the State through the work they can do in local communities. It is the perfect match that moneys derived from crime are channelled back to the groups trying to undo crime's negative effects.

Apart from several political paragraphs, the Sinn Féin motion echoes the Government's policy in the voluntary and community sector. In the main, the sector will find the Government will listen to it with a favourable ear.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Why has the Government then tabled an amendment to delete completely the Sinn Féin motion?

Deputy Dominic Hannigan: Only last month I was reminded of the dedication and effort that community groups play in their localities when I stepped outside my front door and walked into the Dunshaughlin funfair, part of the week-long Dunshaughlin harvest festival. Its organising committee galvanised the local community to clean up and paint the village as well as renovating some buildings. The festival was successful in attracting visitors to the village and I congratulate the organising committee on its efforts.

Such work is essential to building communities. In Meath alone, there are 400 community groups. As legislators, we need to be aware of their role in local communities and ensure we can relieve some of the burdens they face. I have been contacted by several groups to raise the matter of one such burden, the need for audited accounts. Producing these costs approximately €1,000 every year while participating in FÁS schemes can cost community groups in the order of €2,000 or €3,000, depending on the size of the scheme. Such costs can be highly restrictive, meaning less money is available for other parts of the projects. Will the Minister of State with responsibility for sport ask the Ministers for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and Social Protection to examine how the burden on local community groups can be reduced?

Simple solutions have been suggested to me. First, when voluntary and community organisations register with the Companies Registration Office, CRO, could they be defined as not-for-profit companies? Second, could community employment schemes be allowed to operate in a manner similar to the way the rural social scheme works, as this would help to alleviate administrative burden on community groups? I look forward to learning the Minister of State's thoughts on these matters.

The last section of Sinn Féin's motion deals with the all-Ireland consultative civic forum. In my role as Chairman of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, I will consider this matter. The St. Andrews Agreement builds on the commitment in the Good Friday Agreement to an independent consultative forum where civic society from North and South of the Border can meet and discuss issues. I welcome the comments by the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose last night to the effect that he was fully supportive of the concept and wanted it implemented as soon as possible.

The Government has sent its proposals on the forum to Northern Ireland. We are awaiting a response from the First Minister and the Office of the Deputy First Minister. The Deputy First Minister is otherwise engaged at the moment and has stepped away from his post. No doubt when he returns to his position he can help to drive the review forward.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: No. The Office of the Deputy First Minister is filled.

Deputy Martin Ferris: He is only journeying down for a number of weeks.

Deputy Dominic Hannigan: Events held by the previous version of the forum were successful. We need to move the process forward.

At my committee's inaugural meeting last week, we visited places in Northern Ireland and spoke with community groups. This is an activity with which we will continue. At our meeting tomorrow, I intend to raise the issue of the all-Ireland consultative civic forum and drive forward the process.

Deputy Seán Kyne: As a public representative, I have seen at first hand the significant contribution community and voluntary organisations have made to every town and village. Thousands of organisations in the not-for-profit voluntary and community sector transform Irish society for the better each day in ways that other sectors cannot. Included in the voluntary organisations are those local community development groups and parish councils that meet weekly or monthly to plan events, fund-raise for projects and set up meetings and, in many cases, become the driving force behind community projects. Individuals give freely of their time and-or expertise to help their communities for no reason other than to improve their localities. Tidy Towns groups were mentioned by the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose, yesterday. Such groups provide sterling service to improve their surroundings and inspire pride for towns where improvements become visible. County councils are also important sources of funding for Tidy Towns and community groups. Despite the cutbacks, it is good that such small grants continue. These grants are valuable to local communities.

In recent weeks, I have attended a number of briefings and spoken with members of community and voluntary organisations such as the Carers Association, Marriage Equality, the Simon Communities and Older and Bolder, all of which tirelessly combat problems and issues and seek changes that can make a difference to the lives of many citizens.

We are all too aware of the financial and economic crisis being experienced by society. It must be said that community and voluntary organisations, acutely aware of the constraints on resources, have displayed a commendable understanding and a remarkable resilience at seeking new ways of doing more with less and of striving for efficiencies without sacrificing effectiveness.

Other non-governmental organisations, such as the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the Free Legal Advice Centres have been instrumental in the recently completed universal periodic review of Ireland by consulting with communities and outlining areas of concern in respect of our human rights obligations. The United Nations and the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Shatter, recognised the significant contribution of the Rights Now coalition of NGOs. This recognition is verification of the regard and respect that exists at Government level for our partners in the community and voluntary sector. Without doubt, the State will continue to work with such organisations as we examine ways to improve the legislative framework for human rights.

In the motion, Sinn Féin states that the Government has inflicted cutbacks on community and voluntary groups, specifically those that have spoken out against Government policies. This is inaccurate and an untruth. Both Government parties have upheld democratic principles and vindicated essential freedoms such as that of speech and expression without fear when others at darker moments in our history have not. Despite such calculated accusations being made against us, I assure all citizens that the Government will continue to support community and voluntary organisations that share the goals of protecting the vulnerable and disadvan-

taged, upholding and respecting rights and making society fairer and more equitable despite the traumatic economic times in which we are living.

I commend the Government on its plans for an interim report on philanthropy. Last week saw the Global Irish Economic Forum in Dublin Castle. I hope it can encourage the Irish diaspora to continue supporting our community and voluntary sectors, investing in our businesses and creating jobs.

Deputy Eric Byrne: I am fascinated by the broad area that is the community and voluntary sector. The tragedy is that I have four minutes to talk about topics that could take me an hour to discuss. I am as much a community activist as I am a politician. It would take me four minutes to read out the list of groups on which I volunteer, including as a director. If anyone wants to see that list, he or she can visit my website, www.ericbyrne.ie. One could spend a good four minutes reading about my involvement in child care, drugs task forces and a range of other community groups.

Deputy Martin Ferris: How far back does it go?

Deputy Eric Byrne: I will reiterate my belief in the voluntary and community sector by explaining how it acts as the concrete that binds communities and, consequently, societies together. The sector plays a vital role in providing social solidarity and support in the community.

I have been lobbied by people and asked to get my head around how to allow these groups to negotiate their terms and conditions of employment and their ability to spend money as they please. Granting negotiating rights on behalf of the sector is a difficult issue in light of the dozens of funding streams, for example, the HSE, local authorities, the Departments of Social Protection, Justice and Equality, the Environment, Community and Local Government and Health, the Garda Síochána and VECs. Intermediary bodies called local area partnership boards, which are limited companies, have responsibilities for funding streams and are usually under the management of Pobal. Will the Minister of State convey to the Government that it should strengthen the organisations by creating an umbrella organisation, one that could ensure stable funding for the groups, eradicate the duplication of funding and create greater efficiency in the community sector?

It is always sad to see programmes and projects collapse. I was a member of a local area partnership called the Kimmage, Walkinstown, Crumlin, Drimnagh, Terenure, KWCDT, partnership. It was put into liquidation by Pobal due to governance issues. So many community development projects and other projects have collapsed because of the simple matter of governance. More will do likewise unless the Government gets a handle on educating the people, mainly volunteers, who sit on boards tirelessly yet are not equipped to understand the importance of governance. To strengthen their role and allow them to spend money more productively, they should be better assisted. I cannot overstate the heroic and valuable work done by so many which provides the essential bond and social stability so needed in times of financial crisis.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Eric Byrne: To conclude, I would like to state——

An Ceann Comhairle: You are over time, Deputy.

Deputy Eric Byrne: What really gets me in the craw is that this motion comes from Sinn Féin, a party which continues to attack the Government. If I may quote the Sinn Féin-DUP programme for government——

An Ceann Comhairle: No, you can not. You are over time.

Deputy Eric Byrne: Believe it or not, it commits the parties to continue their efforts to address the divisions in society——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is taking time from other speakers.

Deputy Eric Byrne: It states that progress has been made, but at a time when society is being transformed sectarianism, racism and intolerance are still all too evident. However, the Department of Education and Sinn Féin Minister, Catriona Ruane MLA——

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry Deputy you are over time. You are taking time from other Members. You are being unfair.

Deputy Eric Byrne: I will conclude now. In March, a 70% cut in funding of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council was made.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Eric Byrne: I will accept criticism when it is due, but coming from people who already cut to the extent it did, which made the council reply that it had resulted in——

Deputy Martin Ferris: Will you give us your CV as you are up there, along with your previous CV?

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry Deputy, you are over time.

Deputy Eric Byrne: ——wide-ranging job losses in the community relations sector——

An Ceann Comhairle: Resume your seat.

Deputy Eric Byrne: ——and that schools and those engaging in community relations and cross community work——

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Does the Deputy want nobody else to be able to speak this evening?

Deputy Eric Byrne: Sinn Féin Members are hypocrites.

Deputy Martin Ferris: Give us the rest of your CV.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy McHugh who now has only three minutes.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Deputy McHugh is lucky he was left with anything.

Deputy Joe McHugh: It was worthwhile to give my Government colleague latitude because he was giving the House very valid information.

The Government amendment mentions the commitment to the North-South consultative forum in the St. Andrews Agreement and it is important that I reiterate Deputy Hannigan's observation and insight as Chairman of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement that it is important to get it up and going. There should be an

onus on both Administrations to get it going as a priority. It provides an opportunity, particularly at a time of reconfiguration in the community and voluntary sector at grassroots level. I acknowledge certain funding constraints exist and the community and voluntary sector will face certain challenges, but the positive news is that the sector is alive and well.

I acknowledge the Ceann Comhairle's role and proactive involvement with Willie Hay, the Speaker of the House in Northern Ireland, in trying to get the political mechanism of the parliamentary forum up and running. It is important that we have a dual focus, and the consultative forum should be pursued vigorously alongside the efforts of the Ceann Comhairle.

While the sector does face reconfiguration, this presents an opportunity. There is much close connectivity between the voluntary and community sectors North and South and much good work is done. However there is also much duplication, and the Government amendment places emphasis on reduced duplication.

Last week, I spoke at the Conservative Party conference in Manchester and made the point there is an emphasis on duplication in Northern Ireland at present, led by the two Government parties. The word used by people down here is "ameliorate" but there is an austerity programme in Northern Ireland with a realignment of services. We should pursue more aggressively a realignment of services on a North-South basis. We need to engage more with the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrat Party Government in the UK to pursue this agenda. It is not good enough to focus on the Good Friday agreement aspects between Stormont and Westminster, as there is a third tier which is east-west North-South linkage. It is important because it presents opportunities with regard to economies of scale. We always ask why certain projects fall between two stools. Greencastle ferry cannot get mainstream funding—

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Joe McHugh: —but it is a practical cross-Border project which requires energy and commitment on a North-South basis and realignment would provide an opportunity to do this.

My point on duplicity—

An Ceann Comhairle: Sorry Deputy, you are over time.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I am over time. Three minutes was a bit short.

An Ceann Comhairle: I know.

Deputy Joe McHugh: I will conclude by stating if we are serious about the focus of the Good Friday Agreement we should not consider Stormont and Westminster only. We must also consider the proceeds of North-South realignments and this must be done by challenging the mindset which exists between Stormont and Westminster.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: I commend Sinn Féin for tabling the motion because it gives all of us an opportunity to reflect on and discuss key aspects of community life.

I want to refer to community employment, CE, schemes. Recently, I listened to a very harsh critique of the value of CE schemes from a senior figure in the ESRI. I was very surprised by this individual's dismissive and disparaging comments and assessment of CE schemes. The ESRI is an influential body with the ear of policy-makers. For this reason, its personnel have a responsibility to get out of their offices and into the community to familiarise themselves with the real value of CE schemes before passing judgment.

[Deputy Michael Conaghan.]

If the ESRI were to take this approach, it would discover just how valuable a role CE schemes play. It would find that entire swathes of community infrastructure, community centres, crèches, buildings and halls are kept open for use through the presence of CE schemes. The importance of CE schemes extends far beyond infrastructure. CE schemes respond to many community needs through meals on wheels services and services for the elderly, crèches and schools. In many communities, including mine, CE schemes are now the bedrock of the infrastructure and is a crucial resource.

Alongside these valuable services, the ESRI would also find that CE scheme participants are offered a path of self-development and self-realisation. Through the educational element of CE schemes, many have received a second chance in education, and discovered an urge for learning, and a realisation they can succeed at learning. This can and does enrich lives. In my community, people who participate in the educational element of the CE scheme and gain access to college walk much taller and youngsters see them as role models in the community. It is hard to put a value or price on this but it is very important.

Therefore, I challenge the ESRI to evaluate properly the CE scheme rather than offer us its perceived value. We must move forward and re-imagine the CE schemes for a new generation and new economic circumstances, and as part of a strong social economy. To do this, we need a proper evaluation of CE schemes——

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you Deputy.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: ——and their contribution.

With regard to the voluntary sector, we must also recognise the extent to which community life is enriched, enlivened and animated by the voluntary sector. Across the entire spectrum of community life, volunteerism is the fuel that drives clubs, groups, associations and committees.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: We must also mention altruism, this disposition and spirit that is deeply embedded in the human psyche and personality. We must encourage, acknowledge, value, nurture and celebrate this, particularly in young people.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: Finally——

An Ceann Comhairle: You are way over time.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: I ask for half a minute more.

The Labour Party needs no lectures, instruction or guidance from Sinn Féin or any other party——

Deputy Michael Colreavy: Yes, you do.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: ——on the importance of valuing the community and voluntary sector. It was a Labour Party Minister who first introduced and invented the CE scheme——

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: ——a mechanism which has unlocked——

An Ceann Comhairle: I must ask the Deputy to finish. He is taking time from his colleagues.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: —a huge reservoir of individual and community talent. It was another Labour Party Minister, Deputy Pat Rabbitte, who invented another key building block of community infrastructure, namely the task forces. I want to—

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you. Please resume your seat.

Deputy Dan Neville: I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the debate. I wish to focus on an area of volunteerism which is often not fully understood, and this is volunteers on crisis helplines and organisations involved in bereavement support. Samaritans is an excellent voluntary organisation. People who staff crisis help lines are dealing with very vulnerable people and they may often be deeply affected by the work. However, they are well trained to deal with the difficulties. Their reward comes from the work and the skills they have acquired. I do not think society acknowledges to the fullest extent those who work with people in crisis on a voluntary basis. Samaritans has 1,400 volunteers in the Republic of Ireland. They gave 54,600 hours listening time on the telephone help line last year and this equates to more than 1,050 hours per week of listening to people in crisis. This time is expected to increase in 2011 because of the economic situation. Samaritans offers a 24-hour service and the commitment of the volunteers should be acknowledged. The service provides emotional support and is beneficial to the community in general.

I refer also to organisations offering crisis help lines such as Pieta House and SoSad Ireland, Rural Stress help line, LGBT support help line and 1life. Organisations such as Console, Living Links and Barnardos provide bereavement counselling. Other organisations provide support for dealing with other suffering and include, Suicide or Survive, Shine, Aware and Grow both of which deal with depression, the national self harm network, Bodywhys which provides help for those with eating disorders and the Eating Disorder Resource Centre of Ireland. I would like to have paid tribute to many more organisations but time does not allow.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: The Sinn Féin motion maintains that the community and voluntary sector is being hollowed out by decisions made by the current Administration. I suggest we cast an eye over that party's record in the North in recent times and it will be clear that Sinn Féin is involved in implementing swingeing cuts to the community and voluntary sector resulting in job losses, a reduction in service and distress to vulnerable people. As recently as 22 September, the Department of Social Development in the North confirmed that it had reduced by 25% its funding to infrastructural support organisations providing services to the voluntary and community sector at regional level. This will have a direct and detrimental effect on the community and voluntary sector across the Border, yet Sinn Féin Party Members attend this House and pontificate about the need to preserve services here while it is signing off on cuts affecting the most vulnerable across the Border.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: The Labour Party should go to the North and organise there.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: I refer to a statement by a Sinn Féin MLA who spoke about these reductions in the Northern Ireland Assembly just two weeks ago.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: Go up and organise.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should speak through the Chair, please.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: It states, "The cuts will bring about significant changes to current support arrangements and a clear emphasis on rationalisation". Sinn Féin, along with its coali-

[Deputy Michael McCarthy.]

tion partners and friends, the DUP, has overseen the following cuts to community and voluntary sector services in the North this year: the withdrawal in March of 25% of funding or £440,000 from Action Mental Health, a leading mental health charity. This will cost 21 jobs and it means that 500 fewer people will be able to avail of mental health services. I remind the House that last Monday was world mental health day. There has been a cut in funding of £200,000 in the Family Fund, an organisation which provides grants to low income families raising severely disabled or seriously ill children; a reduction in funding of 50% for Down Community Transport in respect of its Dial a Lift service which provides door-to-door travel for individuals living in rural areas who are unable or find it difficult to avail of public transport. Three jobs have gone and the total cuts amount to £350,000. The Fermanagh Rural Community Initiative has received a cut in funding of £200,000 or 30% of its original funding. This will result in another job loss and a reduction in education for the long-term unemployed.

I could go on but what I wish to highlight is the hypocrisy of a party that comes into this House with no cost-benefit analysis for any of its policies, with no realistic economic view of how this country should emerge from the current economic mess in which it finds itself, a very selective amnesia by that party who voted in this House for the blanket guarantee for——

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Order, please.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: That blanket guarantee is the reason this country is in the mess it is in.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: The Deputy's party implemented the blanket guarantee to which he refers.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: That party embraced the blanket guarantee——

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Deputy's party is in power.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: ——and it is because of its actions that this country is in the mess it is. I find it galling that Sinn Féin Party members can come in here after implementing swingeing cuts——

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: We are here because we were elected.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: ——with the most right-wing party in Europe, the DUP and then lecture this Administration.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: It is all Sinn Féin's fault.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I wish to share time with Deputies Seán Crowe, Jonathan O'Brien, Pádraig Mac Lochlainn, Michael Colreavy and Martin Ferris.

Earlier this year, the Minister of State with special responsibility for housing, Deputy Willie Penrose, launched a housing policy statement. It proclaimed an intention to radically change public housing in Ireland but it set out nothing of the sort. Beneath the mealy-mouthed rhetoric were more of the failed policies of Fianna Fáil which had allowed social housing stock to dwindle and deteriorate. One policy which was not new but which was to be pursued with renewed vigour was the shifting of responsibility for housing our citizens further away from the Government and into the hands of the voluntary sector. This is bad government and a blatant shirking of its duty by this Government. It has been made even worse in light of the

Government extension of the austerity it has wrought on the ordinary struggling people. It has heaped this arduous task on voluntary organisations, one they cannot hope to deliver.

Fine organisations such as Respond, Threshold and many others, are being charged with providing housing but with less funding. Where does the Government think this money will come from? It is quick to pass the buck but even quicker to slash with the knife. Social housing is continuing to be abandoned by the State and these cuts to the voluntary sector show that the Government does not consider the housing of its citizens to be a priority or even an issue. It is more important to our Government to receive the pat on the head from the Troika than to serve its citizens and to respect their rights.

Respond has called for a reallocation of NAMA funds to the voluntary housing sector. This would be a positive action but the social dividend promised from NAMA must be part of the State provision of social housing in order to meet the great need which persisted through the boom years but which was ignored. It has now been ignored for very different reasons but ignored, nonetheless. The NAMA project must support housing for the most disadvantaged and marginalised citizens who have been denied this right. It must support people living in completely unacceptable conditions, such as in Dolphin House and St. Teresa's Gardens. It must support regeneration which has been stalled in places like O'Devaney Gardens, Ballymun and Limerick. It must do so with a dedicated Government strategy of public provision as a matter of right.

My own community will feel these cuts very hard. Over the past number of years there has been a sustained attack on community and voluntary groups throughout the State. These attacks have been justified on the grounds that the economic quagmire in which we find ourselves requires it. My own area of Dublin North West has been badly hit with the loss of community projects and workers on the ground in Ballymun, Finglas, Santry and Whitehall. Luckily we have a large number of voluntary groups, residents associations and volunteers who contribute an untold wealth of experience and help to fill the void that has been created by these cutbacks already imposed. This sector supports approximately 50,000 full-time jobs and a large number of part-time jobs, as well as thousands of volunteers. Year after year, the drugs task force has faced cuts of from 10% to 13% in its funding. This has resulted in a serious loss of projects and staff to deal with the crisis of drugs in our community. It is also a serious blow to those looking for help and rehabilitation as a result of addiction. The Finglas-Cabra drugs task force is one of the lowest funded in the State, yet we have one of the worst areas in terms of needs.

Community projects which employ people on CE schemes are also under attack. The Den and the Finglas Youth Resource Centre in Finglas, the CDP in Ballymun and the Ballymun Community Network are all bearing the brunt of these austerity policies. Can the Government not see the road these cuts are leading us down in pursuit of the economy? Once more, the Government is abandoning the community. We still do not have enough funding to deal with the serious issue of suicide. More resources are needed to highlight and extend round the clock services for people at risk of taking their lives. These cuts leave desperate people in even more desperate situations. The result is easy to see and is devastating to our communities and families. If the Government fails our communities, our most vulnerable and our most marginalised, it throws a generation on the scrap heap and shows it has learned nothing and never will.

Deputy Seán Crowe: The main purpose of the debate was to focus on the growing problem that affects the whole community and voluntary sector. This debate is not about a row between us and Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party or anyone else. It is about focusing on what is going on or not going on within the sector.

[Deputy Seán Crowe.]

We all know from our communities that there is a problem of morale for many of the groups dealing with the community. When community groups go looking for support, they find the doors closed or find there is no strategic plan in place to deal with the problems that exist. We know there is a growing drugs problem in this city, but how do we respond to that problem? How does the State respond to that problem? It cuts back services for people in need of support. That is the reality. I know that because I am involved with many groups in my area. I know, for instance, that children go to school hungry in this city and across the land. How are we, as a country and a Government, responding to that? We are certainly not supporting those groups or individuals who are helping the children who are going to school hungry. The official response from the Government is that we do not have the money. However, we know from Barnados, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, CDP groups and those involved in the community that children go to school hungry.

What is the response from the Government? We hear criticism from Government that we are not involved in this in the North, but the reverse is the case. I understand that some €80 million was ring-fenced for funding there, but more funding was provided because of the realisation that we are in a recession and more people want to use the services. Anyone with any sense of logic would know this is the wrong time to be closing down services. It is the wrong time to be shutting down community services when more people are looking for support.

Deputy Ellis spoke about how the cuts affect drugs projects. Why are we cutting services to the bone at a time when more people are looking for help and services? People are asking how much more they must bear and how many more cuts they must face. We want a response on that from the Government. Will we see more cuts? If so, what is the outlook for society? We have seen from other jurisdictions what happens when leadership and expertise are removed from communities. That is the big concern of our communities. People who have spent their lives working with young people and the elderly in their communities say they have never seen things as bad.

This is not an attack on the Minister or anyone else. There is a responsibility on all in this House to come up with solutions. One of our solutions is to support these services for the future. Does this make sense to the Minister of State and to anyone in the Labour Party, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or the Technical Group? This is what the people want to hear. They want to hear our plans for this sector, but we have not heard any of that in this debate.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: Everyone is aware of the role of the community and voluntary sector and the vital part it plays in providing essential services throughout the State. Workers in this sector work with some of our most disadvantaged communities in trying to build a better and more equal society, which is something everyone in this House should support. All Deputies in the House are aware of the valuable service the sector provides and are also aware the sector has been forced to absorb the cuts inflicted on it in previous budgets. As matters stand, all the indications are that the community and voluntary sector must, once again, face further cuts in the upcoming budget.

While the sector is varied and diverse, a number of common strengths are replicated among the thousands of organisations throughout the sector. By and large, the various organisations are cost effective. They deliver local solutions to local problems and deliver essential services the State has failed to deliver. These services include child care, care of the elderly, youth work, social inclusion, drug rehabilitation, disability, and education and training programmes. From 2009 to 2010, the community and voluntary sector suffered headline cuts of between 18% and 20%. That trend has continued and will continue into the future. These organisations and

workers have been forced to absorb these cuts through redundancies, three-day weeks, pay cuts and service reductions.

If we speak to any workers in the sector, they will confirm that we have already passed the point where the cuts have resulted in the loss of vital services the State does not provide. These organisations were providing these services to the most disadvantaged communities. They will also say that they cannot absorb any further cuts. In fact, we need to reverse some of the cuts that have taken place. Unless we do so, more people will fall by the wayside. The cuts are having a huge impact on the fabric of our communities which are already trying to deal with the fall-out from unemployment, increased drug abuse, early school leavers. They cannot take any more. Make no mistake, further cuts will only serve to sacrifice our long-term social and economic development for short-term savings.

Deputy Dara Murphy spoke about the problem we have with drugs. This is a problem in Cork, like in every other city and town throughout the State. Many community projects throughout the country do great work on drug prevention to help combat the spread of drug abuse. Whether through intervention or education, the work they do plays a vital role in combatting the spread of drugs. Every time their funding is cut, this increases the chance that more of our young people — the people we should rely on to turn the economy around — will slip through the net and end up abusing drugs. In the long term, this will cost the State more.

I would like to touch briefly on the policy which saw the control of the CDPs taken from the voluntary boards of management and placed under the direct control of the partnership programmes. That process was flawed from the beginning and should never have taken place. A recent study by the community workers co-operative found that 45% of CDPs found the whole process cumbersome and not well thought out. Only 24% found the transition a smooth process. Many people within the CDP structure did not believe this policy was in the best interests of communities.

All it has done is hollow out local democracy by disempowering those at the heart of local communities, the decision-makers within their local organisations. We have seen local voluntary boards being wound up, staff being let go and assets transferred to partnerships. The CDPs had the option of refusing to participate in the model but one of the consequences of refusal was that funding would be stopped. In our constituency of Cork North-Central, Deputy Dara Murphy knows that one such project went down that road. It was one of the most successful CDPs on the northside of Cork city and provided services to people ranging from five and six years of age, in after-school programmes, to the elderly. It is now operating for two hours a day because funding has been cut and the organisation refused to transfer assets, which the local community had raised funds for and purchased. The local community elected a board of management to operate the assets on behalf of the community. For refusing to transfer the assets and cede control to the partnerships, funding was cut. Who has suffered? The local community has suffered. The model is flawed and needs to be reviewed.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Many years ago, I listened to a speech delivered to the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, comparing the after effects of the potato famine with the unemployment crisis of the 1980s. It was not so much the famine as the cholera and disease that followed that devastated the people. It was not so much the unemployment as the drugs crisis in the inner cities, the despair and the lack of hope. As the economy was turning around, the Taoiseach was asked how he would move people from a kick in the teeth to a kick in the backside to get back to work.

People talk the talk about charity as if they were Victorians but they do not really get the real lives of people. Maybe they are paid too much money, eat in fancy restaurants and have a lifestyle that disconnects them from real people. Tonight I listened to a presentation from

[Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.]

community activists in this city. The real impact of cuts to the community and voluntary sector, as my friend Deputy Crowe pointed out, is on children who do not have food in their stomachs and educational supports and where resources that fill the gaps left by this economic crisis are taken away. In this State, policy ensures the reckless and unbelievably wealthy gamblers from other European and international states are paid every cent they are owed while we literally leave people starve in this country. We literally rob resources from the people in community development who are at the coalface. The former Minister of State with responsibility for community affairs in 2008 to 2009, John Curran, said the following about the work of community development projects:

The projects come from the communities themselves and what really inspires me is people's imagination and their own approach to coming up with solutions to their problems that work. They are so innovative and flexible and timely in their response that they are doing things the statutory agencies couldn't respond to in a short timeframe. People's ingenuity always astounds me.

Within a year, his Government brought in policies that destroyed community development projects in some cases or integrated them into partnership or development groups where they lost their focus on helping the most disadvantaged. It is in the style of McCarthy, our own McCarthy in this State, who likes to privatise public resources and take away amenities from the most disadvantaged working-class communities and cities and isolated rural communities. These are the policies being implemented.

To listen to a Labour Deputy come in here like a highlander with a hit-and-run speech about resources in the Six Counties makes me sick because for decades the Labour Party showed no interest in the people of the Six Counties. They criminalised republicans who stood up for their interests. Eddie Fullerton, a councillor from my town of Buncrana who was murdered by loyalists, was turned away from this building due to the censorship policies of the Labour Party at the time. I listened to the Labour Party Member preach about his care for the people of the North, as if one can compare this to a devolved Assembly in the Six Counties that must rely on funding from the central source like a town council or county council. The Assembly has no sovereignty or control over its affairs and it is being compared to this so-called sovereign institution, where the Labour Party and Fine Gael were elected by disadvantaged, working class communities in many cases, with hope in their hearts that they would allow Deputies to come into this Chamber and fight for their communities. This is nonsense, obfuscation and distraction. Every time Sinn Féin raises issues about our communities and the impact cuts and austerity have on real people's lives, we must listen to this hit-and-run obfuscation and nonsense. At some stage, it must stop and the Labour Party must understand that it represents the same communities I represent.

I say this to the one Labour Party Deputy out of almost 40 who is present in the Chamber to listen to this debate. I do not preach to him and I do not say I am better than him but I appeal to him to start to fight for the communities he represents and do justice for the people who put the Labour Party here. After five years, the Labour Party should be able to say that it stood up to the right-wing agenda that may exist in Fine Gael, defended their communities and defended them against privatisation, and a sustained and strategic attack by right-wing parties on community and voluntary groups who defend the most disadvantaged in this country. Let that be the legacy of the Labour Party after five years and let it not be that the Labour Party coalesced with right-wing influences——

Deputy Michael Conaghan: I do not need lectures from Deputy Mac Lochlainn about fighting for communities.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: —to attack, once again, the most disadvantaged people in this State. The Labour Party should make up its mind who it stands for, whether this is for the people who put its Members into this Chamber, or to kowtow to right-wing interests in this State and outside the State. The Labour Party should make up its mind and stop giving us this fog about the North of Ireland.

Deputy Dara Murphy: His point was that Sinn Féin is perfectly willing to cut in government in Northern Ireland and to preach south of the Border. The point was about governance rather than history.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: His point was wrong.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: Those listening to this debate must be very disappointed. We tabled this motion to try to stop some of the worst ravages that have been, and are being, inflicted on the community sector. Instead of having rational debate and putting forward just cause or showing empathy with the people working in that sector and those who receive the services of the sector, the parties in government have only childish abuse. It is not good enough.

I say to the Ministers and Deputies in government that three words describe everything that is wrong with what they are doing — equality of pain. The previous Government and this Government said there must be equality of pain and that everybody must share the pain. There should not be equality of pain until there is equality in the first place. In this nation, we do not have equality. We are a long way from equality. A charge was made earlier that Sinn Féin calls for services to be restored to the most vulnerable and for cutbacks to the most vulnerable in this society to be reversed but that it does not produce an alternative. That is false. Sinn Féin called for Deputies' and Ministers' salaries to be reduced dramatically. We called for an upper limit on the income of those at the senior levels of the Civil Service and public service. We called for a special tax rate for those who earn multiples of the average industrial wage, but Deputy Perry and Deputy Murphy voted against that. They must not say we did not present alternatives. We did present alternatives, but the Deputies turned them down. It was their call and their choice. They have the majority, and they did it.

Deputy Dara Murphy: As Sinn Féin did in Northern Ireland.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: Here we go again.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: We are calling for Deputies to support those working in the community sector and, most of all, to support those people who depend on the community sector for their quality of life. The Deputies are in their clinics, walking the streets and talking to people; they know how hard things are for many people and they know the desperation that is out there. They know that what the Government is doing in their name is wrong, but they blame the troika and the previous Administration and they hide behind the party whip. They say "I know we promised during the election campaign that we would do certain things, but we cannot do them now because the troika will not let us." Equality of pain is the issue. Every Deputy in this House, irrespective of party, has an opportunity tonight. They have their minds and they have their conscience, and they have a finger that can push the red button or the green button. I ask them to take courage and do the right thing — vote against the Government's nonsensical amendment and vote in favour of this good, pro-people motion from Sinn Féin. I ask them to do the right thing.

Deputy Martin Ferris: I wish to share time with Deputy Healy-Rae.

Build 4 Life is a voluntary organisation founded and run by the families and friends of cystic fibrosis patients in Kerry and Cork. It is one of the few registered charities, if not the only one, in this country in which every penny donated goes to the intended project. The volunteers who run the organisation do not even claim expenses, and no administration costs are deducted from donations. To date the charity has raised millions and has provided an outpatient unit for cystic fibrosis sufferers at Cork University Hospital. It is currently working towards developing an inpatient unit in the same hospital, which will cost €2.3 million. It has raised €2 million so far, and it hoped its application for national lottery funding, which it sent to the office of the Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, at the start of this year, will provide it with the final €300,000. Although the application was initially submitted a year ago, it had to be resubmitted in January 2011, and to date the charity has not received an official decision. However, it has been told unofficially by a public representative that it will get nothing.

Many of the volunteers have given years of their lives to this project and feel this decision is a kick in the stomach to them and to the 25% of cystic fibrosis sufferers in Ireland who happen to live in the catchment area of Cork University Hospital, that is, in Cork, Kerry and south Tipperary. This unit is desperately needed and would be provided without any cost to the Exchequer. Of the €3.8 million, all that is required is €300,000 in national lottery funding that the Minister has within his gift. Build 4 Life cannot get over the hypocrisy of the new Minister who, when he sat on this side of the House, castigated the former Minister, Mary Harney, time and again about the state of the health service and issues such as this. Yet when he is on the other side of the House and has within his gift the possibility of giving €300,000 to get this unit up and running, he has refused to give that money. With the amount of money that has been spent on materials and the construction of this facility, Build 4 Life has paid almost €400,000 in VAT.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to conclude soon if he wishes to give two minutes to Deputy Healy-Rae.

Deputy Martin Ferris: I ask everyone here tonight to put pressure on the Minister to ensure he gives the funding necessary to finish this project, which is well worthwhile.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank Deputy Ferris and acknowledge the presence of the Minister of State.

The important role played by the community and voluntary sector in Ireland has been highlighted in a number of reports. The 2000 White Paper on the relationship between the State and the sector noted: "An active Community and Voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralised...structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhanced for all." The 2006 National Economic and Social Council strategy, entitled People, Productivity and Purpose, stressed the need for healthy community and voluntary organisations as an important requirement for overall economic and social development. Reflecting similar sentiments, the national partnership agreement Towards 2016 stated: "The Government recognises that community and voluntary activity forms the very core of a vibrant and inclusive society." The Centre for Non-profit Management in Trinity College estimates that there are almost 25,000 non-profit organisations in Ireland, although the definition of a non-profit organisation used by the CNM is broader than the community and voluntary sector as it includes all non-profit bodies.

The mantra of this Government is value for money, and rightly so. In this difficult economic time, every Member of the House has a responsibility to ensure that all decisions are made with this mantra in mind. Also, the Government has a duty to give due consideration to all

requests for support from the voluntary sector. Only last week, as Deputy Ferris rightly pointed out, a request for support from the Build 4 Life cystic fibrosis group was turned down. This group has raised more than €2 million to fund the provision of an isolation unit in Cork University Hospital. The hospital management has said that the total cost will be €2.3 million, and ward 5B, which is currently lying idle, has been identified as the location of the unit.

It is a disgrace that the request for funding has been turned down. The irony is that if the request for €300,000 in funding had been granted, there would have been a net gain of €450,000 to the Exchequer in VAT and other taxes, there would have been a purpose-built unit in Cork University Hospital for the treatment of cystic fibrosis sufferers, and the taxpayer would most certainly have got value for money. I ask the Minister to revisit this request and to appreciate that it is a win-win situation in which the Government gets value for money and, more importantly, cystic fibrosis sufferers get a proper treatment facility.

Finally, I would like to point out——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Sorry, Deputy.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Just one point.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I must call on the Minister of State.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Last week——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy is very persuasive.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: ——there was an excellent editorial about this very subject in *The Kerryman*.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Hear, hear.

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Perry): In his remarks to the House yesterday evening, Deputy Penrose underlined the Government's strong appreciation of the role of the community and voluntary sector in Irish society. As a practitioner who in 1990 set up one of Ireland's first community economic development companies and is still active in this area, I am very much aware of the critical role of the community and voluntary sector across all strata of society, and I speak based on my knowledge of this area.

As many Deputies are aware, 2011 has been designated the European year of volunteering, and it is appropriate that we pay tribute in this House to the countless active citizens within our communities. These volunteers give of their time freely, and it is important we acknowledge that. They provide care and support services across the community in large and well-established organisations as well as small, informal groupings in every village in the country. They measure their success not by making a profit but by making a difference.

The priority of the Government will be to continue to support valuable front-line services within our communities while reducing overheads and back-office administration costs and ensuring value for money. I draw attention to one scheme referred to on a number of occasions during yesterday's debate: the scheme to support national organisations in the community and voluntary sector, which is operated by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. This scheme has an annual budget of €4 million and provides multi-annual core costs to 64 national community and voluntary organisations, including many organisations involved in advocacy. In this year's round of funding under the scheme, there were 149 applications, of which 64 were successful. The successful applicants were approved following an

[Deputy John Perry.]

open and merit-based competitive process, with a built-in right of appeal. I assure the House that all successful applicants were chosen strictly on their merits. The Minister, Deputy Phil Hogan, rejects any suggestion that an organisation would not qualify for funding under the programme on any other basis.

The programme for Government commits to a review of services at local level in order to improve service delivery for the citizen. This involves sharing and devolving responsibilities down to a much lower level. This is not change for change's sake but is designed to improve the quality of service the public receives and to ensure funds are spent well in every area. Local development companies have been chosen by the Department as the main delivery agents for the local and community development programme, LCDP, for which the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government has committed funding of €63.4 million this year. Representatives from a range of voluntary, statutory and community sectors, together with the social partners, constitute the board of directors of these companies, which will work collaboratively to effect change locally.

Despite suggestions to the contrary yesterday, there is no embargo on community employment schemes filling vacancies in the Dublin area or elsewhere in the country. The number of places available under the scheme was increased in 2010 and remains at that level for 2011. Local circumstances and, in particular, the need to maintain places designated for rehabilitated drug misusers under the national drugs strategy can lead to delays in recruitment to vacancies that arise during the usual course of operation of a scheme. Some 1,000 places are ring-fenced for recovering drug misusers for this purpose and there is no curtailment or reduction in these places.

The Government does not see philanthropy and fund-raising as a substitute for State funding rather as an untapped potential which can further support the not-for-profit sector. The Government fully subscribes to the importance of the implementation of the North-South consultative forum and all of the other provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. This is an issue which requires a firm commitment from the Northern Ireland Executive to proceed.

The Government affirms and supports the voluntary efforts of tens of thousands of people throughout the country. By allowing local communities a greater say in their future, we expect they will emerge from these difficulties more resilient than ever. From my own experience of having established one of Ireland's first community economic regeneration companies, in which I am still actively involved, it is about empowering people. As a former Chairman of the Committee of Public Accounts, I also know it is about getting value for money for the State in terms of the services we deliver.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak on this important motion. At a time of Government-sponsored economic austerity the community and voluntary sector is the last line of defence for many communities. In many cases it provides the glue that keeps families, communities and society together, often providing the services which the State and private sector cannot or will not provide. The community and voluntary sector has a long and proud history of providing services and employment in some of the most marginalised sectors of our society. In some parts of this city it is the largest employer.

I was interested to see the Minister of State tried to put on the situation. Brian Harvey, an independent social policy analyst, has estimated that at its height in 2008, the community and voluntary sector employed some 53,000 people. That number has fallen in recent years and Mr. Harvey has projected it will fall by a further 5,000 by the end of this year as a result of Government cuts. That is the equivalent of ten TalkTalks being shut down, not

because of foreign competition but because of a Government decision which is the individual responsibility of all Government Members.

The Government may feel justified in blaming Fianna Fáil for this, but it must make the decisions now and its fingerprints will be all over the outcome for the sector, be it its growth and development or its destruction. The Government should, as a matter of urgency in these straitened times, prioritise the community and voluntary sector and ensure services are restored to pre-2008 levels. Services should be expanded to meet needs. This can be done by immediately reversing the budget cuts and desisting from putting State money into the pockets of private bondholders. It can be done, for example, through the expansion of FÁS's community employment scheme. There are many great examples of the good work being done throughout the State, particularly under the "special" CE scheme which employs 1,000 people who are in recovery from drug addiction and has played an invaluable role in the national drugs strategy and the national drugs rehabilitation strategy. Based on these successes, we call on the Government to expand the number of "special" CE places to 1,500.

The response from the Government to long-term unemployment has been wholly unacceptable. The introduction of Tús as some type of community-based employment initiative is deeply concerning. It does not offer genuine training opportunities in many instances and those employed through the scheme are open to abuse. Several cases have been reported to trade unions and are currently being investigated. Instead, the focus should be on increasing CE places from 22,000 to 40,000 in order to provide training and access to education and to facilitate the staffing of community crèches, youth projects, senior citizen services and community development projects. The Government must take the decision to support individuals who have been marginalised for years and are most vulnerable to cuts.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government must respond positively to the Labour Relations Court finding which recommended that the State has a responsibility to those employed in the community and voluntary sector. Directly linked to this is the right of employees in the sector to collective bargaining. It is a travesty that nearly 50,000 workers are being denied this basic human right. Moreover, it is in direct contravention of the UN Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Táim lán sásta deis a bheith agam caint san díospóireacht seo. There is something incredibly and predictably depressing in the Government's position as articulated by the Minister of State, Deputy John Perry, this evening and by the Minister of State, Deputy Willie Penrose, last night. They tell us they want value for money — that is code for more cutbacks. They tell us they want to improve service provision — that is code for job losses. Finally, to beat Banagher and put the final gloss on it all, the Minister of State, Deputy Perry, tells us that in the face of cutbacks, the loss of services and an economic catastrophe, taking further pain will mean the community and voluntary sector and the communities it serves will emerge more resilient. It is mind-blowing stuff.

I cannot take seriously a Government or Minister who tells communities which are historically deprived and now under great pressure that more pain is good for them. Here is the newsflash — pain is not good; pain is bad. The suffering is real and the cutbacks are devastating services. We will oppose the Government amendment to our motion. It is a disgrace, with its laughable references to "reducing duplication" and streamlining. That undertaking is neither genuine nor credible. The amendment is simply code words and cover for the cuts that have been imposed and the further cuts that are proposed. The Government, by way of this amendment, brazenly abdicates its responsibility and hands it over to philanthropists and to corporate, private money. The amendment makes no reference and offers no commitment in respect of ring-fencing or protecting funding. That tells the tale in terms of the Government's agenda.

[Deputy Mary Lou McDonald.]

The Minister of State, Deputy Penrose, told us last night that he cannot ring-fence moneys from the dormant accounts fund for the community and voluntary sector. He told us, and this is astonishing: “It must be stressed that moneys disbursed from the fund increase Government debt levels”. It is beyond my comprehension how any Minister, in particular a Labour Party Minister, can stand over that kind of mechanical, bean counter response to the funding crisis in the community and voluntary sector. I hope the Minister understands that a simple amendment to the legislation could move the bulk of the dormant accounts fund liabilities off the State’s balance sheet. It is not rocket science. It can be done.

Politics is all about choices and for us in Sinn Féin it has to be about choices that are fair. The dormant accounts fund is made up of citizens’ money. It makes sense, therefore, that that money be ring-fenced and put back into the communities where citizens live.

Last night the Minister, Deputy Penrose, mentioned philanthropy 15 times, and this Minister has done it again this evening. Fifteen times we were told that the philanthropists will come in and save the day but not once did he make a comment, recommendation or offer a view in respect of ongoing funding. I understand that Fine Gael has a slash and burn approach to this sector. Small government is what it does and it is pretty much every woman, man and child for themselves unless one is a political adviser to one of the bigwigs, and then it seems that money is not a problem. However, the Labour Party, whose members are not present, know full well the devastation facing communities the length and breadth of this State and they know that particularly here in Dublin because we meet the Labour Party TDs and Ministers at all of the community events, the public meetings and the forums. Yet, despite a long-term relationship with these groups, Labour Ministers are turning their backs on this sector and, in turn, on the communities they serve.

In my own constituency the Inner City Partnership was closed down last year and the Labour Ministers have done nothing to right that wrong. To add insult to injury, community development sector workers are being laid off across the board with few or no rights and entitlements and the mere discussion of the budget causes fear and uncertainty.

The irony is that many of those communities voted for Labour with an expectation that its members would stand up for their right to fair play and that they would protect them from the worse excesses of Fine Gael in Government but week after week Labour Ministers sit on the Government benches dogmatically enforcing what we all thought was Fine Gael policy. Labour in government has thus far failed spectacularly to protect the very people it purports to represent. It pursues an agenda of cuts at all costs while feathering its own nests with disgracefully high salaries but that seems to sit okay with them.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: The same as the Deputy’s own salary.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Order please.

A Deputy: He is back.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The community and voluntary sector step in and intervene where the Government has absented itself. The sole reason this sector is needed in the first instance is because the Government and the State has failed to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Inner city communities like the one I represent are facing a drugs crisis not seen since the 1980s. I hope the Deputies in this House realise that. As my colleagues have said, children routinely go to school hungry, some without books. Scores of women face the brutality of domestic violence. Young people are out of work. Men, women and children cannot use computers and have literacy issues. People wonder if they will ever work again, and the

numbers lost to suicide increase year on year but the Government's response to that is to give the community and voluntary sector a rap on the knuckles and to tell them, as the Minister of State, Deputy Penrose said, that they must adapt to the new economic realities.

Do the Ministers of this Government and their backbenchers have any sense of adapting to the social realities in which our citizens live or do they even care any more? The Government wants community workers, the very people who commit their lives to fixing the State's failure to properly educate, to protect and to house its citizens, to spend their time targeting a more diverse range of supports and cultivating relationships with the business community. It is difficult to believe that in a number of short months the Labour Party in particular has become so distanced from the very communities that put its members on the Government benches.

The community and voluntary sector provides essential services that the State and the private sector have failed or are unwilling to deliver. More than 7,500 groups provide these services to our children, our elderly population and people with disabilities and ill health. Their work is heroic, and I salute them. Their work is patriotic, and I salute them all the more because these people are the champions of their communities. We make no apology to anybody in saying that we will stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

Deputy Dara Murphy: But not in Northern Ireland.

Deputy Michael McCarthy: Not in the North.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Order.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Shoulder to shoulder down here and cutting in the North. It is very hypocritical.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please, Deputies.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The challenge for Government, in addition to educating itself on the system of governance 100 miles up the road, is to put its money where its mouth is as regards this sector. The Minister of State said that he understands the sector and that he applauds it. He used the rhetoric but rhetoric will not cut it.

Deputy John Perry: It is not rhetoric. We know it. The Deputy is full of rhetoric.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The sector and the citizens will not be satisfied with crocodile tears or tea and sympathy. We want our funding. We want our services. We want the Minister to take his hands and his austerity off the necks of the people——

Deputy Dara Murphy: In the Republic only.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: ——of working class communities the length and breadth of this State.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 88; Níl, 45.

Tá

Bannon, James.
 Barry, Tom.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Butler, Ray.
 Buttimer, Jerry.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Byrne, Eric.
 Carey, Joe.
 Coffey, Paudie.
 Collins, Áine.
 Conaghan, Michael.
 Conlan, Seán.
 Connaughton, Paul J.
 Conway, Ciara.
 Coonan, Noel.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Creed, Michael.
 Daly, Jim.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Deering, Pat.
 Doherty, Regina.
 Donohoe, Paschal.
 Dowds, Robert.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Farrell, Alan.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Anne.
 Fitzgerald, Frances.
 Fitzpatrick, Peter.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Griffin, Brendan.
 Hannigan, Dominic.
 Harrington, Noel.
 Harris, Simon.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Heydon, Martin.
 Howlin, Brendan.

Humphreys, Kevin.
 Keating, Derek.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kenny, Seán.
 Kyne, Seán.
 Lawlor, Anthony.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lyons, John.
 McCarthy, Michael.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McFadden, Nicky.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McLoughlin, Tony.
 McNamara, Michael.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.
 Mulherin, Michelle.
 Murphy, Dara.
 Murphy, Eoghan.
 Nash, Gerald.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Nolan, Derek.
 Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Donovan, Patrick.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Reilly, Joe.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Phelan, Ann.
 Phelan, John Paul.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Brendan.
 Sherlock, Sean.
 Spring, Arthur.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Walsh, Brian.
 White, Alex.

Níl

Adams, Gerry.
 Boyd Barrett, Richard.
 Browne, John.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Collins, Joan.
 Collins, Niall.
 Colreavy, Michael.
 Cowen, Barry.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Daly, Clare.
 Doherty, Pearse.
 Donnelly, Stephen.
 Ellis, Dessie.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Luke 'Ming'.
 Fleming, Sean.
 Fleming, Tom.

Grealish, Noel.
 Halligan, John.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Healy-Rae, Michael.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Lowry, Michael.
 Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
 McConalogue, Charlie.
 McDonald, Mary Lou.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 McLellan, Sandra.
 Murphy, Catherine.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.

Níl—*continued*

Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghail, Seán.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Brien, Jonathan.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Sullivan, Maureen.

Pringle, Thomas.
 Ross, Shane.
 Stanley, Brian.
 Tóibín, Peadar.
 Wallace, Mick.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Catherine Murphy.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided by electronic means.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: As a teller, I would like to give the so-called socialists an opportunity to think again about their view in undermining the community and voluntary sector, and under Standing Order 71, I propose that the vote be taken by other than electronic means.

An Ceann Comhairle: As Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh is a teller, under Standing Order 71 he is entitled to call a vote through the lobby.

Question again put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 89; Níl, 45.

Tá

Bannon, James.
 Barry, Tom.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Butler, Ray.
 Buttimer, Jerry.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Byrne, Eric.
 Carey, Joe.
 Coffey, Paudie.
 Collins, Áine.
 Conaghan, Michael.
 Conlan, Seán.
 Connaughton, Paul J.
 Conway, Ciara.
 Coonan, Noel.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Creed, Michael.
 Daly, Jim.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Deering, Pat.
 Doherty, Regina.
 Donohoe, Paschal.
 Dowds, Robert.
 Doyle, Andrew.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Farrell, Alan.

Feighan, Frank.
 Ferris, Anne.
 Fitzgerald, Frances.
 Fitzpatrick, Peter.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Griffin, Brendan.
 Hannigan, Dominic.
 Harrington, Noel.
 Harris, Simon.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Heydon, Martin.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Humphreys, Kevin.
 Keating, Derek.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kenny, Seán.
 Kyne, Seán.
 Lawlor, Anthony.
 Lynch, Ciarán.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 Lyons, John.
 McCarthy, Michael.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McFadden, Nicky.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McLoughlin, Tony.
 McNamara, Michael.
 Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Mulherin, Michelle.

Tá—*continued*

Murphy, Dara.
 Murphy, Eoghan.
 Nash, Gerald.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Nolan, Derek.
 Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Donovan, Patrick.
 O'Mahony, John.
 O'Reilly, Joe.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.

Phelan, Ann.
 Phelan, John Paul.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Brendan.
 Sherlock, Sean.
 Spring, Arthur.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Walsh, Brian.
 White, Alex.

Níl

Adams, Gerry.
 Boyd Barrett, Richard.
 Browne, John.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Collins, Joan.
 Collins, Niall.
 Colreavy, Michael.
 Cowen, Barry.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Daly, Clare.
 Doherty, Pearse.
 Donnelly, Stephen.
 Ellis, Dessie.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Flanagan, Luke 'Ming'.
 Fleming, Sean.
 Fleming, Tom.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Halligan, John.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Healy-Rae, Michael.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kitt, Michael P.

Lowry, Michael.
 Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
 McConalogue, Charlie.
 McDonald, Mary Lou.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 McLellan, Sandra.
 Murphy, Catherine.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Brien, Jonathan.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Sullivan, Maureen.
 Pringle, Thomas.
 Ross, Shane.
 Stanley, Brian.
 Tóibín, Peadar.
 Wallace, Mick.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe;; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Catherine Murphy.

Question again declared carried.

The Dáil adjourned at 8.20 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 13 October 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 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Industrial Development

12. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new business start-ups that have been achieved in the seven months since he came to office, on a county basis; and his targets for the next 12 months. [28887/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Perry): My Department does not compile specific annual statistics on the number of new business start-ups that have commenced trading in the State nor their geographic location. Such business start-ups would not be required to be advised to my Department or to the agencies reporting to me. Responsibility for statistical information rests with the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The latest CSO Business Demography returns are in respect of 2009 and were published in 2011. Data in respect of subsequent years is not yet available.

Entrepreneurial activity can also be considered in the context of company formations and data from the Company's Registration Office (CRO) indicates that during the 7 month period in question 8656 companies were incorporated. This would appear to indicate an increase on 2010 which saw 14013 companies incorporated in the year as a whole. The establishment of Start Ups and supporting the development of innovation-led high potential start-up companies with a strong export focus is a key priority for Enterprise Ireland. Enterprise Ireland offers equity investment to HPSU clients on a co-funded basis, which typically leverages significant 3rd party investment.

The County and City Enterprise Boards support the micro-enterprise sector in the start-up and expansion phases, to promote entrepreneurship at local level and to assist the development of sustainable growth-orientated micro-enterprises which can generate job creation at a local level and which, over time, can develop into strong export entities and transfer to the Enterprise Ireland portfolio. Their focus has increasingly been on the development of sustainable growth-orientated local enterprise, which can deliver high quality job creation without displacement or deadweight. Through the provision of both financial and non-financial support the Boards have assisted many micro-enterprises in developing their growth and export potential.

[Deputy John Perry.]

Furthermore, in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government, a Microfinance Start-Up Fund to provide loans to small businesses is being developed. My Department is taking the lead on this initiative and has met with relevant stakeholders, including the European Investment Bank, organisations with experience in the area of Microfinance in Ireland as well as with the relevant Government Departments. The Fund, including scheme design and appropriate delivery mechanisms, will be developed with a view to formalising proposals in the context of Budget 2012.

Details of start-ups assisted by Enterprise Ireland and the County and City Enterprise Boards since March 2011 are set out in the tables. It is intended that Enterprise Ireland will assist as many as 95 HPSUs in the course of 2012. Start-ups assisted by the CEBs in 2012 are likely to be of the same order as for 2011 with 700 enterprises likely to be assisted for the full year.

Start-ups assisted by Enterprise Ireland

County	No of Start-ups assisted since March 2011
Carlow	1
Clare	1
Cork	3
Donegal	2
Dublin	36
Galway	5
Kildare	1
Leitrim	1
Limerick	4
Louth	1
Meath	1
Offaly	1
Sligo	1
Waterford	3
Wicklow	2
Total	63

County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs)	No. of start-ups since March 2011
Carlow	12
Cavan	4
Clare	26
Cork City	13
Cork North	9
Cork South	19
Cork West	7
Donegal	7
Dublin City	21
Dublin South	4
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown	18
Fingal	16
Galway	21

County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs)	No. of start-ups since March 2011
Kerry	21
Kildare	11
Kilkenny	8
Laois	4
Leitrim	11
Limerick City	9
Limerick County	9
Longford	10
Louth	18
Mayo	7
Meath	9
Monaghan	7
Offaly	18
Roscommon	10
Sligo	12
Tipperary North	11
Tipperary South	4
Waterford City	20
Waterford County	19
Westmeath	17
Wexford	6
Wicklow*	0
Total	402

*Figures not available within deadline.

Credit Availability

13. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views that Irish business are experiencing great difficulties in accessing credit; the measures he will take to alleviate these difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28825/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The initiatives taken by the Minister for Finance to restructure and re-capitalise the banking system is the principal response to making credit available. At the end of March 2011, a range of measures was announced to reorganise, recapitalise and deleverage the domestic financial system in order to restore the banks to health and continue to provide a secure banking system for deposits.

This latest 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. 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.

In addition to the initiatives of the Minister for Finance, work is underway within my Department on the design of a Temporary Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme. The Scheme will provide a level of guarantee to banks against losses on qualifying loans to job-creating firms to get banks lending again to industry and entrepreneurs. This Scheme will be closely targeted at commercially viable, well performing companies that have a solid business plan and a defined market for their products or services which can demonstrate repayment capacity for the

[Deputy Richard Bruton.]

additional credit facilities but which do not secure credit facilities due to the following two market failures:

- Insufficient collateral for the additional facilities or,
- Growth / expansionary SMEs which due to their sectors, markets or business model are perceived higher risk under current credit risk evaluation practices.

A loan guarantee would be provided by the guarantor (the State) to the lender, under strict criteria to target the identified market failure, thereby facilitating the outflow of additional credit from the banks. The scheme will be introduced on a temporary basis with a review after year one before any commitment is given to extending the scheme for a further period of time. This scheme will form a key component in the suite of initiatives aimed at ensuring the flow of credit.

Furthermore, in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government, a Microfinance Start-Up Fund to provide loans to small businesses is being developed. My Department is also taking the lead on this initiative and has met with relevant stakeholders, including the European Investment Bank, organisations with experience in the area of Microfinance in Ireland, as well as with the relevant Government Departments. The Fund, including scheme design and appropriate delivery mechanisms, will be developed with a view to formalising proposals in the context of Budget 2012.

Industrial Development

14. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to bring forward proposals in relation to developing the digital gaming industry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28830/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for Government identified digital gaming as a sector with high potential for jobs growth in the coming years. The global games sector is expected to increase in size from 59.3 billion US Dollars at present, to 82 billion US Dollars by 2015. Ireland is well placed to capture a share of this market and we could potentially create an extra 2,500 jobs in the sector within three years.

Over the last two years, we have seen over 25 new names enter the games landscape in Ireland, including leading global games companies such as EA/Bioware, Zynga, Big Fish, Activision and Popcap. We have a strong cohort of new Irish entrepreneurial companies in the sector and a number of our indigenous companies have achieved global recognition, including Havok, Demonware and Jolt Online. Last April, I asked Forfás to prepare a report for me on the potential of the games industry in Ireland. The Forfás report “The Games Sector in Ireland — An Action Plan for Growth”, was presented to me in the last few weeks and was published last Monday, 10th October.

The report sets out the opportunities for growth in the sector in the next few years and identifies actions which need to be taken to underpin and accelerate growth in the longer term. The report confirms the potential that exists for Ireland to fully assert itself as a global games hub for the 21st century. The games sector can also be a catalyst for growth in the wider digital economy in related activities such as animation, TV/Film production, advertising, e-learning and the range of support services that are now an integral part of the games landscape.

The Forfás report contains a number of recommendations covering six key areas:

- Building a cluster within the sector here in Ireland.
- Enhancing skills and experience to support the industry as it evolves.

- Building international visibility of the Irish games sector, highlighting what companies can achieve here in Ireland.
- Accelerating growth in creative development activities.
- Driving R&D and Innovation, and
- Delivering robust and cost competitive broadband to underpin growth.

Success for Ireland in the games sector, however, is not a given — many other countries are pursuing aggressive strategies in developing the sector as a significant contributor to economic growth. We will need decisive action, both on the part of Government and the industry itself, to anticipate the future direction of the industry sector to respond appropriately. The industry has an important role to play by continuously upskilling its staff and through active engagement with Third Level educational institutions to ensure the relevance of courses they provide. Career opportunities in the sector also need to be promoted.

I will be considering the Forfás report in further detail with a view to identifying the most effective means of implementing the actions outlined in the report and I will work with my Government colleagues to deliver on these actions. The full report on the Digital Games sector is available on Forfás's website, *www.Forfas.ie*.

15. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will publish the plans and proposals prepared by the Industrial Development Agency Ireland for increased actions and activities in the south-east region due to be completed by 12 October 2011; the action he will take on these proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28869/11]

17. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress being made on a jobs strategy for the south east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28651/11]

23. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will consult with stakeholders in the south east in relation to the plans and proposals prepared by the Industrial Development Agency Ireland for increased actions and activities in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28870/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 15, 17 and 23 together.

As the Deputy is aware, following the TalkTalk closure announcement, I held a series of meetings with company management, workers, public representatives and business. The message from local stakeholders was very clear in that Waterford has not benefited from the advances in the good times and it has been badly affected in the more difficult times of late. On foot of that, I instructed my agencies to put together an action plan for Waterford and the South East region to look at the areas they can intensify, at the way the region is being supported and an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the area. There was a sense that there needed to be this sort of hard analysis as to why Waterford and the Region, with the strengths it has, has not been more successful.

The agencies have now reported back and I am considering their responses with regard to how best to address the specific employment problems affecting the South East. I consider this course of action more appropriate than establishing a Task Force given the timeframe of the site closure, the need for swift action and the fact that a large amount of analysis has been undertaken in the past. When I have completed my considerations, we will look afresh at what action can be taken and whether there are further deeper issues, which need to be assessed in

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some other way. I am determined to give Waterford the priority it correctly deserves. We need to take a hard look at this to see how we can better support enterprise in the South East and set out the actions we can take in the near term and in the longer term.

As the various reports from the State agencies include commercially sensitive information, I will not be able to publish them as received. However, it is my intention to make known the additional activities and plans for enterprise support when I complete my considerations.

I acknowledge the support of Cabinet colleagues, in particular Ministers for Social Protection and for Education and Skills who responded immediately. FÁS and the Department of Social Protection staff immediately engaged with TalkTalk workers. The Minister for Education and Skills indicated that work on the proposal for a technological university, which is to be explored as part of the programme for Government, is being accelerated. Clear criteria will be developed for that opportunity, which arose in discussions. The Minister for Education and Skills has submitted an application under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund to assist the workers that have lost their jobs.

While it is clear that Ireland is operating in a very difficult economic environment, there are still investment opportunities in global markets and IDA will continue to compete vigorously for projects for Ireland and for the South East. In particular, IDA has begun marketing the TalkTalk facility and the skillsets of the workers internationally.

Jobs are at the very top of this Government's agenda, and if we are to achieve the turnaround in employment that we so badly need, we must implement radical reform across every aspect of the economy. I have spoken before about the need for an innovation revolution — a revolution that brings innovation out of the laboratories and into our businesses, our communities, our schools, our public bodies and every aspect of our economy.

We must broaden our strengths over and above the reliance on the traditional foreign direct investment that has served us so well. Within the multinational sector, we must seek to attract international entrepreneurs to start businesses in Ireland, and must strive continually to encourage the world-leading companies already here to locate the pioneering parts of their businesses here. However, we must also recognise that our indigenous companies have the potential to significantly increase their exports, and do what it takes to create a real indigenous engine of growth.

We must learn from the world-leading companies that we have attracted to Ireland and find ways of ensuring that our indigenous companies can lead the world in the vital processes that add value and create employment: productivity, design, management and research and development. If we are to bring about these types of changes, we need a plan, and that is why I have committed to prepare a comprehensive Jobs Strategy. This Strategy will not attempt to compete with the large number of reports already prepared on this subject, but will draw from the volume of material already available, as well as the level of expertise available both in Ireland and abroad. I have already started a rolling process of engagement on the issues and intend to create an action plan that Government can take to address our challenges.

The Strategy will aspire to:

- Create over 200,000 jobs to have 2 million people at work again
- Be the best country in which to run an enterprise
- Significantly increase the share of our indigenous business in export markets
- Return to and stay in the top five countries for cost competitiveness; and
- Ensure once again that all our children can have a future in Ireland.

Job Losses

16. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs lost throughout the various skilled categories in each of the past ten years to date; the research undertaken to determine the reason for such losses; the action taken; the extent to which the issues noted have been resolved in the context of making this country an attractive location for investment in jobs in the future; the number of new jobs with a similar skill set requirement that have been created in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28853/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department does not collate data in relation to the number of jobs lost or created throughout the various skilled categories. However, the CSO in the Quarterly National Household Survey compiles data in relation to changes in employment by occupational category. In the time allowed it has not been possible for my Department to provide the data sought by the Deputy for a ten year period. However, I have circulated to the Deputy graphs which show the employment changes, in thousands, in certain occupations from Q4 2010 compared to Q3 2007 when employment peaked. Other data which may be of interest to the Deputy can be found on the CSO website.

There were declines of 400,000 across various occupational categories over the period — the occupations shown in the first graph are those in which there were net losses of 5,000 or more. This is a broad indicator of changes in employment by skill categories and qualifications. Some occupations have been in long term decline e.g. farm owners and managers. Some are highly dependent on growth in the domestic economy, disposable income and tourism. A significant proportion of the decline in recent years relates to construction, particularly in skilled trades and crafts.

The most common theme from the CSO preliminary census results for 2011 indicates that the occupations that have increased in the recession are mainly professional, managerial and or technical positions, reflecting a rising demand for higher skills and qualifications, for example, while the annual increase in ICT sector employment (+4% for 2010) is modest, an increasing share of employment within the sector is being accounted for by people with high-level skills. This is a result of a shift in subsector employment from hardware towards software; a general shift in the skills mix; and a pattern of simultaneous creation and loss of jobs, resulting in lower-skilled jobs being replaced with higher-skilled.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) advises the Irish Government on current and future skills needs of the economy and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland's enterprise and employment growth. It has a central role in ensuring that labour market needs for skilled workers are anticipated and met. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs provides advice to Government on skills issues impacting enterprise through skills foresight & benchmarking; strategic advice on building skills through education and training; data collection and analysis on demand and supply of skilled labour.

The Group works directly in consultation with enterprises (foreign and Irish-owned) to identify specific current and future skills needs. This analysis enables education and training providers to adapt provision to address skills needs. It is also used to underpin labour market activation programmes such as the recent HEA Springboard initiative, a competitive call for provision of higher education places for the unemployed.

The Department of Education and Skills has responsibility for the implementation of labour activation measures and a number of initiatives have been launched, including:

- A €30 million labour market activation fund, supporting 55 projects by 42 providers delivered to 12,629 participants.

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- The Springboard Initiative which will provide 6,000 new places on higher education programmes for unemployed people. The initiative is targeted at those who were previously working but lost their jobs or were made redundant and who, with some upskilling, could fill current or future job shortages.

Another important initiative is JobBridge, the new national internship scheme that will provide work experience placements and will assist in breaking the cycle of unemployment for 5,000 jobseekers.

These labour market activation measures, combined with the increased numbers participating in further education and training and higher education, contribute to making Ireland a very attractive location for future start-ups, FDI and expansion within existing businesses. For much of the last decade, company location has been positive overall for Ireland. IDA Ireland has continued to attract and retain high value investments from leading global corporations. The combined influence of Ireland’s improving competitiveness, our commitment to maintaining our 12.5% corporate tax rate, the development of our national infrastructure, the Government’s investment in science, technology and innovation, and our strong skills base has been instrumental in this regard, and will continue to attract and increase the level of inward investment in Ireland. To date in 2011, the IDA has announced investment decisions which will create over 4,500 jobs in the Irish economy as the investments come on stream.

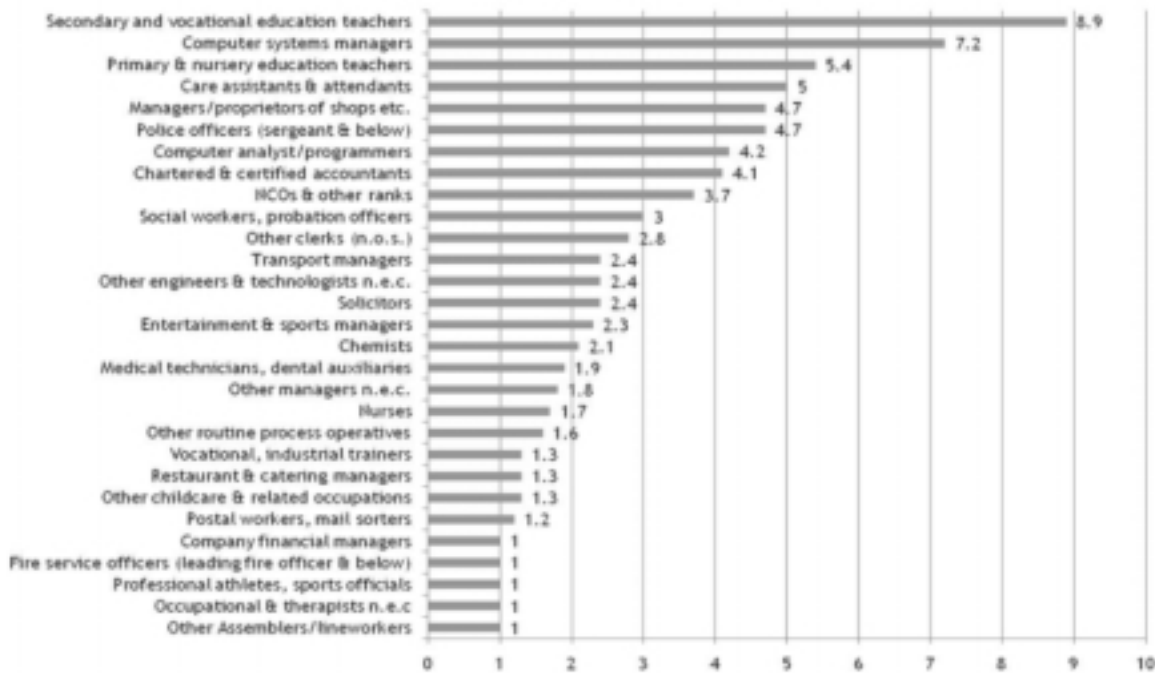
My Department works closely with the Department of Education and Skills and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs to ensure that our education and training programmes are developed and adapted to meet the needs of enterprises now and into the future.

Appendix 1



Source: CSO QNHS

Increase in occupations 2007/2010



Question No. 17 answered with Question No. 15.

Industrial Disputes

18. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will expedite payments to a person (details supplied). [28899/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): This case refers to a Determination of the Employment Appeals Tribunal in which an award to the person was made and to the alleged failure of an employer to subsequently comply with its provisions. Enforcement of EAT Determinations is a matter for the courts. In this regard, I note that the person has secured an order of the Circuit Court seeking enforcement of the award. Enforcement, in these circumstances, is the responsibility of the relevant County Sheriff and my Department has no capacity to intervene.

Departmental Staff

19. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of civil servants transferred to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade since the redeployment of responsibilities for trade to that Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28832/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department retains lead responsibility for trade policy including within the framework of EU Common Commercial policy and the WTO. These functions are directly linked to the sectoral enterprise and investment development responsibilities that are being developed by my Department and Agencies — as it is essential that we maintain a coherent approach between export, enterprise and investment policies. In addition, Export Control Licensing for military or dual use goods will remain in my Department. There are strong links between the licensing and control activity and the enterprise development role and the scientific and technical capacity of the agencies

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under my remit. In addition, my Department will continue to manage the compilation of detailed trade statistics, covering both exports and imports.

The Transfer of Functions Order which took effect on 1 June, 2011, has strengthened the role of the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade by specifically transferring responsibility to that Department for the management and chairing of key Trade Promotion functions, specifically the Export Trade Council as well as responsibility for Joint Economic Commissions. Following the making of that order, three posts from the Bilateral Trade Unit of this Department were transferred to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade later that month.

The *Export Trade Council*, now chaired by the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, oversees the implementation of the recommendations in *Trading and Investing in a Smart Economy*, which was launched in September 2010. I participate fully in the meetings and work of the new Council. That strategy has brought together all of the relevant agencies and Departments involved in promoting overseas trade, tourism and investment with an integrated approach to achieving a set of agreed priorities and targets for both existing and new high growth potential markets.

Responsibility for the organisation and management of Joint Economic Commissions (JECs), and for setting up any new Joint Economic Commissions, is now also a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Joint Economic Commissions* are formal Intergovernmental bodies which provide a forum for discussing issues that relate to the development of economic and business cooperation and scientific and technological cooperation. Ireland currently operates five Joint Economic Commissions with key growth markets. I will work closely with the Tánaiste in planning a rolling programme of Trade missions. Our intention is to maximise the potential of these trade missions, by targeting market sectors and countries where there is significant potential for exports, research and business partnership and investment.

Departmental Reports

20. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the name and number of external reports that were commissioned by his Department from 2004 to 2008 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 Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy with regard to the external reports commissioned by previous Ministers in the Department from 2004 to 2008 is provided in tabular format. In the five year period, forty one reports were carried out at a total cost to the Department of €4,503,136.

In general, external reports are required, in the main, where the necessary expertise is not available within the Department or where there is a requirement to have an independent external valuation of a particular programme or policy area. As is clear from the information provided, with the exception of a small number of reports in specialist subject areas, the Department complied with the applicable tendering requirements where the amount was in excess of the threshold of €25k, which is the limit specified within the Department of Finance Public Procurement Guidelines for undertaking a formal tendering process. When commissioning reports that fall under the relevant threshold, standard practice in the Department is that at least three quotations are obtained.

In general, the commissioning of such reports contributes to the compilation of necessary evidence for the formulation of policy proposals which balance the needs of relevant stakeholders against the resources available to Government. On this basis, and given that the appro-

appropriate tendering procedures were followed in each case, I believe that the commissioning of these reports served the public interest. The Department advises that these reports were commissioned on the basis that the relevant Ministers were satisfied as to their contribution to the public interest.

Reports Commissioned by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation: 2004-2008

2004

Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Disaster Recovery / Business Continuity Plan	Helm Consultancy	To develop a Disaster Recovery / Business Continuity Plan for the Department	€84,172	Tendering procedure used
Evaluation of the expenditure review of Enterprise Ireland's overseas office network and separate Evaluation of the IDA Property Programme	Prof. Helen O'Neill	An independent evaluation of the expenditure review report on IDA Ireland's Property Programme and separate independent evaluation of the expenditure review of Enterprise Ireland's overseas office network	€1,936	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
Analysis of the findings of questionnaires regarding the Enterprise Ireland overseas office networks and Department of Foreign Affairs missions	Ms Tara Downer	In the context of the expenditure review of Enterprise Ireland's overseas offices network, an analysis of the findings of questionnaires regarding the agency's overseas office networks and Department of Foreign Affairs missions.	€3,000	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
Expenditure Review of IDA Ireland's Property Programme	DTZ Piedad Consultancy and DTZ Sherry Fitzgerald	To provide an analysis of the role of property in attracting foreign direct investment.	€62,500 (consultancy fees) plus printing	Tendering procedure used
Usability Report of the Department's website	Ennis Information Age Services	Audit of the Department's website.	€7,139	Tendering procedure used
Customer Care Research	IPA and TNS/MRBI	Customer Care Research for the Department.	€78,752	Tendering procedure used
Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) The First Years 2001-2005	Report of an International Evaluation Panel	Evaluation of SFI.	(Cost borne by Forfás)	Tendering procedure used

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Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Consumer Strategy Group (CSG) Report — “Make Consumers Count”(including studies commissioned by the CSG)	A number of different consultants and supply / service companies were engaged by the Group during it’s lifetime to undertake work in respect of research, advertising, publications, web, etc.	The Consumer Strategy Group was appointed in March 2004 to advise and make recommendations for the development of a national consumer policy strategy.	€485,172	Tendering procedure used
Total			€722,671	

2005

Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Outcome of Consultations regarding the Employment Rights Bodies Group Report	Transition Management	To report on consultations with employment rights bodies and social partners	€11,616	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
An Assessment of the Increase in the Minimum Wage recommended by the Labour Court in 2005.	ESRI	Assessment of recommended increase to the minimum wage	€10,000	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
ESRI survey and report on the national minimum wage (NMW)	ESRI	To report on the results of the follow up survey on the NMW	€139,000 (this is the cost of survey and report)	The ESRI had carried out 3 previous surveys on the NMW which were tendered for — only 1 other company tendered for those projects. ESRI’s methodology best suited the requirements set down. The proposal to award the contract was reviewed in accordance with D/Finance Circular 40/02.
Final Evaluation Report of Productive Sector Operational Programme (PSOP) 2000-2006	Fitzpatrick Associates	Compliance with EU Regulatory Requirements	€74,415	Tendering procedure used

Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Compliance with Company Law and the impact of the operations of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE)	Ilward Browne	To discover levels of compliance with Company Law and the impact of the operations of the ODCE.	€27,862	Tendering procedure used
Total			€262,893	

2006

Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
An Assessment of the Increase in the Minimum Wage recommended by the Labour Court in 2006.	ESRI	Assessment of recommended increase in the Minimum Wage	€15,000	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
Audit of Patents Office Computer Systems	Tekenable	Conduct an audit of the Patents Office computer system to identify and quantify the benefits to be achieved by moving to latest technology.	€2,420	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
Report on the Economic Impact Assessment of Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Legislation.	Indecon	To report on the economic impact of occupational health and safety legislation and its effect on competitiveness and the economy.	€122,048 (includes printing costs).	Tendering procedure used
Total			€139,468	

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2007

Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Review of the Operation of the National Employment Rights Authority's (NERA) Information Services	Vision Consultancy	To make recommendations on the structures, processes and systems that should operate in NERA's Information Unit in order to achieve the highest possible standard of excellence in terms of meeting customer needs.	€95,711	Tendering procedure used
Security Review	RITS	To conduct an Information Security Review of the Department's ICT Systems and to make appropriate recommendations	€118,928	Tendering procedure used
Business Process Review	Vision 1 Software	To carry out a Business Process Review of the Department's Insolvency Payments Section and to make appropriate recommendations	€20,364	Tendering procedure used
Market Research for Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement	Ilward Browne IMS	To ascertain an overview of the company law compliance environment and the performance of the Office in the discharge of its functions.	€44,790 in 2007, €15,898 in 2008	Tendering procedure used
Value for Money Review of Science Foundation Ireland(SFI)	Indecon economic consultants	To examine SFI's major funding programmes as part of the Government's Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative.	€189,038	Tendering procedure used
Communications Strategy for Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement	Keating and Associates	To develop and advise on a Communications Strategy for ODCE	€32,670	Tendering procedure used

Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Bullying in the Workplace — Survey Reports, 2007.	Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).	2 national surveys were carried out to establish an update picture of workplace bullying in Ireland both in terms of the incidence of bullying for those in work and also to explore how organisations viewed the problem of bullying in their workplaces.	€277,006 (this was the combined total cost of the production of the 2 surveys, which were published in one report, includes printing costs).	Tendering procedure used
Total			€794,405	

2008

Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Data Backup and Storage Review	Computer Associates	To review the Department's Data Backup and Storage environment and produce a report with recommendations.	€13,750	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
Business Process Review	Version 1	To prepare a report on the Insolvency Payments Section Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)	€13,177	Tendering procedure used
Project Management Review	Trigraph Professional Services	Review of ICT Unit Project Management Procedures & Practices	€2,995	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
IT Security Reviews	RITS	3 ICT Technical Reports on laptop encryption, the Department's financials application and scans of on-line systems	€17,669	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
IT Security Review	RITS	Report of the forensics analysis of the European Structural Fund (ESF) website	€2,580	Below threshold for public advertising of contract
Companies Registration Office (CRO) Business Process Engineering Review (BPR)	Grant Thornton	BPR of the CRO	€71,874	Tendering procedure used

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Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Review of Research, Development and Technological Innovation (RTDI) projects in receipt of EU Structural Funds	Contract-auditline (CAL)	Compliance with EU Regulatory Requirements	€38,130	Tendering procedure used
Health and Safety Active Monitoring Reports (Safety Audits) on each of the Department's buildings	Corporate Risk Strategies Ltd.	The identify any risks/hazards in the Department and its Offices and to suggest control measures to be put in place to eliminate these risks so far as is reasonably practical.	€24,200	Tendering procedure used
Website Evaluation Report	IQ Content Ltd	Review of the Department's website.	€41,261	Tendering procedure used
Evaluation of Discover Science and Engineering (DSE) Programme	Independent panel of experts chaired by Dr.Graham Farmello	To ensure that the DSE Programme remains strategically relevant and operationally efficient.	€52,541 (Represents half of the cost of the report, with the balance paid by Forfás)	Tendering procedure used
Report of the Advisory Group on Media Mergers	PriceWaterhouse-Coopers/ Emily Egan	To review the legislative framework in relation to the public interest aspects of media mergers and to make recommendations as appropriate.	€33,732	Tendering procedure used
Review of the Regulation of Petroleum Handling and Storage Facilities	ARUP Consulting Engineers	To support the Department in its review of Dangerous Substances legislation.	€145,301	Tendering procedure used
Report of Investigation of Bovale Developments	PwC Dublin	The ODCE initiated director disqualification proceedings based in part on this Report.The ODCE is satisfied that this Report and the ongoing legal action is serving the public interest.	€570,924	Contract awarded following interview process among several accountancy firms who were on the ODCE's Panel of Accountancy Firms.
Report of Company Investigation (company name withheld until the legal proceedings commence)	PwC Belfast	The ODCE initiated director disqualification proceedings arising from its examination of this Report. These proceedings may be listed for hearing later this year. The ODCE is satisfied that this Report and the ongoing legal action is serving the public interest.	€155,565: It was carried out and paid for over 3 financial years 2007 = €17,793 2008 = €64,130 2009 = €73,642	The Contractor in question had already completed an examination of the company under investigation, and was therefore the only firm qualified to undertake the assignment for the Office.

Name of Report Commissioned by Dept	Report Produced by	Objectives of Report	Cost (€)	Comment
Report of the High Court Inspector into certain matters at DCC plc, S&L investments Ltd and Lotus Green Ltd.	Mr Bill Shipsey SC	The published Inspector's Report clarified the circumstances surrounding the share dealings in question. The ODCE is satisfied that this Report served the public interest.	€1.4 million (2008-2010)	Tendering procedure used
Report on the Investigation into Petrol and Diesel Price Movements	National Consumer Agency	At the request of the then Tánaiste, the National Consumer Agency undertook to survey why pump prices for petrol and diesel had not fallen in line with the drop in the wholesale price of oil.	Cost borne by the National Consumer Agency	Not applicable
Grocery Monitor Reports Numbers 1, 2 and 3. A Description of the Structure & Operation of Grocery Retailing & Wholesaling in Ireland 2001-2008	Competition Authority	Following the repeal of the Restrictive Practices (Groceries) Order 1987, the Competition Authority was requested to review and monitor developments in the grocery sector in light of the new regulatory environment.	Cost borne by the Competition Authority.	Not applicable
Report on The Cost of Running Retail Operations in Ireland	Forfás	At the request of the then Tánaiste, Forfás examined the comparative costs of running retail operations in a number of cities in Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands.	Cost borne by Forfás	Not applicable
Total			€2,583,699	

Enterprise Support Services

21. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the assistance available to start up and non-start up businesses for the employment of new staff; his plans for additional supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28789/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The role of my Department is to drive Ireland's competitiveness and productivity by creating the conditions where enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation can flourish and quality employment opportunities are grown and maintained. Operating under the aegis of my Department direct assistance to start-up and growth companies is provided by a number of Agencies including the County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs) and Enterprise Ireland.

The role of the CEBs is to provide support for micro-enterprise sector in the start-up and expansion phases, to develop indigenous micro-enterprise potential and to stimulate economic

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activity and entrepreneurship at local level. The CEBs deliver a series of Programmes to underpin this role and they can provide both financial and non-financial assistance to a project promoter.

The forms of financial assistance that are available, subject to certain restrictions and conditional on an agreed business plan include the following:

- *Priming Grant* (payable up to 50% of the investment or €80,000 whichever is the lesser), available to micro-enterprises for business start-ups within the first 18 months of start-up.
- *Business Expansion/Development Grant* (payable up to 50% of the investment or €80,000 whichever is the lesser), available to micro-enterprises to grow and develop the micro-enterprise.
- *Feasibility/Innovation Grant* (payable up to €20,000 or 50% (S&E region)/60% (BMW region) of the investment, whichever is the lesser), available to micro-enterprises to assist with the cost of necessary pre-start up studies carried out for the purposes of assessing market interest in/demand for a proposed new product or service, the appropriateness of the associated funding plans, the general viability and sustainability of the venture and assistance with innovation.

In the case of *Priming Grants* and *Business Expansion/Development Grants*, all business costs directly attributable to starting a new business or growing and developing a business, save payments to State Bodies may be considered for support, including, where appropriate, an element of employment/salary costs for the 1st year of employment.

In addition, the provision of non-financial assistance can take the form of a wide range of supports such as Programmes covering Start Your Own Business, Business Management and Capability Development, Mentoring, E-commerce, Enterprise Education, and Women in Business networks. Due to the Boards unique relationship with their clients and the local business community they can specifically tailor their programmes to meet the evolving needs and requirements of these small enterprises going forward.

The range of financial and non-financial assistance available from the CEBs represents a broad suite of appropriate supports dedicated to the micro-enterprise sector. For the remainder of 2011 the CEBs will continue to support enterprise development in the sector and will ensure that available funds are targeted to maximise entrepreneurial development across the Country.

22. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the efforts he has made to reform the grant aid system here. [28888/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The various EU State Aid regulations and frameworks set out the types of activities that can be supported by the Member States and stipulate the maximum percentage of eligible costs that can be aided. These ceilings vary according to the type of aid measure involved but typically allow higher rates of aid for small and medium sized enterprises. Most measures are horizontal and do not have differentiated aid rates depending on the location of a company in the EU.

By contrast, the Regional Aid Guidelines govern the areas in which Member States may grant regional aid, more commonly known as investment aid. Investment aid is intended to promote the economic development of certain disadvantaged areas within the European Union in order to redress regional disparities. The Guidelines specify rules for the selection of regions which are eligible for regional aid and define the maximum permitted levels of this aid. Under

Ireland's current Regional Aid Map, regions covering 50% of the population are entitled to grant Regional Aid.

Under the Regional Aid Map, the highest rates were afforded to the Border, Midlands and West (BMW) region. For the period of 2007 to the end of 2010, the region qualified for a rate of 30% for large firms; for medium and small firms the rates were 40% and 50% respectively. In accordance with the Guidelines, a reduced rate of aid for the BMW region is applicable from 1 January 2011: 15% for large companies, 25% and 35% for medium and small firms respectively. The maximum aid rates for eligible regions within the Southern and Eastern Region remain at 10% for large companies, 20% and 30% for medium and small firms respectively. No scope exists to renegotiate aid rates within the current Guidelines, which are due to expire on 31 December 2013. There are no proposals as yet from the European Commission on new Regional Aid Guidelines to apply after the end of 2013.

Question No. 23 answered with Question No. 15.

Economic Competitiveness

24. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will report on the publication of Ireland's competitiveness scorecard 2011 by the National Competitiveness Council. [24418/11]

32. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the reports or recommendations he has received from the National Competitiveness Council which reports to him. [24419/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 24 and 32 together.

Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2011 was published by the National Competitiveness Council on 6th September. This annual benchmarking report analyses Ireland's competitiveness performance using 127 statistical indicators. These range from measures such as economic growth and quality of life, to policy inputs that will drive future competitiveness across areas such as the education system and the delivery of infrastructure. Drawing primarily on data from international sources (e.g. OECD, Eurostat, UN, etc.), the report benchmarks Ireland's performance, comparing and ranking it against 17 of our key competitors and the OECD or EU average.

The 2011 Scorecard finds that our competitiveness performance is mixed, with strengths in areas such as export performance, inward investment and improved productivity, but with weaknesses in other areas, including prices and labour costs. The National Competitiveness Council, in the report, states that a renewed focus on cost competitiveness is fundamental to our economic recovery. Notwithstanding the fact that cost competitiveness gains have been made since 2008, further significant progress is required to ensure Irish enterprises can compete internationally.

In addition to the annual benchmarking report, the National Competitiveness Council each year publishes "Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge", which, drawing from the benchmarking exercise, outlines the main challenges to Ireland's competitiveness and the policy responses required to meet them. The 2011 report will be submitted to the Government in the coming weeks for consideration. I have asked the NCC to ensure that the report focuses on specific actionable proposals that will drive Ireland's continued economic recovery.

The NCC also prepares a report on the "Costs of Doing Business in Ireland". The most recent report in this series was published in June of this year. The report analyses Ireland's cost competitiveness across five key business inputs: Labour costs, Property costs, Utility costs,

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Business and Professional Services costs and indirect business costs such as consumer prices. The main findings of the report are similar to the Competitiveness Scorecard, in that the business environment continued to show an improvement in cost competitiveness in 2010, but deeper structural improvements are necessary to ensure that costs do not rise again as the economy recovers.

In this regard, the Costs of Doing Business report made a number of recommendations to embed competitiveness in the economy in a structural way. I have brought these recommendations to the attention of my Ministerial colleagues in Government and I will continue to work with them to identify further actions that can be taken to improve our competitiveness, reduce costs to business and remove obstacles to employment creation. As part of its work programme, the NCC publishes other papers from time to time on specific competitiveness issues. All NCC reports are available on the NCC Website, *www.competitiveness.ie*.

Company Law

25. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to update the current partnership law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28649/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Company Law Review Group (CLRG) gave in-depth consideration, over a period of 4 years, to the reform of partnership law, in particular to the possibility of introducing Limited Liability Partnerships for accountants and solicitors. In general, the CLRG did not find any strong tide of opinion running in favour of introducing Limited Liability Partnerships. However, the Group did say that the issue warranted some further consideration and recommended that the Department of Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation and the Department of Justice and Equality should establish a committee, made up of representatives of both Departments and of the CLRG, the Irish Accountancy and Auditing Supervisory Authority and the Courts Service, to consider whether accountants and solicitors should be permitted to form Limited Liability Partnerships or companies.

The issues at stake here are complex and wide ranging, particularly as it could involve the establishment of a new legal form which would have to apply generally and not only to the professions. The committee considering the issues will also have to take into account the taxation and transparency issues before coming to a conclusion and recommendations. In the meantime, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence will soon publish the Legal Services Regulation Bill and I understand that it will include provision for the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority, to be established by the Bill, to conduct research and consultation and make proposals on partnerships for the legal profession.

Finally, the overall position on liability has been changing in the last few years. Section 44 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 provides that a solicitor may contract with a client to limit his/ her liability to that client. Furthermore, S.I. 220/2010, European Communities (Statutory Audits) (Directive 2006/43/EC) Regulations 2010, provides, among other things, for the removal of the prohibition on auditors incorporating as a limited liability company.

Consultancy Contracts

26. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount that was spent on consultants in his Department in 2009 and 2010; and the amount that will be spent on consultants in 2011. [28882/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Details are provided in the table of the amount that was spent on consultants by my Department in 2009, 2010 and the amount that will be spent on consultants in 2011. It should be noted that my Department processes payments for expenditure on consultancy relating to the Offices under the remit of my Department and these payments are included in the figures provided.

Year	Expenditure on Consultants
2009	€740,028
2010	€536,455
2011*	€373,000

Note 1:

*Estimated expenditure taken from Revised Estimate 2011.

Skill Shortages

27. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if, in view of the mismatch of available skills and available jobs in the market and the expensive and often slow infrastructure within his Department in identifying new skills sets that will be needed in the immediate future, he will consider a new State sponsored jobs media based on the LinkedIn model that would connect employers with unemployed persons with relevant skills immediately. [28883/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): FÁS Jobs Ireland is an online marketplace where jobseekers and employers can find information about employment opportunities in Ireland and across Europe. As responsibility for the FÁS Employment Services has transferred to the Minister for Social Protection I have referred your question to her for consideration and direct reply to you. With regard to the identification of new skills for the future, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs now comes under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills which has responsibility for the provision of training and education.

Emigration Levels

28. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to reduce the level of emigration which has reached 50,000 persons a year; and if he will quantify the level of emigration reduction his plan will achieve for each of the next three years. [28879/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Both inward and outward migration have been a feature of Ireland's labour force over the last three decades and they will continue to be a feature of a modern globalised economy where mobile workers follow job opportunities. Recent CSO data shows that 76,400 people were estimated to have emigrated in the year ended April 2011 while 42,300 entered Ireland in the same period giving a net outward migration of 34,000 approx in the period. Some 36,200 (47.4%) of those who left Ireland in the 12 months ending April 2011 were non-Irish nationals reflecting the diversity of our population and labour force in recent years.

Extract from CSO Population and Migration Estimates (,000)

	Immigrants	Emigrants	Net migration
Year Ending April 2010	30.8	65.3	—34.5
Year Ending April 2011	42.3	76.4	—34.1

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A closer analysis of the immigrant figures shows that 17,100 Irish national returned to Ireland in the year to April 2011- an increase of almost 4,000 compared to the previous year. Returning Irish nationals accounted for 40% of all immigrants in the twelve months to April 2011.

There is clearly a difference between voluntary migration, where people choose to work abroad, and a situation where people feel that they have to look elsewhere for work until such time as there are jobs available in the Irish economy to match their skills. In order to address this, the Government has set economic recovery and job creation as its core objectives. It is only by creating the right environment for businesses to expand that we will see new jobs coming on stream.

Building on the Jobs Initiative of last May, I have begun the process of preparing a comprehensive Jobs Strategy which will provide an action plan to support the creation of employment in the economy. It is expected that the Strategy will be published in January. In the meantime, the enterprise development agencies, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, and the County and City Enterprise Boards are continuing to drive and promote enterprise development, and consequently employment creation, in our economy.

The training, work experience and education measures that are being implemented by the Departments of Social Protection and Education and Skills are designed to help those who are unemployed gain valuable work experience, maintain close links with the labour market, improve their skills and education levels and ultimately improve their career prospects.

Many Irish people will continue to choose to emigrate for personal and career reasons and therefore it is not possible to estimate the level of emigration over the coming years. However, the Global Irish Economic Forum held in Dublin Castle last weekend showed that many Irish emigrants have been successful in the field of business and entertainment and they still have a close attachment to Ireland. The Forum showed that we can — and should — tap into our diaspora to help us to achieve economic recovery and create new jobs. In this context, the Government will be driving forward a number of initiatives and suggestions which emerged from the Global Irish Economic Forum last weekend.

Job Creation

29. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans for job creation in view of the planned privatisation of State assets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28871/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I announced last week that I have begun the preparation of a comprehensive Jobs Strategy at the request of the Taoiseach and Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs. Building on the Jobs Initiative of last May, this Strategy will provide an action plan to support the creation of employment in the economy.

It is only by creating the right environment for businesses to expand that we will see new jobs coming on stream. Part of the task is to ensure that critical infrastructure is put in place to allow enterprises to grow and take advantage of the opportunities that will arise in both traditional and emerging sectors. Ireland needs to continue to improve its key infrastructure, particularly in the areas of energy, water and broadband, to maintain Ireland's attractiveness as a place to do business.

These infrastructural services are important for companies in most sectors. For example, the pharmaceutical sector has a high dependence on water, all exporting companies need better broadband, and energy infrastructure is important for the whole of the economy and for society.

Improving our infrastructure in these areas will also help us to exploit opportunities in emerging sectors such as Cloud Computing, Cleantech, and Health and Lifesciences. Identifying opportunities in these, and other, sectors will be part of the Jobs Strategy which I expect to publish in January. In this context, the establishment of NewERA, which was announced by the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Minister of State Fergus O'Dowd, on 29th September, is an important development.

NewERA will initially be established on a non-statutory basis as a Shareholder Executive within the NTMA. It will have responsibility for reviewing capital investment plans of the commercial semi state companies from a shareholder perspective, and will identify possible synergies between investment programmes of the different State companies, ESB, Bord Gais, EirGrid, Bord na Mona and Coillte. The NewERA approach will enable us to get the best value and efficiency in the development of energy, water and broadband infrastructure, and help to make Ireland a better place to do business and create jobs.

Export Markets

30. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the changes he has made in the seven months since he came to office to reorientate our foreign enterprise development services towards Brazil, Russia, India and China; and the changes that he will make in this regard in the next 12 months. [28886/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The agreed Programme for Government sets out clearly that Ireland's economic recovery must be export-led. That Programme commits us to achieve the maximum growth in exports, including the long-term development of new markets. The Government has given a commitment to progressively implement the recommendations in the strategy and action plan for Irish Trade, Tourism and Investment to 2015, entitled *Trading and Investing in a Smart Economy*, developed by my Department last year, which will, inter alia, position Ireland to develop better trade relationships with emerging economies. In terms of markets, it identifies potential to further grow our existing key markets — and, most particularly, to increase or gain a foothold in high-growth and high-potential markets, such as Brazil, Russia, India, China.

It must be appreciated that these four countries, collectively referred to as the BRIC countries, are a diverse group of markets at different stages of development and sophistication. Spread across different territories with differing cultures, languages, time zones and business styles and norms they present a number of additional challenges for companies seeking to do business in these markets.

Despite this, the enterprise development agencies, under the remit of my Department, are making progress in these countries. IDA Ireland has established a Growth Markets Division dedicated to the promotion of Ireland as an FDI destination from the BRIC countries, among others. And this year the Agency established second offices in both China (Shenzhen) and India (Bangalore). There is also experienced IDA representation in both Russia and Brazil. IDA has completed a promotional programme to Russia, with a second programme to be undertaken at the end of this month. The Agency has just completed a second promotional programme to Brazil this year.

Enterprise Ireland has identified and targeted a number of sectors and sub-sectors in each individual market that offer clear opportunities. It continues to work with its clients that have the expertise and experience to potentially win sales and grow exports in each market. In addition to the services supplied to clients by EI specialist Market Advisors in each market to drive export growth, EI has also established a High Growth Markets (HGM) team based in

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Dublin effectively giving an extended presence to each market back in Ireland and providing a local first point of contact for client companies in overcoming some of the challenges with regard to face-to-face interaction and time differences.

I, myself, led a Trade Mission to India in April last, with 22 Enterprise Ireland client companies participating, where I officiated over a successful programme of events to promote our exports to that country. Early next month, the Joint Economic Commission with Russia will be held.

Job Protection

31. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps he is taking to secure jobs at the MBNA site in Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28650/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My priority is that any decision taken by Bank of America (BOA) will have minimal impact on employees at the Carrick on Shannon operation and ensure that jobs are maintained at the facility. I emphasised this when I travelled to the USA recently and held discussions with BOA CEO and senior management. While the company has not made any final sale decisions, I am satisfied as to its current level of engagement with IDA Ireland.

IDA Ireland has had regular contact with local management since the announcement by Bank of America (BOA) to monitor the evolving situation and has engaged its international network of overseas offices to identify groups with a potential interest in the Carrick operation. It is still very early in the process of attempting to maximise future activity and employment at the Carrick facility. There has been positive preliminary interest. However it would clearly take some time for any definitive proposal to emerge and be selected. Fortunately, Bank of America has not set down any rigid timelines — so there is an opportunity for both it and the IDA to evaluate opportunities.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 24.

Departmental Agencies

33. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the cost of the administration of each of the enterprise development agencies; and if he will estimate the savings that would be achieved if the enterprise development agencies' administration function was amalgamated and training synergies found with the new further education body SOLAS. [28880/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The estimated cost associated with the administration function (back-office, corporate services, corporate facilities etc) of Enterprise Ireland for 2011 is €13.2m out of an estimated operating budget (pay and non-pay) of €90m. This represents 14.7% of the overall operating expenditure. The balance of the operating costs, in addition to operating a network of 9 regional offices and 31 overseas offices, includes the salaries and other costs of staff who directly engage with client companies and who provide a range of services aimed at supporting and incentivising companies to invest more, employ more and know more in the context of winning export sales.

The current exchequer allocation for the network of County and City Enterprise Boards is €12.242m. In addition to the day-to-day operational running costs of the CEB network, this figure includes the salaries of business advisors and other staff who provide direct advice and mentoring to client companies which represents a strong investment in the micro-enterprise

sector, notwithstanding the additional level of demand on CEB services generated in the current difficult economic climate.

The estimated cost associated with the administration function (back-office, corporate services, corporate facilities etc) of IDA Ireland for 2011 is €10.27m out of an estimated operating budget (pay and non-pay) of €41.7m. This represents 25% of the overall operating expenditure. The balance of the operating costs, in addition to operating a network of regional and overseas offices includes the salaries and other costs of staff who directly engage with client companies with the aim of winning and embedding foreign direct investment in this country.

In the case of Shannon Development, the estimated cost associated with the administration function (back-office, corporate services, corporate facilities etc) for 2011 is €3.1m out of an estimated operating budget (pay and non-pay) of €17m. This represents 18% of overall operating expenditure. The balance of the operating costs, includes the salaries and other costs of staff who directly engage with client companies and who provide a range of services aimed at supporting and incentivising companies to invest more and employ more.

Currently, Forfás is carrying out work on the potential of increasing existing shared services within the agencies. Potential cost savings have not yet been quantified. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is also carrying out another exercise on the potential for shared services across the public sector which is at an early stage.

The Government Decision on the establishment of SOLAS sets out the Government's strategy for the integration of further education provided by the VECs and training provided by FAS. The training provided by the enterprise development agencies under the aegis of my Department such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the CEBs are usually part of an overall package of funding for grant aided industry and while it is anticipated that that these agencies will develop linkages with SOLAS as its role evolves, it would be impossible, at this point to quantify the level or extent of savings that might emerge from any synergies found.

County Enterprise Boards

34. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the changes he will make to the institutional and corporate arrangements for the county enterprise boards; if local flexibility will be maintained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28648/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The issue of restructuring the County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs) has been in the public domain since the publication of the McCarthy Group Report in 2009. I am of the view that it is timely and appropriate to re-structure, and re-focus, how the State delivers its support to the indigenous micro-enterprise sector which is a key component of the small business sector and will be vital to our economic recovery in Ireland.

There are a number of schools of thought on the best way forward in relation to CEB restructuring. It will be important to ensure that there is a coherent and cohesive delivery of State support to the indigenous business sector based on clear enterprise policy principles laid down by this Department. Any restructuring must not compromise the State's engagement with, and support for, the micro-enterprise sector and, in particular, must not make it more difficult for the end-user to access the support services available for the Sector.

Within my Department we are currently seeking to determine the extent to which there should be restructuring of the CEBs, and the nature of that restructuring, having regard to the Programme for Government, and to other recommendations on CEB restructuring. I am also conscious of the need to achieve a rational and focused model for entrepreneurs, as well as the

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need to ensure that there is targeted local delivery of enterprise support, driven by a national enterprise policy, in a manner which eliminates overlap and duplication.

EU Funding

35. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he has approached the European Investment Bank to co-fund capital building projects. [28876/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have not formally approached the European Investment Bank to co-fund capital building projects. However, my Department has explored EIB funding options. Under Cycle 5 the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI), one project utilised European Investment Bank funding in order to co-fund a capital building project. The project involved was the TCD Biomedical Building which has been constructed on Pearse Street. €54,571,000 is exchequer funding and a further €20,594,000 funding was privately sourced by the HEI. Within, and subject to, the terms of the Borrowing Framework as established under Section 38 of the Universities Act (1997), universities are autonomous and, therefore, may act independently when seeking and securing loans.

Economic Competitiveness

36. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the reductions in the cost of utility services that have been achieved in the seven months since he took office; and the reductions that will be achieved in the next 12 months. [28885/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Responsibility for the regulation of utilities is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation, CER, which is an independent statutory body under the remit of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. Ireland's wholesale and retail electricity and gas markets are characterised by vigorous competition regulated by the CER.

From 1 October, residential gas consumers will be the only segment of the electricity and gas markets where prices will be regulated, with prices in the retail electricity market now fully deregulated. Prices in the electricity market and unregulated part of the gas market are wholly a commercial and operational matter for the suppliers.

The Government is committed to competition to exert downward pressure on prices. Competition is achieving competitive pressure on suppliers, by stimulating them to offer better deals and discounts, which will primarily benefit business and domestic customers. Customers are to be encouraged to work actively in securing better value offers in the market and in switching to suppliers delivering lower prices to reduce their energy costs.

From a business perspective, actions to date have improved Ireland's competitiveness position in the gas and electricity sectors. Analysis by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, of EUROSTAT data for the second half of 2010 shows that, for large business customers of electricity, Irish prices were between 7 and 9% of the eurozone average while prices for small to medium-sized business customers ranged from 4% below the average to 6% above, depending on the category. Gas tariffs remain competitive with business tariffs at 83% to 90% of the eurozone average.

Overseas Development Aid

37. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the criteria for which funding is allocated by Irish Aid to non-governmental organisations; the

measures in place to ensure that these procedures are followed through once funding has been allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28922/11]

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. It is recognised internationally for its effectiveness, and for its concentration on some of the poorest countries and communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Irish Aid channels a higher proportion of overall assistance through development Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) than other international donors, reflecting the strong support of the Irish people for the work of NGOs and missionaries. This funding is provided to support the long term development work of NGOs, in accordance with the objectives of the Government’s aid programme, the work of NGOs on emergency and humanitarian assistance, and development education programmes.

All Irish Aid funding of NGOs requires Ministerial approval. Funding proposals submitted by NGOs are rigorously appraised by Irish Aid staff and, as appropriate, by external experts, against criteria which include quality of intended impact, sustainability, cost effectiveness in the use of resources and strength of management systems and oversight within partner organisations. In advance of approval of funding applications, it is a fundamental condition that annual audited accounts are provided by partners. In the interests of transparency, NGOs which receive significant levels of funding from Irish Aid are required to publish their audited accounts on their websites.

Funding by Irish Aid is strongly focused on the achievement of development results. Specific objectives and results are identified, against which all programmes are assessed and evaluated. All development aid funding is disbursed in line with these specific objectives. Procedures to ensure funding is used for intended purposes include regular field monitoring visits to programme partners, annual narrative and financial reporting against agreed objectives and budgets, end of programme evaluations and ongoing reviews of compliance.

In addition, the Evaluation and Audit Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade periodically evaluates and audits partners in receipt of significant funding. Recent audits have included the NGOs, Concern, Goal and Trócaire. These arrangements aim to ensure that Ireland’s development funding to NGOs reaches those most in need and is subject to rigorous oversight. Irish Aid and our NGO partners are working in some of the most difficult environments in the world. I am satisfied that the assessment, monitoring, evaluation and audit systems which Irish Aid has put in place provide the best assurance that development aid funding is meeting its intended objectives.

Diplomatic Representation

38. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the location of Irish embassies currently without an ambassador; his plans to amalgamate or fill these posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28966/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Currently there are vacancies at Ambassadorial level at our Embassies in Canberra, Holy See, Stockholm and Brussels. Irish Ambassadors are appointed by the President based on nominations by the Government. I will be submitting proposals to the Government in the very near future about filling existing Ambassadorial vacancies and others that are expected to arise over the next few months.

Grant Payments

39. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the grant awarded to an organisation (details supplied) in County Antrim to continue its work of reconciling Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland which it has undertaken since the 1960s; and if, in the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement, the payment will continue. [29006/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): My Department, through the Reconciliation and Anti-Sectarianism Funds, has supported the Corrymeela Community for a number of years in its aims to provide a safe environment for people to build new relationships through dialogue and encounter and to foster reconciliation between all people in Northern Ireland. Corrymeela Community was awarded a grant of €150,000 in 2009 (three equal annual instalments of €50,000 for 2009, 2010 and 2011) to allow the organisation to provide residential workshop facilities to community groups and to further reconciliation through its Creating Communities Programme, which targets young people and families. The programme is designed to combat sectarianism and residentials and activities are offered for families and young people. While it is open to Corrymeela Community to apply for funding in future years, it is not possible at this stage to indicate whether or not a future application would be successful.

Diplomatic Representation

40. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of embassies this State has; the location of these embassies; the current number of staff in these embassies and the way staffing levels compare to each of the years 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010; the budgets provided to each of these embassies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29076/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland has 58 Embassies, 7 multilateral missions and 11 Consulates General and other offices overseas. In addition to their country of primary accreditation, many Ambassadors are also accredited to additional countries on a non-resident basis. The budget of each Mission is considered to be the locally-devolved administrative (day-to-day) budget including local staff salaries but not salaries of diplomatic staff, which are a charge on the Headquarters budget. Likewise, my Department's capital budget is not allocated to missions on an ongoing basis but is managed from Headquarters. Details of the budgets are included in the table below. The budgets of missions that manage significant programmes on behalf of Irish Aid reflect the additional management and oversight required for the effective implementation of those important programmes.

Administrative Budgets for Missions under Vote 28

Mission Name	2007	2008	2009	2010
BERNE	410,913	437,412	427,988	429,447
BERLIN	989,049	1,087,413	1,021,130	907,409
BOSTON	358,449	340,432	373,100	377,114
BRUSSELS (EMBASSY)	786,135	797,848	866,057	564,559
BRUSSELS (PR-EU)	3,212,811	3,287,727	3,312,397	3,322,071
BUENOS AIRES	322,915	356,510	372,902	438,541
CAIRO	423,112	460,950	396,525	382,190
CANBERRA	685,692	735,778	659,319	760,935
CHICAGO	374,739	361,004	326,566	345,200

Mission Name	2007	2008	2009	2010
COPENHAGEN	489,824	453,531	423,347	400,517
GENEVA	1,025,326	1,100,971	1,075,171	1,158,745
THE HAGUE	796,322	655,764	652,976	741,184
HOLY SEE	507,171	465,421	429,188	435,726
ABUJA	340,829	482,313	290,016	278,241
LISBON	372,323	421,384	376,881	347,406
LONDON (Includes PPO London)	4,802,407	4,176,511	3,807,568	3,448,547
LUXEMBOURG	689,555	697,480	692,201	687,546
MADRID	1,111,591	1,187,876	1,192,169	1,073,062
MOSCOW	894,959	621,369	759,994	758,895
NEW DELHI	675,856	746,064	474,056	743,338
NEW YORK — PMUN	1,830,274	2,163,309	1,266,438	1,773,546
NEW YORK — C.G.	2,078,888	1,695,637	1,761,317	1,798,093
OTTAWA	555,007	518,918	484,809	555,300
PARIS	1,735,974	1,728,866	1,684,107	1,698,403
ROME	1,123,927	1,226,389	1,200,155	1,187,410
SAN FRANCISCO	440,660	447,138	418,088	427,629
STOCKHOLM	425,044	405,238	396,501	474,031
TEHRAN	315,880	361,419	508,622	449,698
TOKYO	1,512,360	1,527,528	2,040,450	1,581,230
VIENNA	623,208	653,183	636,769	654,487
WASHINGTON DC	1,309,597	1,170,402	1,200,800	1,236,780
OSLO	681,225	684,003	594,344	551,146
STRASBOURG	411,768	429,925	425,598	415,027
RIYADH	354,774	360,173	505,645	344,037
ATHENS	473,132	466,756	479,663	489,042
BEIJING	717,438	702,587	674,053	728,852
SEOUL	463,052	702,932	336,119	677,583
WARSAW	859,674	900,958	823,095	782,993
HELSINKI	532,898	440,335	560,166	526,400
PRETORIA	780,024	710,107	533,210	684,301
PRAGUE	576,003	562,068	544,386	566,321
KUALA LUMPUR	360,576	349,914	343,486	362,896
BUDAPEST	448,096	476,165	487,050	453,678
OSCE — VIENNA	452,111	447,742	438,703	482,715
TEL AVIV	612,408	559,020	581,112	585,185
CARDIFF	218,563	171,720	80,028	Closed
EDINBURGH	287,684	213,313	221,185	229,941
ANKARA	409,800	412,782	389,863	394,114
MEXICO	576,947	508,335	451,487	441,289
SYDNEY	489,818	513,448	483,921	565,349
SHANGHAI	436,737	383,727	506,973	552,387
SINGAPORE	896,912	797,600	801,544	821,066
RAMALLAH	374,282	356,261	286,028	348,085
BRUSSELS (P.F.P.)	316,306	266,990	266,699	251,942
NICOSIA	380,745	419,018	405,689	397,820
LJUBLJANA	430,892	489,701	431,438	421,396
TALLINN	424,639	422,292	350,750	412,343

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

Mission Name	2007	2008	2009	2010
BRATISLAVA	366,101	380,017	409,568	358,004
BRASILIA	447,306	458,959	451,615	554,554
BUCHAREST	538,425	510,155	525,399	433,408
SOFIA	377,875	423,536	394,384	367,570
RIGA	383,636	379,309	368,369	341,547
VILNIUS	450,730	471,881	452,427	426,413
VALLETTA	307,828	316,038	326,847	324,574
ABU DHABI*	372,155	545,048		
ATLANTA *	35,380			
TOTAL MISSION EXPENDITURE	48,811,302	47,725,872	45,926,204	46,579,181

*Opened in 2010

Administrative budget of Embassies from Vote 29

Mission Name	2007	2008	2009	2010
Addis Ababa	1,069,681	1,120,947	1,004,946	986,204
Maseru	641,586	855,970	607,549	590,515
Llongwe	372,588	696,622	699,500	571,766
Maputo	1,296,893	1,642,201	1,362,203	1,080,345
Freetown	193,473	200,889	326,386	311,302
Pretoria	575,140	665,141	483,238	484,791
Dar Es Salaam	696,806	1,073,990	1,011,800	934,447
Kampala	1,265,261	2,046,346	1,368,460	1,212,029
Hanoi	462,089	578,967	581,847	644,703
Lusaka	1,138,391	1,484,288	1,078,568	1,201,480
Dili	176,523	214,729	250,211	208,411
Totals	7,888,432	10,580,092	8,774,709	8,225,994

The staffing information for 2011 requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below in respect of Missions abroad. The figures take account of officers of other Government Departments and offices, whose salaries and other costs are in some cases borne by the parent Department or office. Also included is a small number of staff indirectly engaged through local employment agencies, some on a temporary basis. Comparable figures for each of the previous four years are not immediately available. Programme staff employed locally by Irish development Missions are not included.

Mission	Current staffing complement	Changes over the period 2007-2010	Number of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officers posted from HQ	Comment and/or reason, where relevant
Abu Dhabi	12	+12	2	Mission established in 2009; Total includes 6 Department of Justice and Equality visa office staff

Mission	Current staffing complement	Changes over the period 2007-2010	Number of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officers posted from HQ	Comment and/or reason, where relevant
Abuja	16	-1	2	Total includes 9 Department of Justice and Equality visa office staff, local staff post suppressed
Addis Ababa	9	—	5	
Ankara	7	—	3	
Athens	8	—	3	
Atlanta	2	+2	1	Mission established in 2010
Beijing	26	—	5	Total includes 9 Department of Justice and Equality visa office staff
Berlin	12	—	5	
Berne	5	—	2	
Boston	5	—	2	
Brasilia	6	—	2	
Bratislava	5	—	2	
Brussels (Embassy)	14	-2	3	Ambassador post currently vacant; Third Secretary post suppressed; includes Partnership for Peace Office; total includes 6 staff from other Departments and Offices
Brussels (PR-EU)	85	—	39	Total includes 40 staff from other Departments and Offices
Bucharest	7.5	—	2	
Budapest	6	—	2	
Buenos Aires	5.6	—	2	
Cairo	10	—	3	
Canberra	8.5	-1	1	Ambassador post currently vacant
Chicago	5.4	—	2	
Copenhagen	6.4	-1	2	First Secretary post suppressed
Dar-Es-Salaam	8	—	5	
Dili	3	-1	2	Third Secretary post suppressed
Edinburgh	3	-1	2	Third Secretary post suppressed
Freetown	3	—	2	
Geneva	14	—	6	Total includes 4 officers from other Departments
Hanoi	8	—	5	
Helsinki	5	—	2	
Holy See	5	- 1.5	1	Ambassador post currently vacant, part-time local staff post suppressed
Kampala	8	—	4	
Kuala Lumpur	8	—	2	
Lisbon	6	—	2	
Lilongwe	4	-1	3	Senior Development Specialist post currently vacant
Ljubljana	5	-1	2	Local staff post suppressed

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

Mission	Current staffing complement	Changes over the period 2007-2010	Number of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officers posted from HQ	Comment and/or reason, where relevant
London (including Passport office)	51	-35	31	Certain passport functions and posts transferred to HQ and others suppressed including 20 local staff posts; total includes 5 Department of Justice and Equality visa office staff and 5 officials from other Departments or officers
Lusaka	6	-1	3	Development Specialist post currently vacant
Luxembourg	6	-1	1	Third Secretary post suppressed
Madrid	14	—	4	
Maputo	8	—	5	
Maseru	4	—	2	
Mexico	7	—	3	
Moscow	20	—	6	Total includes 7 Department of Justice and Equality visa office staff
New Delhi	24	—	3	Total includes 10 Department of Justice and Equality visa office staff
New York — Consulate General	17	-1	5	Local staff post reassigned to Atlanta
New York — PMUN	16	+1	9	Development post added
Nicosia	6	—	2	
Oslo	5	—	2	
Ottawa	8	—	3	
Paris	21	-2	7	Includes Mission to the OECD and UNESCO; 2 administrative posts suppressed
Prague	9	-1	2	Third Secretary post suppressed
Pretoria	14	-1.5	4	Third Secretary currently vacant, part-time local staff post suppressed
Ramallah	6	—	2	
Riga	3	-2	1	Third Secretary post suppressed, local staff post suppressed
Riyadh	10	-1	2	Third Secretary post suppressed
Rome	11.8	-1	3	First Secretary post suppressed
San Francisco	5	-1	2	Local staff post suppressed
Seoul	6	—	2	
Shanghai	7	—	3	
Singapore	8	—	2	
Sofia	7	—	2	
Stockholm	5	-1	1	Ambassador post currently vacant
Strasbourg	6	—	2	
Sydney	5	—	2	
Tallinn	3	-2	1	Third Secretary post suppressed, local staff post suppressed
Tehran	6	—	2	

Mission	Current staffing complement	Changes over the period 2007-2010	Number of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officers posted from HQ	Comment and/or reason, where relevant
Tel Aviv	5.5	-0.5	2	Part-time local staff post suppressed
The Hague	9	—	3	
Tokyo	11	—	3	Mission temporarily strengthened in advance of Ireland's OSCE chairmanship 2012
Valletta	3	—	1	
Vienna (Embassy)	8	—	3	
Vienna (OSCE)	15	+10	7	
Vilnius	4.5	—	2	
Warsaw	10.7	—	3	Total includes 3 officers from other Departments
Washington DC	21	—	9	

Tourism Promotion

41. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Irish embassies have a role in promoting Ireland as a tourism location; if he will consider seeking a more proactive role for our embassies in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29077/11]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The advancement of Ireland's economic interests overseas is a key priority for my Department. This includes the promotion of Ireland as a tourist destination. Both at headquarters and through our Embassy network we work closely with all of the State Agencies including Tourism Ireland, which is tasked with helping to grow overseas tourism revenue and visitor numbers on an all-Ireland basis.

In all of the markets which Tourism Ireland has identified as priorities, under the Trading and Investing in a Smart Economy Strategy, there is a Tourism Ireland representative nominated to the local market team, which is chaired by the local Ambassador and includes the other relevant State Agencies. These teams prepare annual market development plans to ensure a coherent approach to Ireland's promotional activities overseas. Throughout the year Embassies jointly run many promotional events with Tourism Ireland, including Trade Fairs, industry events, showcase events and other activities. In cities where there is no Tourism Ireland Office, our Embassies and Consulates deal with public enquiries and serve as distribution points for brochures and other printed matter promoting tourism to Ireland.

The support which Embassies can provide in the promotion of Ireland as a tourist destination is particularly evident around the St Patrick's Day celebrations which provide a unique opportunity to raise awareness of Ireland worldwide. This year, as in previous years, Embassies abroad worked closely with Tourism Ireland to co-ordinate promotional activity, including the "greening" of key international landmarks, organised by Tourism Ireland. Ambassadors co-hosted receptions and officiated at tourism related events. I might add that in non-priority markets, where Tourism Ireland do not have an office, Embassies and Consulates also play an active role in promoting the Island of Ireland as a tourism destination.

Banking Sector Recruitment

42. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons recruited on an annual basis to the Central Bank of Ireland since 2008 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28913/11]

43. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance the number and type of consultants brought into the Central Bank of Ireland on an annual basis since 2008; the start date of each consultant contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28914/11]

44. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance if any retired staff from the Central Bank of Ireland have been brought back into the bank on a consulting basis since 2008; the number of same that were brought back, broken down on an annual basis, and the length of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28915/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 to 44, inclusive, together.

The Minister for Finance has no role in recruitment of staff and hiring of consultants of the Central Bank of Ireland. However, I have been informed by the Central Bank of the following:

Number of appointments on an annual basis since 2008.

Year	No. of appointments
2008	126
2009	85
2010	265
2011	173.4

Number of consultants brought in on an annual basis since 2008.

The Central Bank has informed me that, in the time available, it is not possible to provide a separate start date for each of the 283 consultancy contracts concerned. However, the information requested by the Deputy is set out below by reference to the year in which the contracts commenced.

Year	Central Banking	Supervisory	IT	Facilities
2008	27	34	3	11
2009	20	29	0	9
2010	22	27	0	27
2011	21	26	7	20

Retired staff brought back by the Central Bank on a consultancy basis since 2008.

Four staff were brought back into the Bank on a consulting basis since 2008. However, in the time available, it was not possible to identify the length of time of each contract and I have asked that the information be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is compiled.

Consultancy Contracts

45. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank of Ireland has consulted with any outside agencies with regard to stressed mortgages; the names of these

agencies; the nature of the advice provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28916/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Central Bank that in the context of the Financial Measures project, consultancy advice was provided in relation to all the relevant aspects of the stress testing exercise undertaken for AIB, EBS, Bank of Ireland and Irish Life and Permanent including mortgages. This work was undertaken by a team of consultants from three companies namely — Blackrock, BarCap and BCG.

Appointments to State Boards

46. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the appointments made to State agencies and boards under his remit for the years 2009, 2010 and to date in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28962/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Information requested by the Deputy in relation to appointments to bodies under the aegis of my Department is contained in the following tables.

2009

Name of Body	Name of appointee	Date appointed /reappointed
National Development Finance Agency (NDFA)	Mr John Corrigan (Chairman) Chief Executive, (NTMA) ex-officio Mr Brian Murphy (Chief Ececutive) Director, (NTMA) ex-officio	4 Dec 2009 12 Jan 2009
National Pensions Reserve Fund Commission	Professor Frances Ruane Mr Brian Hillery Mr John Corrigan (ex-officio)	1 Jul 2009 1 Jul 2009 (re-appointed) 4 Dec 2009
National Assets Management Agency	Mr Frank Daley (Chairperson) Mr Michael Connolly Mr William Soffe Ms Eilish Finan Mr Brian McEnery Mr Peter Stewart Mr John Corrigan (ex-officio) Mr Brendan McDonagh (ex-officio)	All non ex-officio members appointed 22 Dec 2009
Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority	Mr John Dunne Mr Dermot Quigley	1 May 2009 1 May 2009

2010

Name of Body	Name of appointee	Date appointed /reappointed
Central Bank Commission	Professor John Fitzgerald Mr. Max Watson Mr. Michael Soden Mr. Des Geraghty Professor Blanaid Clarke	All appointed 01 Oct 2010
National Pensions Reserve Fund Commission	Mr Paul Carty (Chair) Mr Knut N Kjaer Mr John A Canning Jr	1 Aug 2010 2 Apr 2010 2 Apr 2010 (re-appointed)
National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) Advisory Committee	Ms Tytti Noras Mr Brendan McDonagh Mr Kevin Cardiff	1 Aug 2010 (re-appointed) 1 Sep 2010 1 Feb 2010

[Deputy Michael Noonan.]

Name of Body	Name of appointee	Date appointed /reappointed
State Claims Agency Policy Committee	Mr Chris Fitzgerald Mr Tony Delaney Brigadier General Christopher Moore (retired) Ms Niamh Moran	20 Oct 2010 22 Feb 2010 22 Feb 2010
National Assets Management Agency	Mr Steven Seelig	10 Mar 2010 25 May 2010
Credit Union Advisory Committee	Mr Pádraig O’Cearbhaill (Chair) Ms Iris White Mr Michael O’Conaill Mr Gerry Murphy Ms Noreen Byrne Ms Denise O’Connell Mr Donal McKillop	All appointed 1 Sep 2010
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	William Prasifka (Financial Services Ombudsman) Tom Comerford (Deputy Financial Services Ombudsman) Tom Finn, Head of Legal Services	Appointed in 2010

To date in 2011

Name of Body	Name of appointee	Date appointed /reappointed
National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) Advisory Committee	Mr Donal Roth	1 Jan 2011(re-appointed)
Central Bank Commission	Mr Alan Ahearne	08 Mar 2011
Commission on Credit Unions	Donal McKillop (Chair) Fiona Cullen Kieron Brennan Billy Doyle Eileen Fitzgerald Tom McCarthy Tim Molan Robert Moynihan James O’Brien Dan O’Gorman Joe O’Toole John Wilson Aidan Carrigan	All appointed June 2011

Tax Code

47. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the arrangements in place regarding recouping VAT to the Exchequer when State agencies arrange the sale of assets abroad and when VAT may be charged on the sale commission or on the sale proceeds (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28992/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the EU VAT Directive, with which the VAT law in EU Member States must comply, provides for a margin scheme for auctioneers of works of art. Under the margin scheme, VAT is charged on the commission or margin received by the auctioneer and not the full value of the item being supplied as would be the case under normal VAT rules.

However, it is important to note that auctioneers may elect to use the margin scheme for some sales and not others. The margin scheme arrangement is referred to as the “auction

scheme” and the goods concerned are referred to as “auction scheme goods”. In general, auction scheme goods are goods passed to the auctioneer by a person who is otherwise not entitled to a VAT input credit on their acquisition. The auctioneer is regarded as simultaneously buying and selling the goods and for VAT purposes does not treat the transaction as a sale where commission is charged. VAT, as mentioned previously, is accounted for on the margin and not the full consideration received.

Under the auction scheme VAT is accounted for in the Member State in which the auction takes place, that is, where the auction scheme goods are supplied. Where the auction is held within another EU Member State, VAT is charged in that Member State and not in Ireland. In such case, as there would be no liability to Irish VAT, the issue of recouping VAT to the Exchequer does not arise.

Financial Institutions Support Scheme

48. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the bank guarantee scheme will remain the same and if deposit accounts containing up to €100,000 will be safe; the length of time the guarantee will remain in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29008/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legal basis for the Deposit Guarantee Scheme in Ireland is set out in the European Communities (Deposit Guarantee Scheme) Regulations 1995 (S.I. No. 168 of 1995) as amended. These Regulations implement the European Union Directive on Deposit Guarantee Schemes (Directive 94/19/EC) as amended. As a statutory scheme implemented under EU law, the Deposit Guarantee Scheme is in place on an ongoing basis. The Scheme is administered by the Central Bank of Ireland and covers 100% of deposits held in any credit institution authorised in Ireland (including credit unions) up to a maximum of €100,000 per qualifying depositor per institution in accordance with the terms of the Directive. Generally, the Scheme covers deposits held in current accounts, demand deposit accounts and term deposit accounts with credit institutions.

The basic intention behind such a scheme is to reassure depositors that there is a safety net that will enable them to recover all, or at least most, of their savings in the event of a failure of a credit institution. This reassurance, in turn, helps to contribute to the stability of the financial system. While a review of the EU Directive is underway at present, this is not expected to have any impact on the coverage level already in place. Furthermore, on foot of a recent Government decision I have sought EU state aid approval for a prolongation of the Eligible Liabilities Guarantee (ELG) Scheme that guarantees, inter alia, retail deposits in excess of €100,000 and all other deposits, on the advice of the Governor of the Central Bank and of the other State authorities, on financial stability grounds. I have also consulted with the ECB.

The extension of the ELG Scheme is a necessary element in placing the Irish banking system on a sound footing and is also important in maintaining the confidence of deposit holders. Subject to receipt of EU state aid approvals, I propose to place a draft statutory instrument before both Houses of the Oireachtas for approval well in advance of the end of the year to enable the issuance period in the Scheme to be extended for one year to 31 December 2012.

Legislative Programme

49. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) (No. 2) Bill 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29018/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The material supplied by the Deputy refers to recent amendments to the Credit Union Act 1997 which were brought forward at Committee Stage of the Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) (No. 2) Bill 2011. The primary purpose of these amendments is to enhance the Central Bank's existing powers to issue regulatory directions. On foot of concerns raised by credit union representatives, I asked my officials to consult with the relevant credit union stakeholders, including the Commission on Credit Unions. Further amendments are proposed for Report Stage of the Bill to address the concerns raised without compromising the ability of the Central Bank to act on financial stability grounds. The Deputy might note that Report Stage of the Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) (No. 2) Bill 2011 is scheduled for today 12 October 2011.

Banks Recapitalisation

50. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the arrangements in respect of the €1 billion that is being recouped from the sale of Bank of Ireland shares to private investors; if he will confirm that funding provided to Bank of Ireland through the National Pensions Reserve Fund is to be lodged; the impact this will have on State finances; the implications in respect of the budget deficit for 2011; if he will publish the correspondence he issued to the National Treasury Management Agency and/or the National Pensions Reserve Fund in respect of the transfer of these funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29062/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): On 25 July 2011, I announced the successful conclusion of negotiations by the Government with private investors who, subject to appropriate regulatory clearances being obtained, committed to buy up to €1.123 billion of the NPRF's holding of Bank of Ireland ordinary stock. The investors committed to both initially purchase approximately €0.2 billion of stock and subsequently purchase the remainder after appropriate regulatory approvals had been obtained.

On 28 July 2011, I issued a direction to the NPRF under section 20A of the National Pension Reserve Fund Act 2000 (as amended) that, inter alia, the share consideration received from the disposal to the private investors is transferred from the NPRF to the Exchequer. Pursuant to this direction the net proceeds received from the initial disposal, of €233 million, have been transferred from the NPRF to the Exchequer. When regulatory approvals have been obtained, and the agreed remaining shares are acquired by the private investors, the resultant net proceeds will also be transferred to the Exchequer.

These net proceeds from the initial disposal have been classified as a capital receipt in the Exchequer account and they appear in Note 3 of the end-September Exchequer Statement which was published last week. These receipts benefit the Exchequer finances through reducing the Exchequer deficit. However they do not benefit the General Government measure of the deficit as they are the proceeds of a financial transaction from the swapping of one class of financial asset for another.

Tax Code

51. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the savings to be made to the Exchequer from placing an earnings ceiling of €80,000 on pensions contributions and standardising tax relief for pension contributions at 20%. [29126/11]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume that the Deputy is referring to the current annual earnings cap of €115,000 which operates to limit the level of tax-relieved personal pension contributions in any one year. The annual earnings cap acts, in conjunction with

age-related percentage limits of annual earnings, to put a ceiling on the annual amount of tax relief an individual taxpayer can obtain on pension contributions.

A breakdown of the cost of tax relief on employee contributions to occupational pension schemes is not available by income tax rate, as tax returns by employers to the Revenue Commissioners of employee contributions to such schemes are aggregated at employer level. An historical breakdown is available by tax rate of the tax relief claimed on contributions to personal pension plans — Retirement Annuity Contracts (RACs) and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs) — by the self-employed and others, to the extent that the contributions have been included in the personal tax returns of those taxpayers. There is, therefore, only a limited statistical basis for providing definitive figures.

However, by making certain assumptions about the available information, the Revenue Commissioners inform me that the combined estimated full year yield to the Exchequer from reducing the current annual earnings cap of €115,000 to €80,000 and confining tax relief to the standard rate of 20% in respect of individual contributions to occupational pension schemes, RACs and PRSAs would be about €550 million.

FÁS Training Programmes

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to liaise with the educational and training sectors with a view to maximising job opportunities for apprentices, those who have not yet completed their apprenticeship and those seeking such placements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29124/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): FÁS has the statutory responsibility for the organisation and control of designated apprenticeship. FÁS does this in co-operation with my Department, the Institutes of Technology, employers and unions. Redundant Apprentices may register with their local FÁS Employment Services Office to avail of information on job vacancies. Information on job vacancies may also be accessed by telephoning FÁS Jobs Ireland at Free Phone 1800 611 116 or on the FÁS website at www.fas.ie. In addition, the following initiatives have been taken by FÁS to enable registered redundant apprentices to progress in 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

With the support of the social partners, 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.

Competency Determination Mechanism

FÁS has introduced a Competency Determination Mechanism 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.

[Deputy Ciarán Cannon.]

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.

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. 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 the 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 and with work experience in the Manufacturing and Facility Maintenance Sectors.

Fee Waiver Scheme

Course fees will be waived for redundant apprentices who attend FÁS day and/or evening courses in order to enhance their employable skills.

Training Sector/Employer Contact

FÁS is in regular contact with the Higher Education Authority, Construction Industry Federation, County & City Managers Association, TEEU, ESB Networks and other

employers to request assistance for redundant apprentices to obtain on-the-job training with assessments and other training supports.

My Department along with FÁS will continue to explore ways to support and assist apprentices to progress and finish their apprenticeships.

Early Childhood Education

53. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children that commence school each year in September who have reached their fourth birthday in the months of July or August in the same year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28905/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The National School Annual Census collects data on the age of children classified by the year of their birth. Data is not collected on the month of birth and hence the data requested is not available. I believe a breakdown of births by month may be available on the website of the Central Statistics Office at www.cso.ie. While this information may be helpful, I am informed by the officials in my Department's Statistics section that this information cannot be used as a precise measure as to which children have commenced school in a given year, as parents have the right to decide when their child starts primary school.

School Transport

54. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide funding to operate a shuttle bus service between the school bus drop off point and a new school (details supplied). [28908/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The planning and organising of school bus routes is an operational matter for Bus Éireann. Bus routes are planned in such a way as to ensure that, as far as possible, eligible pupils have a reasonable standard of service while at the same time ensuring that school transport vehicles are fully utilised in an efficient and cost effective manner. Bus Éireann has advised that the pupils concerned are availing of a service within the guidelines of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme. As a result I do not propose to provide additional funding for the operation of a shuttle bus service.

Special Educational Needs

55. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will deal with a matter (details supplied) regarding special needs assistants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28925/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): 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 school, to which the child referred to by the Deputy, is attending has an allocation of 3 SNA posts and 44.1 Resource Teaching Hours. 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

[Deputy Ruairí Quinn.]

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, of their SNA allocation for the current school year, taking into account the care needs of qualifying pupils attending the school. The NCSE has recently published statistical information in relation to the allocation of Special Needs Assistant posts and resource teaching hours to Primary Special and Post Primary Schools. The information is provided on a county by county and school by school basis on its website at *www.ncse.ie*.

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 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. 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 Funding

56. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the responsibility for providing funding for street lighting outside of schools lies with his Department or with the local authority. [28937/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The provision of street lighting is a matter for the relevant local authority, and the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, under the Roads Act, 1993.

Special Educational Needs

57. **Deputy Eamonn Maloney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will approve the appointment of a replacement teacher at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28957/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As the Deputy will be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent agency with responsibility for determining the appropriate staffing levels in relation to the support of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools. The NCSE operates within my Department's policy in allocating this support. As the Deputy Principal at the school referred to by the Deputy has retired, the school may wish to appoint an acting Deputy Principal from their existing staffing component in the interim until a selection process has been carried out and a Deputy Principal is appointed. The school should refer to Circular 07/03 for information on post of responsibilities.

Schools Refurbishment

58. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that there was no official correspondence from his Department aside from the note on the online claim system on 20 June 2011 advising schools not to enter into any capital works based on the

minor works grant for the 2011/12 school year and outlining that a decision on it would be circulated to schools in September 2011; and if this scheme has been withdrawn. [28982/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Correspondence issued to the management bodies in the primary sector (Catholic Primary School Managers Association, Church of Ireland Board of Education, Educate Together and Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Gaeilge Teo) on the 20 June 2011 regarding the Minor Works Grant 2011/2012 in addition to the notice on the On Line Claim System. The notice on the On Line Claim System reads:

Primary schools are advised not to enter into any capital commitment this year in anticipation of a Minor Works Grant 2011/2012. In the context of the capital resources available to the Department and the prioritisation of these, a decision on the issue of the availability and level of a Minor Works Grant for the school year 2011/12 will be made in the autumn and schools will be informed.

The position as outlined in the notice remains.

School Transport

59. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the transport difficulties being currently experienced by pupils attending a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will investigate this representation and fast track their schools transport appeal application process. [28985/11]

60. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in the case of a school (details supplied) in County Cork in which its union of parishes covers a catchment area of more than 400 square miles for the last 39 years, he will give details of his new policy and the way he came to his recent decision; and if he will outline the policy position in relation to pupils attending this minority school and accessing school transport particularly in view of the fact that they reside more than the 3.2 kilometres distance criteria but in this case are being denied transport because they are not deemed to be coming from a distinct locality. [28986/11]

62. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in view of the fact that a school (details supplied) in County Cork and because of its broad catchment area relies heavily on school transport for its survival, he will review his decision to reinstate the school transport to pupils currently attending this school. [28988/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59, 60 and 62 together.

Changes in the School Transport Scheme were announced by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government and derive from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the scheme. One of the changes announced included an increase to ten in the minimum number of eligible pupils, residing in a distinct locality, required to establish or retain an individual school transport service. Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport schemes on behalf of my Department, has advised that in this case, the number of applications from eligible pupils did not match the above requirement and consequently the service was withdrawn from the beginning of the current school year.

This minimum number requirement has been applied to all individual school transport services nationally from the commencement of the 2011/12 school year. As is currently the position, families of eligible pupils, for whom there is no school transport service available, may apply for a remote area grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

[Deputy Ciarán Cannon.]

It is essential to stress that the wider context within which this change is taking place, is a situation of the most serious financial difficulties. Under the four year recovery plan, there is a requirement to deliver savings of €17 million on the school transport budget and this measure is an integral part of this. I understand that the appeal referred to by the Deputy is to be considered by the School Transport Appeals Board at their next meeting which is scheduled for Thursday 20th October 2011.

61. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that there are 321 schools in County Cork, seven of the schools are multi-denominational, 20 schools are under Church of Ireland management and the rest are under Roman Catholic management and that this year, according to his own statistics on the web, out of the 15 schools in Cork that lost their transport, four were under Church of Ireland management. [28987/11]

63. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the potential impact of a current interpretation of distinct locality on minority schools and rural Ireland, that is a service to convey a group of children whose homes are scattered points in a school district would not be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28989/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 63 together.

Changes in the School Transport Scheme were announced by the previous Fianna Fáil-Green Party Government and derive from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the scheme. One of the changes announced included an increase to ten in the minimum number of eligible pupils, residing in a distinct locality, required to establish or retain an individual school transport service. This minimum number requirement has been applied to all individual school transport services nationally from the commencement of the 2011/12 school year. As is currently the position, families of eligible pupils, for whom there is no school transport service available, may apply for a remote area grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements. Bus Éireann has advised that 11 schools in County Cork had services withdrawn under the minimum number requirement and three of these schools are under Church of Ireland management. A full list of schools in County Cork is available on my Department's website. It is essential to stress that the wider context within which this change is taking place, is a situation of the most serious financial difficulties. Under the four year recovery plan, there is a requirement to deliver savings of €17 million on the school transport budget and this measure is an integral part of this.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 59.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 61.

FÁS Training Programmes

64. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in furnishing a FETAC certificate to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when this person can expect to receive the certificate which is required to secure employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29004/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): FÁS has confirmed to my Department that it expects to receive from FETAC the certificate for the person in question by the end of this month.

School Statistics

65. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a breakdown of the number of pupils attending primary school per county and per patronage. [29014/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The information requested on the number of primary pupils by county is provided by the National School Annual Census and is available on the Department's website, in table 2.18 of the Department's Annual Statistical Report at <http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/stats—statistical—report—2010—2011.xls>.

Alternatively the data can be access through the Department's Education Statistics Database at <http://www.cso.ie/px/des/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=EDA57&ti=National+School+Pupils+by+Year,+County,+Statistic+and+School+Programme&path=../Database/DES/Primary%20Level%20Education%20Statistics/&lang=1>. Information on patronage is not available at county level.

Higher Education Grants

66. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a full grant of €6,100 to a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29032/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I regret that the economic circumstances of the country are such that I am not in a position to reverse or alter any of the changes to the student grant measures announced in Budget 2011 by the previous Fianna Fáil — Green Party Government. These changes included an increase in the qualifying distance criterion for the non-adjacent rate of grant from 24 kilometres to 45 kilometres.

The measurement of the distance from a student's home to college for student grant purposes is a matter for the relevant grant awarding body — the local authority or VEC where the student is ordinarily resident. It remains the case that the shortest most direct route to the institution attended is measured. No appeal appears to have been received in this case either by my Department or the Student Grant Appeals Board.

67. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason he is insisting on using old congested routes for examining the qualifying distance applicable when assessing whether an applicant qualifies for a higher education grant at the non-adjacent rate; his views that students should use the best route available to them when travelling to college; the reason he is insisting that students use old congested routes and avoid motorways; whether this a policy that he has set or should officials when deciding on the distance to be used be allowed to consider not only the shortest route but also the best route to avoid extra traffic build up on unsuitable routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29039/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The measurement of the distances for student grant purposes is a matter for grant awarding bodies — the relevant local authority or VEC. There has been no change as to how these distances are measured. As in the past for all cases, the shortest most direct route to the institution attended is measured. I understand that a range of mechanisms can be used, for example, online mapping such as AA Route Planner and Google Maps. If the distance is disputed, the matter should be taken up with the grant awarding body concerned. In some cases, it may be necessary to carry out a physical measurement.

Ombudsman for Children

68. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the request by the Ombudsman for Children to extend the remit of that office to cover the working of the National Council on Special Education; if he has had discussions on this issue with the Ombudsman and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in view of the fact that the NCSE is under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29065/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Office of the Ombudsman for Children was established under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 by the Minister for Health and Children. On 3rd June 2011 responsibility for the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 was transferred to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I understand that the Office of the Ombudsman for Children has been in contact with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs regarding this matter. I also understand that under this Act the inclusion of the National Council for Special Education within the remit of the Ombudsman for Children requires a draft Order to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and a resolution approving this order approved by each such House.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs have advised that they intend to consult with my Department and with the Ombudsman for Children before finalising a proposal on this matter. Pending the making of any order by the Government to include the NCSE within the complaints and investigation remit of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, the Office and the NCSE have agreed an interim process through which the concerns which had been brought to the attention of the Office would be brought to the direct attention of NCSE for response.

Vocational Education Committees

69. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way decisions were reached regarding the location of vocational education committee head offices; the person who made the final decision; the factors that were considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29066/11]

70. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for existing vocational education committee head offices which will not be head offices once they are amalgamated with other VECs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29067/11]

71. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the role of a vocational education committee sub-office within the new configuration of VECs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29068/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69, 70 and 71 together.

Last week, I finalised and announced my decision in relation to the location of headquarters of the merged VECs. In arriving at this decision, I considered a range of factors including the need to ensure that the location of a VEC headquarters will, to the greatest extent possible, facilitate staff redeployment under a redeployment scheme within the context of the Croke Park Agreement and the need to operate at lowest cost having regard to the accommodation available in existing locations.

I expect that headquarters staff of a merging VEC who are employed in an office which has not been designated as a head office or sub office of the new structure will move to the designated headquarters location as soon as feasible, although in all cases, a sub-office will be main-

tained for the immediate term in order to facilitate an orderly merger. The role of headquarters staff of a merging VEC who are employed in an office which has been designated as a sub-office, and the use of offices which will no longer be used as administrative offices of VECs following the merger, will fall to be considered and worked through by the CEO of the merged entity in conjunction with my Department.

School Staffing

72. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to assist graduate teachers who are currently unemployed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29069/11]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Anecdotal evidence indicates that there is an over supply of teachers currently and that there are newly qualified teachers not yet holding teaching positions in schools. 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. In addition, the Deputy might also wish to note that the JobBridge National Internship Scheme has recently been extended to teachers. This provides 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.

EU Funding

73. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for co-financing support from the European Globalisation Fund for retraining and upskilling tradespeople and building workers; the amount of funding to be made available; the number of workers who will be catered for; the number of places that will be available in County Kerry; and the envisaged commencement date. [29078/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): On 7 October 2011 the European Commission approved co-financing of €35.7m under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) in respect of three applications for assistance submitted in June 2010 for almost 9,000 former workers made redundant in the construction NACE 41, 43 and 71 subsectors between 1 July 2009 and 31 March 2010. These applications still require to be approved by the other EU budgetary authorities of the European Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. In total, including national co-financing, the three applications will total €55m to provide guidance, training, education and enterprise supports to eligible beneficiaries.

A number of national measures, for which EGF co-financing has been sought, are already being provided by the relevant service providers and funded from national sources. These measures include career guidance, full, part-time and evening further education and training courses, apprenticeship on- and off-the-job training, full and part-time third level education programmes and related training and education allowances where appropriate. The main service providers delivering these supports are FÁS, Vocational Education Committees and publicly funded higher education institutes. Training is also being provided through contracted private providers and the technical employment support grant mechanism administered by FÁS.

As data is being collated from a number of service providers at present, it is not possible to provide a breakdown by county of expenditure and participation rates to date. It is estimated nationally that at least 4,500 interventions for this cohort have been commenced in the areas

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of guidance, training and third level education. All eligible individual beneficiaries will be contacted in due course and be made aware of the specific interventions available to them under the relevant EGF programmes. I will make a further announcement on how those interventions will be made available and on how eligible persons will be informed in the next couple of weeks.

Flood Relief

74. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures taken by the Office of Public Works to resolve flooding at a river at Ballycatlan, Carrickmacross, County Monaghan, which has previously caused extensive damage to lands belonging to a person (details supplied); if plans can be put in place to erect a bridge across the river at this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28961/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): Two channels forming part of the Glyde and Dee Arterial Drainage Scheme flow through the lands concerned and the Office of Public Works (OPW) has a statutory responsibility to maintain this Scheme. One of these channels, and a portion of the other, was maintained by the OPW as part of the Scheme channel maintenance works carried out during 2010. However, it was not possible to maintain the remainder of the channel at that time due to an issue over the securing of access from this landowner.

On foot of a channel survey carried out by the OPW earlier this year, the maintenance of a channel downstream of the affected lands was undertaken. The OPW has this week inspected the channel to determine the impact of these works on the water levels through the lands of the person concerned upstream and whether any further works are required. Arrangements will then be made to maintain the remainder of the channel. It will be necessary to secure the co-operation of the landowner regarding access in order to undertake this maintenance. My Office is not in a position to erect a bridge on the lands, as the OPW does not build new bridges on existing arterial drainage schemes.

Departmental Agencies

75. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if it envisaged that a voluntary redundancy scheme will be introduced at FÁS in the context of the reorganisation of the body under SOLAS. [28997/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Issues relating to FÁS are a matter in the first instance for the Minister for Education and Skills. My Department has received no proposal from the Department of Education and Skills in relation to a voluntary redundancy scheme in FÁS.

Public Service Agreements

76. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the Croke Park agreement; if he has received implementation plans for this agreement from each Government Department and State agency; the status of these implementation plans; the discussions he has had with the EU-IMF regarding the agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29063/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Under the *Public Service Agreement 2010-2014*, detailed action plans have been developed across each sector of the public service to underpin the change and reform process envisaged by the Agreement.

The Action Plans were first developed in October 2010 and subsequently revised in January 2011. Public service bodies in each sector were required to prepare their first detailed report on the progress being made in implementing their Action Plans last May and this formed part of the first annual review of the Agreement undertaken by the Implementation Body.

The second phase of progress reporting on the Agreement is underway at present. Sectors are due to submit updated progress reports to the Implementation Body during October. These sectoral reports will be examined by the Body and published on its website (www.implementationbody.gov.ie). It is expected that Action Plans will need to be revisited later in the year when decisions have been taken by Government on the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure.

The Government has indicated that the Public Service Agreement represents a key enabler to meeting its fiscal targets under its obligations under the EU/IMF Joint Programme of Assistance. The quarterly returns made to date by the Government under the Programme on public service numbers and the pay bill have indicated that the numbers of public servants are falling and we are on track to meet the existing target of 302,000 public service posts by end 2011. Similarly, the Exchequer pay bill return for the first six months is in line with the 2011 pay bill targets. The Government has indicated that it wishes to honour the commitments given in the Public Service Agreement. However, this will only be possible if the Agreement is implemented in full.

Public Service Staff

77. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a consistent policy in place within the public service regarding absenteeism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29064/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In relation to absenteeism across the public service each of the sectors has its own policy in place. In the Civil Service, the area for which I have direct responsibility, the policy for sick leave is governed by a number of Circulars which are published on the Personnel Code and available on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform website. The procedures were recently updated and are set out in Circular 9/2010 which codifies the procedures for the management of sick leave. These procedures reflect best practice and include provision for return to work interviews, monitoring the patterns of sick leave and referral of officers to the Chief Medical Officer for the Civil Service.

The local government sector has been addressing the issue of attendance management and absenteeism for many years now, not least through the gathering and analysis of statistics from the annual Service Indicator Reports. A Policy and Procedure for Attendance Management issued in 2006 by the Local Government Management Services Board and these were revised and re-issued in early 2011.

In the Education sector the Department of Education and Skills has recently issued a circular concerning the Sick Leave Scheme for Registered Teachers in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools (Circular 60/2010 available on the Department of Education and Skills website). Circular letter 33/2010, also published by the Department of Education and Skills and available on the website, sets out the sick leave scheme for special needs assistants.

In the Health Sector, the Health Services Executive has published policies entitled 'Managing Attendance Policy and Procedures' and 'Rehabilitation of employees back to work after illness or injury — Policy and Procedure', designed to address absenteeism and to support staff in returning to work following illness or injury. Both documents are available on the HSE website.

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In addition, my Department is initiating a review of sick leave provisions and will be bringing proposals to me on the matter.

Pension Provisions

78. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason a single person in the public sector is compelled by law to pay a pension for a spouse and child even if they do not have a spouse or a child; and the way such a requirement can be justified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29082/11]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Commission on Public Service Pensions examined the issue of compulsory membership in its Final Report on Public Service Pensions in 2000. It did not recommend any change in the rules providing for automatic membership of the spouses' and children's schemes, nor in the refund arrangements for membership contributions.

Public service spouses' and children's schemes are structured on a group insurance basis and the member contribution rates take account of the fact that payment of benefits will not arise in respect of all members. If cessation or refund of contributions (other than in respect of contributions exceeding forty years) were to be permitted on the basis that no benefits were going to arise, this would weaken the integrity of the schemes and could undermine fundamentally the financing of the schemes.

It is generally not possible to determine that a person will never benefit from such schemes as they provide cover for marriages and civil partnerships after retirement, and adopted children and stepchildren are also covered. Also, there is now a wider range of scheme beneficiaries under the schemes than heretofore. For example, in relation to civil partnerships, Section 99 of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 provides that a benefit under a pension scheme that is provided for the spouse of a scheme member is deemed to provide equally for the civil partner (as defined in the Act) of such a person.

There are no plans to make any changes with regard to contributions to existing spouses' and children's schemes. The details provided had already been sent to my Department by the person concerned in a letter dated 26 September 2011. A direct response issued on 10 October 2011.

Public Contracts

79. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the nationality of the firms which were successful in applying for public contracts in the years 2009 and 2010; and if he will break these down in order of value of public contract and size of firm. [28930/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of public contracts awarded by my Department in the years 2009 and 2010 is set out in tabular form below. The information provided outlines: nationality of firm; value of contract; nature of contract; and size of firm. In awarding contracts, the Department had full regard for the public procurement procedures and awarded the contracts in line with those requirements. The majority of firms that were awarded contracts during the relevant period were Irish. In determining the size of firms, the criteria used was: small firm — less than 50 employees; medium sized firm — from 50 to 250 employees and large sized firm — over 250 employees.

List of Contracts — Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

2009

Nationality of firm	Value	Nature of contract	Size of Firm
Irish	€975,000	IT Helpdesk services	Large
Irish	€280,000 over max. 4 years	Upgrade and migration of IT system, and ongoing support and maintenance	Medium
UK	€268,341	Postal service *	Large
UK	€209,564	Undertaking a forensic assessment of the export credit insurance market in Ireland	Large
Irish	€170,000	Purchase of servers, storage and tape libraries	Large
Irish	€130,686	Contract cleaning	Large
Irish	€130,000	Purchase of PC's from Government Framework	Small
Irish	€126,359	Off-site file storage	Large
Irish	€120,000	Network support services	Small
Irish	€110,000	Cleaning services	Medium
Irish	€105,349	Printing and posting of personalised letters service	Small/Medium
Irish	€85,000	Software support services	Large
Irish	€80,000	Purchase of Microsoft licences	Medium
Irish	€72,292	Audit services	Large
Irish	€60,917	Software licences & support	Large
Irish	€59,041	2 year drawdown contract for supply of storage shelving	Small
Irish	€54,141	Cleaning and hygiene supplies	Medium
Irish	€34,112	Software purchase, installation & support	Small, part of a medium-sized group
Irish	€31,242	Cleaning services	Large
Irish	€30,000	Design	Small
Irish	€30,000	Stenography services	Small
Irish	€30,000	Technical support services	Large
Irish	€24,905	Indexing, barcoding, and boxing of CRO documents	Small/Medium
Irish	€14,400	Supply of storage system expansion to CRO database	Small
UK	€9,800	Audit of EU co-funded enterprise agency R&D programmes	Small

2010

Nationality of firm	Value	Nature of contract	Size of Firm
Irish	€500,000	Purchase of wide area network connectivity	Large
Irish	€360,000 over max. 4 years	IT system support	Large
UK	€270,000	Purchase of Microsoft Office 2010 licences	Large
Irish	€250,000 estimated	Purchase of servers and storage devices	Large
UK	€180,015	Postal service	Large
Irish	€180,000 over max. 4 years	eForms licences, development and support	Small
Irish	€150,000 estimated	Purchase of PC's from Government Framework	Small
Irish	€121,781	Off-site file storage	Large

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Nationality of firm	Value	Nature of contract	Size of Firm
Irish	€106,354	Printing and posting of personalised letters service	Small/Medium
Irish	€104,060	Business Process Re-engineering and Employment Appeals Tribunal and Rights Commissioner Service	Medium
Irish	€94,179	Postal Service	Large
Irish	€65,000 over max. 4 years	IT system upgrade and support	Large
Irish	€60,000 over 2 years	ICT training for Departmental staff (drawdown contract)	Small
Irish	€60,000 estimated	Purchase of specialised technical IT eLearning training	Medium
Irish	€60,000	Technical support services	Large
Irish	€55,575	Audit of EU cofounded enterprise agency R&D programmes	Medium
Irish	€41,687	Cleaning and hygiene supplies	Medium
Irish	€40,656	Lease of equipment and software on a short-term basis	Medium
Irish	€40,000	Purchase of network routing equipment	Large
Irish	€35,000	Purchase of backup/ disaster recovery software	Medium
Irish	€29,011	Communication services for NERA	Small

*Postal Service

The UK firm Pitney Bowes provided postal services to the Department in 2010. While this company provided the franking machines for stamping all outgoing post and managed this postal service, all outgoing mail was handled by An Post which is Irish. This postal service has since reverted to An Post as a result of a competitive tender process.

Export Markets

80. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the measures available to small and medium enterprises who wish to break into emerging economy export markets; the new assistance measures he will provide to such SMEs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28953/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for Government sets out clearly that Ireland’s economic recovery must be export-led and commits us to achieving the maximum growth in exports. The Government has given a commitment to progressively implement the recommendations in the strategy and action plan for Irish Trade, Tourism and Investment to 2015, entitled *Trading and Investing in a Smart Economy*, developed by my Department last year, which will, inter alia, position Ireland to develop better trade relationships with emerging economies.

Through Enterprise Ireland, a comprehensive suite of business supports are available to exporting companies. These programmes are tailored to a company’s stage of export development, such as the International Selling Programme and the Excel at Export Selling workshop series as well as “First Flight” workshops. Companies are offered the services of a Mentor to assist them, in a systematic way, with their export preparation and development needs.

As well as training programmes, Enterprise Ireland also helps companies retain the services of a Business Accelerator — an industry expert within a specific sector and market, with the experience, knowledge and contacts to support the company’s expansion and development into an export market, while the Going Global Fund supports well established but domestically-focussed companies investigate business opportunities on the international market. The fund

is designed to assist successful applicants to evaluate and assess overseas market opportunities; develop plans to tailor their current service/product offer for overseas markets; identify suitable channels to international markets; examine possibilities for web-enabling its service offer for export markets; and undertake overseas market research.

Through its “Client Knowledge Services” offer Enterprise Ireland allows client companies and potential exporters access to a comprehensive library of sector and market intelligence and information on “doing business overseas”. This complements Enterprise Ireland’s market advisors’ work in the overseas office. Enterprise Ireland has also developed detailed “third-party provider” contacts (legal, tax etc.) in priority markets which can be accessed by new exporters as well as organising and engaging business networks in all markets wherever possible.

Enterprise Ireland also recognises the importance of ensuring a supply of high calibre graduates across all business functions in terms future economic growth. To this end it has recently launched the second call of its very successful Graduates 4 International Growth. This initiative brings together a graduate and a company that are both focused on making a lasting impact in overseas markets. Graduates, with the potential to be the next generation of business development executives, will be matched with an ambitious internationally trading company and will be provided with a structured means of acquiring new skills in international business. Graduates will also deliver a project that clearly links with their company’s in market growth plans.

Key instruments to pursue trade expansion are, of course, Trade Missions and over the last five years, there have been a number of Trade Missions to key emerging markets such as the BRIC countries and others including the Middle East and South Africa. A further indicator of commitment to developing our trading relationships is the fact that the Department of Foreign Affairs has expanded its network of Embassies and Consulates in some of those countries and Enterprise Ireland has opened new offices to facilitate Irish companies developing export opportunities there. In addition, Enterprise Ireland has a dedicated High Growth Markets Unit in Dublin to provide further assistance to client companies doing business in a range of countries, including the key emerging markets.

Furthermore I have retained responsibility for trade policy and consequently, my Department is engaged in the promotion of Ireland’s trade interests through, for example, the negotiation of Free Trade Agreements between the EU and third countries. A Free Trade Agreement is now in place with South Korea and another is under negotiation with India. I also place a particular emphasis on promoting less restrictive global trade arrangements by means of the current round of world trade talks at the World Trade Organisation and developing new opportunities for exporters by reductions in tariff and non-tariff barriers through trade and regulatory discussions between the EU and China, Russia, Brazil and the United States.

All the efforts have borne considerable fruit. Between 2005 and 2010, merchandise exports to these countries have risen 73% and between 2004 and 2009 (latest available year). Services exports have risen by 622%. A key example of this success is the fact that Ireland now has a modest trade surplus with China, a dramatic turnaround from the position only three years ago when we had a trade deficit of €2.9bn with that country.

Employment Rights

81. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when he plans to bring in legislation to protect low-paid workers. [28941/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 26 July 2011 the Government agreed a package of radical reforms to the Joint Labour Committee and Regis-

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tered Employment Agreement wage settling mechanisms. The reform proposals deal with recommendations made and issues raised in the Independent Report on the JLC/REA systems (Duffy/Walsh report) as well as the outcome of the recent High Court ruling in the Grace Fried Chicken constitutional challenge.

The proposed measures will provide for the retention of the JLC and REA systems, subject to the reforms that are required to place them on a more secure legal and constitutional footing. They will also reinstate a robust system of protection for workers in these sectors in the aftermath of the High Court ruling. Heads of a Bill to give effect to the reform proposals have been prepared by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, agreed by Government, and communicated to the Attorney General, who has agreed to give the highest priority to drafting this legislation. It is my intention is to have a Bill ready to introduce to the Oireachtas at the earliest possible opportunity this term.

EU Funding

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he has had discussions with the EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science with a view to obtaining maximum support for the innovation and technology sectors; the extent, if any, of a planned programme agreed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29116/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Both I and the Minister for Research and Innovation, Sean Sherlock, TD, continue to have meetings, as the opportunity arises, with the EU Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, with a view to building strong relationships to ensure that Ireland maximises the benefits of our position in the EU in terms of jobs and opportunities to further develop our economy.

The Seventh EU Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP7), with a budget of over €50 billion for the period 2007 to 2013, is the EU's main instrument for funding research and development in Europe. In order to extract the maximum benefit from the opportunities available within FP7, a National Support Network has been put in place, headed by a National Director for FP7 based in Enterprise Ireland who leads a team of national contact points for various elements of the Programme. This support structure ensures that a coordinated and coherent approach is adopted towards FP7 across all of the Government Departments, agencies and other organisations involved. Through this support structure, a mix of guidance, advice and financial assistance is available to encourage researchers and companies, large and small, to avail of the opportunities within the Programme.

According to the European Commission's latest report on FP7, Ireland has secured over €333 million under the Programme to date. This illustrates that Ireland continues to punch above its weight in successfully accessing EU funding for research and development. In fact, the report shows that Irish Small and Medium-sized Enterprises have the highest participation rate in the Programme of all the 27 EU Member States.

I should emphasise that the competitive nature of EU research programmes means that funding is based on the quality of applications from research organisations from both the academic and the industry sectors. Ireland's strong performance in securing this level of competitive funding validates our strategy for the development of a knowledge-based economy, capable of sustaining economic growth and more and better quality jobs for this economy.

Job Losses

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs lost and created in each of the past five years to date in 2011; the extent to which particular sectors have been affected, positively or negatively, to a greater or lesser extent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29117/11]

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which focus is on job creation in the low, medium and upper income areas with particular reference to the need to have a balanced, supportive and self-sufficient economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29118/11]

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he has evaluated the reason or reasons for any job losses over the past five years to date with a view to determination of cause and addressing the issues emerging; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29119/11]

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which jobs in the manufacturing sector or services sector lost over the past five years can be replaced in the future; if the reasons for such losses can be adequately addressed in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29123/11]

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he expects to encourage job creation in the manufacturing and service sectors over the next five years with particular reference to identifying, in advance, world market needs and providing for such in all sectors in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29125/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83 to 85, inclusive, 89 and 90 together.

Figures in respect of the number of jobs created or lost in firms assisted by the industrial development agencies, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Shannon Development, are compiled annually in the Forfás Annual Employment Survey. As the information is compiled on an annualised basis, the figures in respect of 2011 will not be available until 2012. Details of the number of jobs created and lost in agency-assisted companies on an annual basis over the last five years are set out in Table A accompanying this reply. Details of jobs created and lost in those companies by sector are set out in Tables B and C.

My Department does not collect or retain information on the number of jobs that have been created or lost in County and City Enterprise Board assisted companies. However, statistical information in relation to details of jobs existing in companies assisted by the County and City Enterprise Boards is collated annually and is set out in Table D in respect of the last five years. Figures in respect of 2011 will be available in the early part of 2012.

In general terms, business decline, resulting in job losses, often arises due to a combination of issues affecting the long-term viability of a company, rather than a singular difficulty. In this context, some of the most commonly stated primary reasons for business decline and consequent job losses include:

- Significant decreases in customer/market demand due to the recession in Ireland and key trading partners
- Financial Difficulties (insolvency, bankruptcy, bad debts, inability to raise finance)

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- Increased competition from competitor companies (in some cases exacerbated by volatility in exchange rates)
- Loss of key customers
- Rationalisation/Consolidation/Restructuring of Group structures involving the closure of a company unit.

Job creation is central to our economic recovery and the Programme for Government has job creation at its core. The role of my Department is to ensure that we have the right policies in place that will support and grow our enterprise base in order to facilitate job creation. The Jobs Initiative announced in May focuses our limited resources on measures that offer the greatest potential for expansion and employment creation in the domestic economy.

The programmes supported by my Department and its agencies will be critical in achieving economic growth through promoting the export potential of enterprise in Ireland and driving our Smart Economy. The allocation of €508m in capital funding for 2011 will ensure the core programmes of the enterprise agencies are sustained and targeted as well as driving investment in research and development. This investment in the Enterprise Development agencies will drive recovery in the economy by facilitating the winning of foreign direct investments, the growth of indigenous exports and the creation of sustainable jobs.

The focus of Enterprise Ireland is aimed at the ultimate objective of increasing exports and consequently, employment in Ireland, and the agency operates a comprehensive range of supports to enable indigenous industry to grow and innovate. Enterprise Ireland has a job creation target of 60,000 under the Government's Strategy for Irish Trade, Tourism and Investment to 2015.

The 35 County and City Enterprise Boards continue to support the development of micro-enterprise through the provision of both direct financial assistance (in the form of capital, feasibility and employment grants) and through indirect or "soft support" assistance such as management development, capability support and the development and delivery of activities to highlight and promote enterprise.

In March 2010, IDA Ireland published 'Horizon 2020', its strategic blueprint for attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Ireland in the coming decade. FDI has been, and will continue to be, a key element in the export-led recovery of the economy. Building on existing regional strengths to ensure Ireland's economic development and optimising regional spread of overseas investments is central to IDA's core activities. The agency's targets for the period to 2015 as per the Government's Strategy for Irish Trade, Tourism and Investment include:

- The creation of 75,000 new jobs;
- To secure an additional 780 inward investment projects;
- To deepen the domestic value added of overseas firms in Ireland and to strengthen linkages and collaboration between foreign-owned and indigenous firms.
- 20% of new greenfield investment projects to come from high growth and emerging economies.

I am confident that the combined influence of Ireland's improving competitiveness, our commitment to maintaining 12.5% corporate tax rate, the development of our national infrastruc-

ture, the Government's investment in science, technology and innovation, and our strong skills base will continue to attract and increase the level of inward investment to Ireland.

Table A

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Full Time Job Gains in Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Shannon Development assisted companies	34,520	28,708	23,508	14,272	17,582
Full Time Job Losses in Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Shannon Development assisted companies	21,347	24,141	30,290	45,927	23,704

Table B — Jobs Created in Agency-assisted Companies by Sector

Sector	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Manufacturing	17,871	13,082	10,329	7,043	7,408
International Services	11,320	9,841	8,889	5,196	7,999
Financial Services	3,073	3,595	2,646	998	1,235
Other	2,256	2,190	1,644	1,035	940
Total	34,520	28,708	23,508	14,272	17,582

Table C — Jobs Lost in Agency-assisted Companies by Sector

Sector	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Manufacturing	14,692	15,405	20,382	28,842	13,614
International Services	5,501	7,107	6,956	11,957	6,695
Financial Services	300	559	1,169	1,976	1,600
Other	854	1,070	1,783	3,152	1,795
Total	21,347	24,141	30,290	45,927	23,704

Table D

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Jobs existing in CEBs Based on CEB Annual Employment Survey	32,279	34,545.5	33,811	30,726.5	32,910

Economic Competitiveness

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he has managed to address issues affecting the competitiveness of the manufacturing and service sectors with particular reference to the need for the retention and creation of sustainable jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29120/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) reports to me on costs and other competitiveness issues in all sectors of the Irish economy through its suite of reports, including the “Costs of Doing Business

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in Ireland” report. The latest report on Costs of Doing Business in Ireland, published in June 2011, found that the Irish economy continued to show an improvement in its competitiveness in 2010, building on a gradual restoration of performance since 2008.

Costs of doing business in Ireland have reduced in relation to labour, property, utilities and business services. However, the NCC points out that some of the cost reductions achieved to date are cyclical in nature rather than structural, and more needs to be done to ensure that costs do not rise again as the economy recovers. The Costs of Doing Business report made a number of recommendations to embed competitiveness in the economy in a structural way. I have brought these recommendations to the attention of my Ministerial colleagues in Government and I will continue to work with them to identify further actions that can be taken to improve our competitiveness, reduce costs to business across all sectors and remove obstacles to employment creation.

The manufacturing and internationally-traded services sectors in Ireland have begun to recover in the last two years and exports have performed strongly. They have been less affected by Ireland’s difficulties in Banking and Public Finances than other sectors and have been in a position to avail of improvements in competitiveness, such as reductions in Ireland pay costs, energy costs and rental costs.

There are many opportunities in technology and innovation which are giving Ireland a competitive edge. We have established strong clusters in innovative sectors such as Medical Devices, ICT and the Pharmaceutical and Financial sectors, which continue to perform well. Ireland is well placed to exploit opportunities in new sectors such as Cloud Computing and Digital Gaming, Life Sciences and Clean-tech. Ireland’s services sector continues to grow and in 2010 accounted for 45.3 per cent of total exports and we have well recognised strengths in many areas such as ICT and Business Services.

Manufacturing is an equally important engine of our economy and is the bedrock on which the growth in Ireland’s economy was founded. While manufacturing is also in transition, it is an integral component of our economy and it will continue to remain so. Higher technological investment and higher value products will be the hallmark of future manufacturing operations in Ireland. The sector will be characterised by increased international competition and enhanced output volumes due to investments in technology and automation. These operations will be knowledge, capital and skills intensive, characterised by a participative innovative culture where management and staff continuously collaborate to drive innovation, productivity, agility, learning and adaptability.

The Jobs Initiative, which the Government introduced last May, will also support the maintenance of existing jobs, as well as facilitating the creation of new ones. The Initiative included a range of measures which will be taken across all Government Departments to stimulate the economy and help get people back to work.

With regard to my own Department, the Jobs Initiative included commitments to:

- develop a temporary Partial Credit Guarantee scheme to improve access to credit for business;
- introduce a Microfinance Fund for small business start-ups;
- extend to the wider public sector — excluding commercial State bodies — the requirement to pay suppliers within 15 days of receipt of a valid invoice;
- amend the treatment of R&D expenditure in the accounts of companies;

- improve access by SMEs to public procurement opportunities;
- introduce a scheme to incentivise people to attract new jobs to Ireland.

I also undertook to improve competitiveness across the economy by reducing costs and administrative burdens on business and by reforming the statutory wage setting mechanisms.

All of these measures will create a more competitive environment for business, including in the manufacturing and services sectors, and will help to maintain jobs and generate new ones. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to identify actions that can be taken to reduce costs in other areas to improve the competitiveness of the economy and support the creation of jobs. I have also begun the process of preparing a comprehensive Jobs Strategy which will provide an action plan to support the creation of employment in the economy. I expect the Strategy to be published in January.

Trade Relations

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans for the expansion and promotion of trade and commerce nationally and internationally with the objective of assisting with economic recovery; if he has set specific targets for the future in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29121/11]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The agreed Programme for Government sets out clearly that Ireland's economic recovery must be export-led. That Programme commits us to achieve the maximum growth in exports, including the long-term development of new markets. The Government has given a commitment to progressively implement the recommendations in the strategy and action plan for Irish Trade, Tourism and Investment to 2015, entitled *Trading and Investing in a Smart Economy*, developed by my Department last year, which will, inter alia, position Ireland to develop better trade relationships with emerging economies. That Strategy takes a two-pronged approach, focussing on particular markets and also on sectors.

In terms of markets, it identifies potential to further grow our existing key markets — and, most particularly, to increase or gain a foothold in high-growth and high-potential markets, such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and key Middle eastern countries. That Strategy has set a number of specific targets for our performance in key areas, to be achieved by 2015. Those targets, agreed by the relevant State Agencies — Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Bord Bia, Tourism Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland — are to be implemented through a suite of actions driven by the agencies concerned.

Reporting on the progress of these actions will be co-ordinated by the Export Trade Council that held its first meeting on 29th September last, in which I participated. At this meeting I set out my Department's priorities in relation to trade policy and how the new Council's activities can work with the wider enterprise agenda of my Department.

Key instruments to pursue trade expansion are, of course, Trade Missions and an ongoing programme of such Missions is underway. I led a mission to India earlier this year and I have just returned from another to the south-eastern United States. Minister of State Perry led a mission to Australia last month. These specific markets all present exciting opportunities for Irish companies to promote our exports, and are in addition, of course, to our on-going work in the more established export markets.

Our strong export performance is having a significant impact on economic recovery, with Net Exports having been a significant contributor to GDP over the last few years and continuing to

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do so in 2011. For that first six months of this year Merchandise Exports have grown by 7% and Services Exports by 8 % over the same period in 2010.

With my responsibility for trade policy, I am engaged in the promotion of Ireland's trade interests through, for example, the negotiation of Free Trade Agreements between the EU and third countries. A Free Trade Agreement is now under negotiation with India and another with South Korea came into effect on 1 July this year. I also place a particular emphasis on promoting less restrictive global trade arrangements by means of the current round of world trade talks at the World Trade Organisation and developing new opportunities for exporters by reductions in tariff and non-tariff barriers through trade and regulatory discussions between the EU and China, Russia, Brazil and the United States. The ongoing success of our exporters should sustain and expand jobs at home and also contribute to economic recovery in the domestic economy.

Question No. 88 answered with Question No. 9.

Questions Nos. 89 and 90 answered with Question No. 83.

Social Welfare Benefits

91. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review the impact of the cuts affecting PRSI patients; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29096/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The dental benefit scheme is paid from the social insurance fund which, given current economic conditions, has required substantial subvention from the Exchequer in recent years. As part of a range of cost-saving measures intended to ease this pressure, the range of treatments available under the scheme was reduced in Budget 2010. The annual free examination has been retained to encourage qualifying customers to continue attending for regular check-ups and to assist in the early detection of the dental-related health issues referred to by the Deputy. Any future changes to the scheme will have to reflect the economic realities of available funding and competing priorities.

General Register Office

92. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason there is a delay in the issuing of birth certificates for infants born in Mayo General Hospital, Castlebar, County Mayo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29110/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As this is a matter for the Health Service Executive, it has been referred to the HSE for their attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if payment under the rent supplement scheme will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28911/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The community welfare service (CWS) and the community welfare officers providing it transferred formally to the Department of Social Protection (DSP) from 1 October 2011. The service and the staff are now part of the DSP. There is no record of an application for rent supplement from the person concerned. If the person concerned wishes to make an application for rent supplement she should contact

the Central Rents Unit on Freephone 1800 201 698 or her local Supplementary Welfare Service Office.

Employment Support Services

94. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps being taken to ensure that the positions advertised on JobBridge are suitable for internships which will benefit the internee on their future career path. [28920/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The JobBridge scheme contains a number of measures to minimise displacement including the following:

- all Host Organisations must declare in their application that they are not displacing an employee and that they have no vacancy in the specific area;
- the JobBridge team check all applications against recent vacancies advertised on the FAS Jobs Ireland website;
- if the JobBridge team suspects that displacement may be an issue, they can liaise with regional FÁS management to find out more information on the company.

In order for all applications from host organisations to be approved they must also meet a number of criteria so as to ensure that the potential internships are of sufficient quality. These include the following:

- That the internship does not allow the intern to work unsupervised;
- That the intern accrues significant experience throughout the entire internship.

In order for an internship to commence a Standard Internship Agreement must be signed by both the intern and the host organisation. This Agreement clearly stipulates the terms of the internship and states the specific learning outcomes the intern will receive over the course of their internship. To ensure compliance with the scheme, my Department and the JobBridge team are monitoring internships to ensure that both host organisations and interns are abiding by the spirit and the rules of the scheme.

This involves the monitoring of monthly compliance reports which the host organisation uses to verify that the internship is proceeding as set out in the Standard Internship Agreement. In addition, contact with the host organisations and interns including random site visits will begin shortly as part of this process.

The scheme also has a ‘whistle blowing’ feature, where any individual who suspects that an internship may be in breach of the scheme’s criteria, including in cases of suspected displacement or poor quality, may contact the National Call Centre. All such claims will be investigated. Where it is proven that displacement has occurred in a Host Organisation their internship opportunities will be removed and they will not be allowed to participate in JobBridge.

95. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Social Protection the uptake of positions advertised on the JobBridge scheme by members of the public to date; and the number of companies signed up to be included on the scheme. [28921/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As of 4 October 2011, just over 2,800 organisations have advertised internship opportunities under the JobBridge scheme. Since the start of the JobBridge scheme just over 5,600 internship opportunities have been available. In

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relation to the number of participants on the JobBridge scheme, the latest figures show that a total of 1,769 individuals have commenced an internship under the scheme.

Departmental Agencies

96. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the additional staff that will be made available to the various Monetary Advice and Budgeting Service offices around the country; the way additional staff will be recruited; and the additional staff that will be provided to the Ballina office, County Mayo. [28947/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) assists people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems. The role of money advisors is to help clients to assess their financial situation, make a budget plan and deal with creditors.

There are 52 independent MABS companies operating the local MABS services from 65 locations throughout the country, with national support provided by the MABS ND. In addition, the MABS National Telephone Helpline is available from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday to Friday and the MABS website can be accessed 24 hours a day at *www.mabs.ie*. Some 90% of clients presenting to MABS are assisted through the telephone helpline, which provides assisted self-help to ensure clients take steps to assess and address their situation.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB), who has responsibility for MABS, has put a new organisational structure in place, which enables CIB regional managers to get a greater insight into the nature of supports required by MABS companies on the ground to deliver an effective service. In addition, the CIB is looking at the processes being used by MABS companies with a view to reducing waiting times, taking account of service capacity across the network of companies.

Currently a MABS office is located at Cualgara, Teeling Street, Ballina, Co Mayo, providing money advice and budgeting services in North Mayo. The Board is aware of the client demand for money advice services in the North West region and a request for additional staffing in respect of North Mayo MABS has been received. This is under review in the context of requests from other services, the increased demand for services throughout the country, and the financial resources available. I am satisfied that the CIB will continue to closely monitor the position in relation to the resources available to individual MABS companies to ensure that effective services are delivered to customers requiring assistance.

Community Employment Schemes

97. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason there is a reluctance to continue the t code status of the community employment schemes; the criteria for ring fenced projects in FÁS; if she will respond to concerns addressed to her by the community projects working in this area. [28948/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Currently 1,000 community employment placements are ring fenced for persons undergoing rehabilitation from drug addiction. These are referred to as Rehabilitation CE Scheme Places. Specific criteria for the selection of placements and participants, agreed with the sector representatives, are in place. Further work is underway under the aegis of the National Drug Rehabilitation Implementation Committee to review the allocation of placements and to ensure that effective referral protocols are in place.

Community employment schemes are not coded in the manner suggested by the Deputy. Instead, the coding is used by FÁS to identify internally persons referred for placement and

who meet the criteria. Persons inappropriately referred are not coded in this manner. A number of special conditions have been agreed for the delivery of the Special Rehabilitation CE Scheme Places. These include age of the participant, duration of placements, supervisory and approval arrangements, qualifying periods, accreditation of training and project support. I have no plans to change the existing arrangements. My Department and FÁS will continue to work with the National Drug Rehabilitation Implementation Committee to improve the effectiveness of this particular initiative.

Social Welfare Benefits

98. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether applications for carer's allowance are now taking over six months to process despite the fact that her Department's voicemail states that decisions will be given within three months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28991/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Entitlement to carer's allowance is based on satisfying medical, means and residency conditions. In determining entitlement to the allowance there are, in certain cases, unavoidable time lags involved in making the necessary investigations and enquiries to enable accurate decisions to be made. Delays can also arise if people applying for the allowance are not in a position to supply all the necessary information in support of their claim.

The average time taken to award a claim for carer's allowance from 1 January 2011 to 31 August 2011 was 13.4 weeks. A total of 10,446 applications were registered in this period (almost 63 per working day) and 9,302 were processed in the same period. The voice mail message is for the information of callers and reflects the average time to award a claim. Some claims will be decided quicker than that and some will take considerably longer, depending on individual circumstances. The message is updated periodically in accordance with latest figures.

I acknowledge that the time taken to process carer's allowance claims is not satisfactory but I am satisfied that my Department is taking appropriate steps to resolve the situation. In particular, a major service delivery modernisation project is underway to improve the efficiency of administration of the carer's allowance scheme. This involves the development of IT functionality and associated business process re-organisation. It is anticipated that the new system will introduce significant processing efficiencies and a quicker and more responsive service to the customer.

Accordingly, this project is being given high priority and involves a significant level of time and commitment from the relevant staff in my Department, which has had, however a short term negative impact on claim processing times. The first tranche of new carer's allowance claims began to be processed under the new system in August 2011. While these new systems and processes will facilitate a significant improvement in overall processing times it should be noted that the intake of new carer's allowance applications continues to increase and that individual claims may still take some time to process.

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when rent allowance for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will be restored; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28999/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The community welfare service (CWS), and the community welfare officers providing it, formally transferred to the Department of Social Protection (DSP) from 1 October 2011. The service and the staff are now part of the DSP. The Department's records show that no application for rent supplement has been

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received from the person in question. The person should now submit an application for rent supplement to the Department in respect of her current residence. This application will be decided based on her new circumstances and her newly sourced accommodation.

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the correct level of rent allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29009/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The community welfare service (CWS), and the community welfare officers providing it, formally transferred to the Department of Social Protection (DSP) from 1 October 2011. The service and the staff are now part of the DSP. The person concerned is in receipt of a rent supplement of €213.50 per month which is the full amount payable based on her household circumstances.

101. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will receive a decision on their application for carer's allowance; and if she will expedite a response. [29015/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department is in receipt of an application for carer's allowance from the above named person. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome. The average time taken to process a claim to completion, including assessment of the claimant's means and the entitlement of the care recipient to full time care and attention on medical grounds is approximately 16 weeks.

102. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will receive a decision on their application for carer's allowance; and if she will expedite a response. [29016/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department is in receipt of an application for carer's allowance from the above named person. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome. The average time taken to process a claim to completion, including assessment of the claimant's means and the entitlement of the care recipient to full time care and attention on medical grounds is approximately 16 weeks.

103. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will receive a decision on their application for carer's allowance; and if she will expedite a response. [29017/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department is in receipt of an application for carer's allowance from the above named person. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome. The average time taken to process a claim to completion, including assessment of the claimant's means and the entitlement of the care recipient to full time care and attention on medical grounds is approximately 16 weeks.

104. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will re-examine the refusal of a back to school grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29019/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) scheme operates from the beginning of June until the end of September each year. A person may qualify for a BSCFA payment if he or she is in receipt of a social welfare or health service executive payment, is participating in an approved employment scheme or attending a recognised education or training course, and has household income at or below certain specified levels.

The persons concerned were refused BSCFA as their income exceeded the limit allowable for their family composition. The person concerned can request a review by contacting the BSCFA Review Section, Department of Social Protection, St. Oliver Plunkett Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. Details on how to request a review are available on the Department's website at *www.welfare.ie* or on the refusal letter that has been provided to the applicant. However, due to the large volume of applications and requests for review received, information regarding the progress of individual reviews will not be available until such time as the applications have been examined and a decision taken.

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way refusal for disability allowance is justified in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if this question will be accepted as grounds for an appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29024/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In order to satisfy the medical conditions for receipt of disability allowance a person must be suffering from an injury, disease, congenital deformity or physical or mental illness or defect which has continued or may reasonably be expected to continue for a period of at least a year and as a result of the condition the person is substantially restricted in undertaking work which would otherwise be suitable having regard to the person's age, experience and qualifications.

When conducting an assessment, the medical assessor does not dispute the existence of the certified cause of incapacity but rather s/he assesses the duration of the illness and the degree to which the loss of function in work-related activities, resulting from the disease or injury, affects the person's ability to perform either their own job or alternative types of work.

The person concerned applied for disability allowance on 27 April 2011. The medical evidence supplied with her claim was referred to one of the department's medical assessors who was of the opinion, based on the information supplied, that that person was not medically suitable for disability allowance. The deciding officer accepted this opinion and the claim was refused and the person was notified in writing of this decision on 12 September 2011.

Further medical evidence, including that which accompanied this Parliamentary Question, has now been referred to a medical assessor. When the medical assessor's opinion is received by the deciding officer, s/he will review the decision and the person will be notified directly of the outcome. If the original decision remains unchanged after this review, the person concerned can lodge an appeal.

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the basis for disallowance of entitlement to disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29025/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As part of a review of the continued entitlement to disability allowance of the person concerned, her medical suitability was assessed by one of the Department's medical assessors who was of the opinion that she was no longer medically suitable for disability allowance. A deciding officer accepted this opinion and the

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person's claim was disallowed. A letter issued to the person on 26 May 2011 advising her of this decision. Further medical evidence was subsequently received from the person which is being referred to a medical assessor for an opinion as to the person's medical suitability for disability allowance. As soon as a decision is made on this further medical evidence the person will be notified of the outcome.

107. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for a top-up non-contributory pension, together with the free schemes such as the living alone allowance and fuel allowance, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29031/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for the State pension non-contributory (SPNC) from the person concerned was received on the 11th July 2011. The file has been forwarded to the local social welfare inspector (SWI) for investigation of the customer's entitlement to SPNC. He will be contacted shortly by the SWI to be interviewed regarding his application. When the SWI has completed her report, the file will be returned for a formal decision and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome without delay.

108. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the entitlements claimable by a person (details supplied) in County Longford who is coming off jobseeker's allowance and will be working a 30 hour week at €250 per week, which will not be sufficient for them and their family to live on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29033/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is currently in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance at a weekly rate of €250.40. Family Income Support is a weekly payment for payments for families at work on low pay. It is not subject to income tax and does not affect medical card eligibility. If the person concerned commences employment for 30 hours per week at a weekly rate of €250.00, he may be entitled to claim for Family Income Support. He can do so by completing the necessary application form or by contacting his local social welfare office.

109. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for family income supplement in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29035/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Family income supplement has been awarded to the person in question with effect from 21 April 2011. First payment, including arrears due, has recently been lodged to the person's nominated bank account. Payment will continue for 52 weeks as long as qualifying conditions are met.

Departmental Properties

110. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the proposed capital programme regarding the refurbishment or replacement of social welfare offices; if an office (details supplied) in County Kildare is included in such a schedule and the timescale of each project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29040/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The significant increase in the Live Register over the past number of years has placed additional pressures on my Department's local offices in terms of providing a satisfactory service to the public. The Department accepts that as a consequence, some of its buildings require refurbishment, extensions or, in some cases,

replacement. The Department relies on the Office of Public Works (OPW) for the provision of new office accommodation. To this end it has requested the OPW as a matter of priority to acquire new local office accommodation in a number of locations throughout the country to enable it deliver a satisfactory service to the public.

These priority locations include Loughrea, Balbriggan, Swords, Castlebar and Newbridge. The provision of new offices is dependent on sufficient resources being made available to the OPW for these projects. The final schedule and timescale for each location will be discussed with the Office of Public Works in light of decisions on budgetary allocations that will be made in the context of the forthcoming Budget.

Social Welfare Benefits

111. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of farm assist; if there are applications outstanding; her plans to expand this programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29113/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The farm assist scheme is a means-tested payment broadly similar to the jobseeker's allowance scheme. It features a more generous means test, which takes account of the specific nature of farming and, unlike jobseeker's allowance, farmers claiming this payment do not need to be available for work outside of the farm in order to qualify.

In recent years changes have been made to farm assist which means that it is now easier for low income farmers to qualify for support under the scheme. Improvements in the method of assessing earnings from insurable employment were also introduced in September 2007 which provides further gains for families claiming farm assist, where either spouse is also in insurable employment. As of the 30th of September there were 11,251 recipients in receipt of farm assist and a further 353 applications awaiting a decision. Any further changes to the farm assist scheme would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

Social Welfare Code

112. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will protect social welfare rates in budget 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29115/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The appropriate level of overall expenditure by my Department in the years ahead will be considered in the context of Budget 2012 and subsequent Budgets. Sustainable public finances are a prerequisite for maintaining an adequate system of social protection as well as achieving future economic stability and growth. To this end, the State must pursue a determined deficit reduction strategy. Accordingly, there will be an on-going requirement to curtail expenditure in 2012 and in later years.

There are considerable challenges ahead including the need to protect, as far as possible, the key income supports and services operated by my Department. This process will be informed by the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure which has been completed by my Department, with the key decisions being made in the context of framing the Budget for 2012.

Employment Support Services

113. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps she is taking to address flaws in the JobBridge programme with respect to the specification of internships permissible under the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28845/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The JobBridge scheme contains a number of measures to minimise displacement including the following:

- all Host Organisations must declare in their application that they are not displacing an employee and that they have no vacancy in the specific area;
- the JobBridge team check all applications against recent vacancies advertised on the FÁS Jobs Ireland website;
- if the JobBridge team suspects that displacement may be an issue, they can liaise with regional FÁS management to find out more information on the company.

In order for all applications from host organisations to be approved they must also meet a number of criteria so as to ensure that the potential internships are of sufficient quality. These include the following:

- that the internship does not allow the intern to work unsupervised;
- that the intern accrues significant experience throughout the entire internship.

In order for an internship to commence a Standard Internship Agreement must be signed by both the intern and the host organisation. This Agreement clearly stipulates the terms of the internship and states the specific learning outcomes the intern will receive over the course of their internship. To ensure compliance with the scheme, my Department and the JobBridge team are monitoring internships to ensure that both host organisations and interns are abiding by the spirit and the rules of the scheme.

This involves the monitoring of monthly compliance reports which the host organisation uses to verify that the internship is proceeding as set out in the Standard Internship Agreement. In addition, contact with the host organisations and interns including random site visits will begin shortly as part of this process.

The scheme also has a ‘whistle blowing’ feature, where any individual who suspects that an internship may be in breach of the scheme’s criteria, including in cases of suspected displacement or poor quality, may contact the National Call Centre. All such claims will be investigated. Where it is proven that displacement has occurred in a Host Organisation their internship opportunities will be removed and they will not be allowed to participate in JobBridge.

Social Insurance

114. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is seeking any changes to the PRSI system in order to provide a social welfare safety net underneath self-employed persons. [28889/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Self-employed persons are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4% which entitles them to access long-term benefits such as State pension (contributory) and widow’s, widower’s or surviving civil partner’s pension (contributory). Ordinary employees who have access to the full range of social insurance benefits pay Class A PRSI at the rate of 4%. In addition, their employers make a PRSI contribution of 10.75% in respect of their employees, resulting in the payment of a combined 14.75% rate per employee under full-rate PRSI Class A. For employees earning less than €356 per week, the rate of employer’s PRSI is 4.25%.

PRSI coverage is related to the risks associated with employment or self-employment, the annualised system of contributions for self-employed people and the practicalities of adminis-

tering and controlling access to short-term payments for self-employed people. A system of separate arrangements for employed and self-employed workers within a social insurance context is common in other European social protection systems.

Any changes to the PRSI system in order to provide a social welfare safety net underneath self-employed persons would have significant financial implications and would have to be considered in the context of a much more significant rise in the rate of contribution payable. The Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare was established by me earlier this year in fulfilment of the commitment made in the Programme for Government. The Advisory Group will, inter alia, examine and report on issues involved in providing social insurance cover for self-employed persons in order to establish whether or not such cover is technically feasible and financially sustainable. It is intended that the Advisory Group should consider any proposals for change to existing arrangements in a cost-neutral or cost-reducing context.

Self-employed persons may establish eligibility to assistance-based payments including payments such as jobseeker's allowance. They can apply for the means-tested jobseeker's allowance if their business ceases or if they are on low income as a result of a downturn in demand for their services. In general, their means will take account of the level of earnings in the last twelve months in determining their expected income for the following year. In the current climate account is taken of the downward trend in the economy.

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115. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection the safeguards in place to guarantee that employees participating on the national internship programme are not exploited and achieve their objectives. [28891/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The JobBridge scheme has a number of measures designed to protect the intern and to ensure the integrity of the JobBridge scheme. In order for all applications from host organisations to be approved they must meet a number of criteria so as to ensure that the potential internships are of sufficient quality. These include the following:

- that the internship does not allow the intern to work unsupervised;
- that the internship is not displacing an employee;
- that the intern accrues significant experience throughout the entire internship.

In order for an internship to commence a Standard Internship Agreement must be signed by both the intern and the host organisation. This Agreement clearly stipulates the terms of the internship and states the specific learning outcomes the intern will receive over the course of their internship. At the end of an internship, host organisations must supply the intern with a reference which includes a statement of all training undergone by the intern as part of the internship. To ensure compliance with the scheme, the Department of Social Protection and the Employment Services Division of FÁS are monitoring internships to ensure that they are of sufficient quality and that both host organisations and interns are abiding by the spirit and the rules of the scheme.

This involves the monitoring of monthly compliance reports that are required to be submitted by the host organisation verifying that the internship is proceeding as set out in the Standard Internship Agreement. In addition, contact with the host organisations and interns including random site visits will begin shortly as part of this process. The scheme also has a 'whistle blowing' feature where any individual who suspects that an internship may be in breach of the

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scheme's criteria, including in cases of suspected displacement or poor quality, may contact the National Call Centre. All such claims will be investigated.

116. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether the JobBridge programme needs to be re-evaluated to reflect the growing unemployment here. [28878/11]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme, came into operation on 1st July 2011. My Department has been given sanction to offer at any one time 5,000 internships for unemployed individuals. As of Friday 7th October a total of 1,769 individuals have commenced an internship. In addition, there are currently 2,477 internships opportunities being advertised on the JobBridge website. While I am happy with the progress JobBridge has made in a little over 3 months, it is too early to consider whether the scheme needs to be expanded. However, my Department will continue to monitor the scheme closely.

While JobBridge is an important component of the Government's response in tackling Ireland's unemployment problem, it is just one of a number of activation measures on offer. The Government is providing a wide range of labour market activation measures designed to assist those who are unemployed. The Jobs Initiative, which was launched last May contains an additional 20,900 education, training and internship places for the unemployed. These labour market activation measures aim to provide unemployed people with enhanced opportunities to maintain and develop their skills and competencies and to improve their prospects of securing employment. Tackling Ireland's unemployment problem remains a priority of the Government and it will continue to require a whole of Government response.

State Property

117. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reasons for the delay in the transaction for lands (details supplied) which he wishes to purchase. [28990/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): During 2010 a dispute arose in relation to a right of way giving access to the site in question and this delayed the completion of this purchase. This matter has now been resolved and contracts were received from the applicant's solicitors on the 20th of May 2011. I am advised that the purchase of this land is now progressing.

Arts Funding

118. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will provide information with regard to an exhibition, Dublin Contemporary 2011, hosted by the National Gallery of Ireland; the body that gave permission for this event to be hosted in State-owned buildings; the amount of public money allocated to fund this event; when permission was given for this exhibition to be hosted in the National Gallery of Ireland; and if he will provide information regarding the organisers of the exhibition. [29012/11]

119. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the body that gave permission for the Dublin Contemporary 2011 event to be housed in State-owned buildings. [28972/11]

120. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount of public money given to the Dublin Contemporary 2011 event as funding. [28973/11]

121. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when permission for the Dublin Contemporary 2011 exhibition to be mounted in the National Gallery of Ireland was given. [28974/11]

122. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the name of the organisers of Dublin Contemporary 2011. [28975/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take questions Nos. 118 to 122, inclusive, together.

Dublin Contemporary 2011 (DC2011) is the largest contemporary visual art event of its kind and scale ever held in Ireland. Its mission is to create a dynamic experience of contemporary visual art within the specific cultural context of Dublin that resonates both locally and globally. Ireland has a unique cultural brand that is globally recognised and Dublin needs to be reinforced as an open, vibrant city that attracts and retains talented people, where creativity and innovation are encouraged and where leading companies want to invest.

DC2011 previewed on 5th September and is due to run until the 31st October. In its first month, it has already attracted much favourable media coverage — both at home and abroad — and it has also been critically well received. DC2011 aims to bring key cultural institutions across the city together with private galleries and public realm art installations to create the critical mass of a truly city-wide exhibition. The primary DC2011 site or hub is situated at Earlsfort Terrace within the grounds of the National Concert Hall. The use of the Earlsfort Terrace site for the exhibition was agreed with the Office of Public Works, which owns the site.

In addition to this core site, further DC2011 exhibitions are hosted at the Hugh Lane Gallery, Douglas Hyde Gallery, National Gallery of Ireland and the Royal Hibernian Academy. Agreements to hosts exhibition at these venues were negotiated between the DC2011 and individual management of the galleries concerned. In the case of the National Gallery of Ireland agreement was finalised in July of this year.

Responsibility for the development, management and delivery of DC2011 rests with the St. Patrick's Festival which was established in 1995 as Féilte Dhuibh Linne Teoranta, a company limited by guarantee and set up by Government to run major cultural events. The programme budget for DC2011 is of the order of €4m. This budget is to be met through a mix of revenues from ticket sales and merchandising, sponsorship, philanthropy and Exchequer support. To date in 2011, €1.16m has been paid by my Department in respect of the DC2011 programming budget. Once final costs, revenues and incomes are determined and audited, the full Exchequer contribution to the programming costs will be finalised.

National Gallery

123. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht his plans to build a helipad as part of the redevelopment of the National Gallery of Ireland; if the effects of such a feature on the safety and protection of artworks housed in the museum have been assessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28976/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): There are no plans for a helipad as part of the redevelopment of the National Gallery of Ireland.

Wildlife Protection

124. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will investigate the use of Larsen traps for the purpose of capturing birds in view of the incidents of misuse of these traps that have emerged recently in which acts of cruelty are reported in a number of incidents in County Kerry; and the action being prepared to address this issue. [29079/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): My Department has responsibility for regulating the use of traps, snares and nets for catching wildlife. This is done in accordance with the provisions of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2010 and the Wildlife Act 1976 (Approved Traps, Snares and Nets) Regulations 2003. The use of Larsen Traps complies with the provisions of these regulations and is acceptable when carried out with due care.

National Parks

125. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the current complement of workers at Killarney National Park, County Kerry; the vacancies that have arisen due to retirements in 2010 and 2011; his plans for replacement workers; and his intentions regarding the filling of these vacancies in the short term. [29080/11]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The total number of permanent staff assigned to Killarney National Park currently stands at 50. In addition, temporary staff are hired each year according to seasonal demand. At peak season this year 14 temporary staff were hired; currently 5 are employed. There were no retirements in 2010 and 2 staff retired in 2011. As the Deputy will be aware, the moratorium on filling staff vacancies across the public services remains in place. I am satisfied however that within this context, adequate staffing resources are in place in order to maintain the property referred to by the Deputy as a high quality visitor attraction.

Alternative Energy Projects

126. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to develop an ocean energy test site centre at Belmullet, County Mayo; and the progress made to date if any. [28955/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Wave and tidal energy, commonly known as ocean energy, is still at the RD&D stage globally. In 2008, the Ocean Energy Development Unit (OEDU) was established in the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) to take forward Ireland's ocean energy programme.

Already by 2008, a number of Irish universities and the Marine Institute were pursuing research and initiatives in the ocean energy area and a quarter scale test site for devices had been established in Galway Bay. The intention was to eventually be able to test full scale grid connected pre-commercial wave energy prototypes. In order to achieve this goal, the OEDU in SEAI has been pursuing a strategy of developing a site where this testing could take place.

The proposed Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS) project in Belmullet, County Mayo, is approaching a stage of development that would see it ready to enter the full consenting process within the next few months subject to budgetary considerations for 2012 and forward years. The test site includes two offshore test areas at 50m and 100m water depths which would in turn be connected to a shore based electricity substation.

The site off Annagh Head near Belmullet was selected in 2008 on the basis of a comprehensive study which looked at a variety of sites along the west coast of Ireland. The decision to choose Belmullet was based principally on the quality of the wave climate (amongst the best

in the world), suitable grid for electrical connection, good shore infrastructure and deepwater with sandy seabed close to shore.

Arup Engineering Services was appointed in 2009 to manage the overall project while ESB International has provided engineering support since the commencement of the project. To facilitate local input into the project as well as address any potential concerns about the project, a local liaison service has been established in the local civic offices in Belmullet.

To facilitate a complete investigation of the proposed test site area a foreshore licence was granted that enabled a variety of surveys to take place. These surveys formed the basis of a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which is in progress for the past 12 to 18 months and includes environmental, mammal, marine traffic and bathymetry amongst others. This will in turn form the basis of a foreshore lease application for the offshore test areas and planning application for the sub-station, subject to budgetary considerations.

Telecommunications Services

127. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent of utilisation of the metropolitan area networks in County Mayo indicating in each case if there is backhaul connectivity; and the resilience that exists. [28956/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): There are five Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) in County Mayo: Ballina; Ballinrobe; Claremorris; Kiltimagh and Knock. The MANS are managed, maintained and operated by elnet on behalf of the State and are available on a wholesale carrier neutral and open access basis.

Backhaul is available in each of the five MAN towns and three of these have been connected: Ballina, Claremorris and Kiltimagh. elnet has advised that the fibre backhaul to Ballina is fully resilient while the routes to Claremorris (fibre) and Kiltimagh (wireless) are not fully resilient. Although backhaul is available, there is currently no backhaul connection to the Ballinrobe and Knock MANs. Five service providers are connected to the Ballina MAN, 1 to the Claremorris MAN and 2 to the Kiltimagh MAN. The number of businesses being served by each service provider in those towns is a commercial matter for the service providers concerned.

128. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if, in view of the sell off of the channel 69 spectrum and the move to channel 38 for programmes making special event users, he will consider having the licensing rate reduced to a level in line with neighbouring countries; if he will examine the possibility of some financial support scheme to help them transfer their current stock of channel 69 equipment to the new allocated frequency range in channel 38 in line with the system that is operating in England and in Germany; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28979/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The licensing of radio microphones is a matter for the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). I understand that channel 69 (854 — 862 MHz) is one of the channels available for radio microphone use in Ireland. At the International Telecommunication Union World Radio-communication Conference in 2007 it was agreed that channels 61 to 69 would be made available for mobile services. Subsequently the European Commission, in its Recommendation 2009/848/EC, recommended that analogue terrestrial TV services would be switched off in 2012 and that the above channels should be used for electronic communications services. This switch over will facilitate the roll out of high speed mobile broadband to communities across Europe. In complying with this Recommendation channel 69 will no longer be available for radio microphone use.

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As the Deputy may be aware Ireland's national digital switch over strategy provides for a move to all digital TV services by the end of 2012, with the existing services in the 800 MHz band (including channel 61-69) due to be switched off at that stage.

ComReg conducted a public consultation on this matter in April 2010. The June 2009 decision of the UK Communications Regulator (Ofcom) to confirm Channel 38 (606 — 614 MHz) as a replacement for Channel 69 was raised during the consultation. In light of the Ofcom decision, and noting that Ireland is a small and open economy and the potential for economies of scale of equipment manufacture and roaming of services, ComReg considered that spectrum for radio microphones should be aligned with spectrum available for radio microphones in larger European markets.

Following consideration of responses received to its consultation, ComReg's view is that it would be appropriate to use a replacement channel aligned with the UK's channel for wireless microphones and it therefore announced in September 2010 that it would make Channel 38 available on an exclusive basis for radio microphone use in Ireland. All appropriate steps for the orderly change in use of the relevant spectrum have been taken.

The current cost of a licence for the possession and use of programme making and special event equipment, including radio microphones, for an event is a €12 administration fee and €12 per piece of equipment. The licence fee was established in 1986 and has remained unchanged since that time. As the Deputy will be aware ComReg is obliged to recover its administrative costs for the management of such licensing schemes. I am advised that it is not possible to make a direct comparison with other countries when considering licence fees given that the method of fee calculation in other countries is based on a number of different factors such as the number of channels required and duration of event. In Ireland the only factor taken into account in terms of fee calculation is the number of pieces of equipment used and this is enshrined in legislation.

ComReg has no remit in relation to compensation and my Department has no funds for a compensation programme as suggested by the Deputy. I understand that the situation in the UK is different as the UK Regulator previously gave assurances on the future use of channel 69 until 2018 but subsequently had to retract this assurance. I understand that radio microphone manufacturers and suppliers have been aware, since the International Telecommunication Union World Radio-communication Conference in 2007, of the fact that channel 69 would no longer be available for wireless microphone use from the end of 2012.

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if and when broadband services will be available in the Knockanally area in County Kildare; his plans with respect to broadband service in this area with particular reference to both the ongoing need and demand for such a service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28993/11]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The provision of broadband services is, in the first instance, a matter for commercial service providers. In cases of market failure the Government will intervene, where it is appropriate and possible to do so. The Group Broadband Scheme, National Broadband Scheme (NBS) and Rural Broadband Scheme are all examples of where Government has intervened to ensure broadband availability in areas, particularly rural ones, where commercial investors have failed to provide services.

The area of Knockanally, County Kildare was not included in the NBS because the national mapping exercise carried out in advance of the scheme determined that the area was already covered from a broadband perspective. The Rural Broadband Scheme, which recently closed

for applications, aims to identify the remaining individual premises in rural Ireland, outside the NBS areas, that are unable to obtain a broadband service and to provide a basic broadband to those premises, where requested.

The areas eligible for applications under the Rural Broadband Scheme included Knockanally in County Kildare. Almost 5,000 applications have been received under the scheme and my Department is currently processing applications where address details need to be clarified — this is a time consuming exercise but the aim is to clear these applications over the coming weeks.

The next step in the scheme is the Verification Phase, in which the Department will give Internet service providers the opportunity to serve the applicants under normal commercial terms. Subject to agreement with the companies concerned, the Verification Phase should be carried out over the period October 2011-January 2012. We would expect that some of the applicants under the Scheme will be offered a service by these companies during this phase.

The procurement process is expected to commence in parallel to select a service provider to offer a service to remaining applicants once the Verification Phase has been completed. My Department expects to identify the preferred supplier by the end of January 2012 and pending contract negotiations a service provider will be appointed by mid-February 2012. Roll out of the service under the Scheme is expected to be completed by the end of 2012.

Environmental Policy

130. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the recent weather conditions if he intends to extend the date for the spread of slurry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29093/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Nitrates Directive and Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme are given legal effect by the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2010. The objective of the Regulations is to protect ground and surface waters, including drinking water sources, primarily through the management of livestock manures and other fertilisers.

Good agricultural practice involves the application of fertilisers as early as practicable in the growing season, in order to maximise the uptake of nutrients by crops and to minimise pollution risks to water. In accordance with the requirements of the Nitrates Directive, the Regulations provide for periods when the application of certain types of fertilisers is prohibited. In addition, the Regulations prohibit such application at any time of the year when the ground is frozen, waterlogged or heavy rain is forecast.

The Irish Farmers Association has requested a deferral of the start of the closed period by 2 weeks, given the abnormally high rain fall during the month of September. I have considered this application in conjunction with my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We recognise that the adverse weather conditions experienced in Ireland during September, in particular, have caused significant hardship for farmers and have made it extremely difficult to carry out regular farming activity. Consequently, I have decided, as an exceptional measure, to grant a two week extension to the period during which slurry may be spread, up to 31 October 2011.

Local Authority Housing

131. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will sanction the purchase of land by Mayo County Council for the building of a home in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [28924/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): My Department's Social Housing Investment Programme includes a number of measures to assist local authorities in meeting social housing need, including the housing needs of persons with a disability, based on traditional construction and acquisition programmes, projects advanced by the voluntary and co-operative housing sector, and through the leasing of accommodation from private landlords. Funding of €6.366 million, of which €1.275 million relates to the provision of new social housing stock, was allocated to Mayo County Council under the 2011 programme. This included some €250,000 to enable the Council to meet expenditure on adaptation works and extensions to local authority housing stock to meet the needs of tenants with a disability.

There are no proposals with my Department at present in relation to this case. It is a matter for Mayo County Council to prioritise proposals for meeting all categories of housing need within the context of its overall social housing investment programme. My Department understands that the Council is currently exploring a number of housing options with a view to meeting the needs of the family in question.

Local Authority Services

132. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the responsibility for providing funding for street lighting outside of schools lies with the Department of Education and Skills or with the local authority. [28938/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Under the Roads Act 1993 the provision of street lighting is a matter for the relevant local authority and the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport. I have no function in this matter.

Ministerial Appointments

133. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the appointments made to State agencies and boards under his remit for the years 2009, 2010 and to date in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28963/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): A number of statutory processes are involved in appointments to State boards. In some cases statutory selection procedures must be followed or nominations must be sought from independent nominating panels before appointments are made by the Government or by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. In other cases only particular public office holders may be appointed to certain boards. In a number of situations, only some appointments to the body concerned are made by the Minister, or appointments are made with the consent of the Minister for Finance or following consultation with the Minister for Finance or Minister for Education and Skills, as appropriate.

The table sets out relevant information in respect of all persons appointed to the state boards under the aegis of my Department for the years 2009, 2010 and to date in 2011.

Name of State Body/Board	Year	Names of Persons Appointed
Building Regulations Advisory Board	2009	Mr Jay Stuart
	2009	Mr Cian Ó Lionáin
	2009	Ms Terry Prendergast
	2009	Mr Sean Balfe
	2010	Mr Kevin O'Rourke
	2010	Ms Edel Collins
	2011	Mr Aidan O'Connor

Name of State Body/Board	Year	Names of Persons Appointed
An Bord Pleanála	2011	Mr Paul Kelly
	2011	Dr. Mary Kelly
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna	2011	Ms Fionna O'Regan
	2010	Councillor Billy Cameron
Comhar, Sustainable Development Council	2010	Mr. Pat McMahon
	2010	Ms. Fionnuala Hanrahan
	2009	Ms Jackie Maguire
	2010	Mr Matt Crowe
	2009	Ms Shirley Clerkin
	2010	Mr John McCarthy
	2010	Ms Mary Stack
	2009	Dr Claire Penny
	2010	Ms Mairead Cirillo
	2010	Ms Finola McDonnell
	2009	Ms Emer Dunne
	2010	Ms Pat Farrell
	2009	Mr Jack O'Sullivan
	2009	Mr Frank Corcoran
	2009	Ms David Korowicz
	2009	Mr Pat Finnegan
	2010	Ms Molly Walsh
	2009	Ms Elaine Nevin
	2009	Mr Seamus Boland
	2009	Ms Niamh Garvey
Dormant Accounts Board	2009	Fr Sean Healy
	2010	Ms Ann Irwin
	2009	Prof. Vincent O'Flaherty
	2009	Ms Sue Scott
	2009	Ms Deirdre McGrath
	2010	Mr Ray Bates
	2010	Mr Ciaran Byrnes
	2009	Ms Marian Hackett
	2009	Ms Kate Feely
	2009	Ms Rosaleen Glackin
	2009	Mr Noel McPartland
	2009	Mr David Martin
DDDA	2010	Ms Mary Maguire
	2010	Mr Colin Wilson
	2010	Ms Eimer O'Rourke
	2011	Mr Des Gunning
	2011	Mr Michael Morley (Chairperson)
EPA	2009	Prof. Niamh Brennan (Chair)
	2009	Ms Yvonne Farrell
	2010	Dr. Berna Grist
	2009	Dr. Mary Kelly
EPA	2009	Ms. Laura Burke
	2009	Mr. Dara Lynott
	2010	Mr. Matthew Crowe

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Name of State Body/Board	Year	Names of Persons Appointed	
Housing Finance Agency	2010	Mr John Bolger	
Housing and Sustainable Communities Ltd	2010	Mr Rich Howlin (Chairperson)	
	2010	Mr Eddie Lewis	
	2010	Mr John O'Connor	
	2010	Ms Marie McLaughlin	
	2010	Mr John McCloskey	
	2010	Mr Peter Carey	
	2010	Ms Ann McGuinness	
	2010	Mr Gordon Richards	
	Irish Water Safety	2009	Mr Dave Corcoran
Limerick Northside Regeneration Agency	2009	Mr Tom Coughlan	
	2009	Mr Frank McGlynn	
	2009	Ms Mary Tully	
	2009	Chief Superintendent Gerry Mahon	
	2010	Chief Superintendent David Sheahan	
	2010	Mr David Sheahan	
	2010	Mr Michael Layde	
	Limerick Southside Regeneration Agency	2009	Mr Tom Coughlan
2009		Mr Frank McGlynn	
2009		Ms Mary Tully	
2009		Chief Superintendent Gerry Mahon	
2010		Chief Superintendent David Sheahan	
2010		Mr David Sheahan	
2010		Mr Michael Layde	
Local Government Management Agency		2009	Mr E Sheehy
	2009	Mr M McLoone	
	2009	Mr T O'Niadh	
	2009	Mr E Breen	
	2009	Mr J Tierney	
	2009	Mr T Mackey	
	2009	Mr P Carey	
	2009	Mr E Gleeson	
	2010	Mr. H Kearns	
	2009	Mr E O'Connor	
	2009	Mr. J. Allen	
	2010	Mr. B. Quinlan	
	2009	Mr. P. McDonald	
	National Building Agency	2010	Mr Rich Howlin (Chairperson)
		2010	Mr Eddie Lewis
2010		Mr John O'Connor	
2010		Ms Marie McLaughlin	
2010		Mr John McCloskey	
2010		Mr Peter Carey	
2010		Ms Ann McGuinness	
2010		Mr Gordon Richards	
National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee		2009	Ms Bridget Casey
	2009	Ms Catherine Linehan	

Name of State Body/Board	Year	Names of Persons Appointed
Pobal	2010	Ms Caroline Keane
	2010	Mr Denis Conlan
	2010	Mr Jim Ganley
	2010	Professor Séamus Ó Cinnéide (Chair)
	2010	Councillor Liam Blaney
	2010	Ms Bridget Casey
	2010	Mr John Paul Collins
	2010	Ms Mary Connors
	2010	Ms Catherine Linehan
	2010	Councillor Patricia McCarthy
	2010	Ms Mary McDonnell
	2010	Mr Conn Murray
	2010	Mr David O'Connor
	2010	Mr Séamus O'Connor
	2011	Ms Mary Tully
	2009	Mr Clifford Kelly
	2009	Mr Sean O'Baoill
	2009	Ms Patricia King
	2009	Mr Seamus Boland
	2009	Mr Dan Joe O'Donovan
Private Rented Tenancies Board	2010	Ms Marian Vickers
	2010	Ms Ruth Cullen
	2010	Mr Frank Cunneen
	2010	Ms Brendan O'Malley
	2010	Ms Orla Coyne Chairperson
	2009	Ms Aideen Hayden
	2009	Mr Eoin O'Sullivan
	2009	Mr Aidan Brennan
	2009	Mr Finian Mathews
	2009	Mr John Tiernan
	2009	Mr Vincent P. Martin
	2009	Mr Gene Feighery
	2010	Mr Conn Murphy
Rent Tribunal	2010	Mr Joseph Meehan
	2010	Ms Orla Coyne
	2010	Ms Mary Doyle
	2010	Ms Louise Moloney
	2010	Mr Eoin O'Sullivan
	2010	Mr Tom O'Reilly
	2010	Mr Keiran Buckley
	2010	Ms Mary Heaslip
Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland	2009	Mr. John O'Dea
	2009	Dr. Patrick Gilligan
	2009	Ms. Darina Muckian
	2009	Ms. Adi Roche
	2010	Ms. Fionnuala Barker
	2010	Dr. Stephanie Ryan
	2010	Mr. James Fitzmaurice

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Name of State Body/Board	Year	Names of Persons Appointed
Western Development Commission	2010	Dr. Kevin Kelleher
	2011	Ms Helen Rochford Brennan
	2011	Mr Neville Bagnall
	2011	Mr Jim Devenney
	2011	Dr Seosamh O Ceallaigh
	2011	Dr Katie Sweeney
	2011	Ms Jackie Maguire
	2011	Ms Mary Devine O'Callaghan
	2011	Mr Vincent Sweeney
	2011	Mr Pádraig O hAoláin
	2011	Mr Vincent Roche
	2011	Mr Gerry O'Connor
2011	Ms Martina Minogue	

Register of Electors

134. **Deputy Paschal Donohoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to allow Irish residents living abroad vote in presidential elections and referenda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28967/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): In order to be able to vote at elections and referenda in this jurisdiction, a person's name must be entered in the register of electors for a constituency in the State in which the person ordinarily resides. Postal voting is provided for in electoral law in respect of certain categories of persons who are entered in the register of electors. The Electoral Act 1992 provides for postal voting by whole-time members of the Defence Forces, members of the Garda Síochána, and Irish diplomats serving abroad and their spouses/civil partners.

Subsequent legislation enacted by the Oireachtas has extended postal voting to other categories: electors living at home who are unable to vote because of a physical illness or a physical disability (the Electoral (Amendment) Act 1996); electors whose occupation, service or employment makes it likely that they will be unable to vote in person at their local polling station on polling day and full-time students registered at their home who are living elsewhere while attending an educational institution in the State (the Electoral Act 1997); certain election staff employed at the poll outside the constituency where they reside (the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2001); and electors who because of the circumstances of their detention in prison pursuant to an order of a court are likely to be unable to go in person on polling day to vote (the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2006).

The Programme for Government sets out a comprehensive range of constitutional reform measures including the review by a Constitutional Convention of the Dáil electoral system and giving citizens the right to vote at Irish embassies in presidential elections. I will bring forward proposals for change to electoral law in light of the decisions for change which may arise from these processes.

Official Engagements

135. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he participated in a climate policy workshop that was organised by IBEC; if this conference has any relevance to the fact that a major climate policy review is due to be

published in the coming weeks; the reason no other stakeholders were consulted with in the run up to this review but IBEC; and his views on same. [28998/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): At the invitation of IBEC, I agreed to give the closing address at their workshop on Responding to the Challenges and Opportunities of Climate Change which was held on 5 October 2011. I attended the closing session at which I was the only speaker. From my perspective, the workshop had no direct relevance to the timing of the climate policy review which I am finalising. There was no bilateral discussion on either the timing or content of the review.

In my closing address, I told the participants that my immediate priority is to complete the review of current national policy in light of existing and anticipated national greenhouse gas mitigation targets. That piece of work, which is almost finalised, will be an important contextual foundation on which the next phase of national climate policy development will be built. That next phase will need to involve engagement from all of the key stakeholders and I am currently considering how best to take that process forward after the review is finalised later this month.

The climate policy review has been raised in general terms at recent bilateral meetings which I have had with a number of stakeholders, including the Irish Environmental Network and the Irish Farmers Association. It was also raised at a recent bilateral meeting with the Irish Corporate Leaders on Climate Change at which both Business in the Community and Friends of the Earth were represented.

Local Authority Housing

136. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the role of the relevant local authorities, through whom funding is provided from his Department for voluntary housing co-operatives; if the local authority has any responsibility in relation to the standard of works or are they merely a conduit for funding with no responsibility in relation to these matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29010/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): My Department's involvement with voluntary and co-operative housing schemes relates primarily to the provision of funds for individual projects. The detailed administration of the schemes, the processing of applications and the certification that projects comply with the terms and conditions of the funding schemes, are the responsibility of the local authority.

Local authorities are responsible for the assessment and appraisal of all new voluntary sector projects and ensuring that they are advanced through the planning, procurement and implementation phases in accordance with the requirements of the Capital Works Management Framework for publicly funded capital projects. In the case of new voluntary or co-operative housing developments, it is a matter for the approved housing body, as Contracting Authority under the terms of the funding schemes, to ensure that such developments comply with the relevant statutory planning and building standards. The approved housing body, as Employer under the terms of the building contract, is responsible for ensuring proper standards of materials and construction.

Local Government Reforms

137. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the remuneration package the members of a group (details supplied) established to implement his decision for a unified county council in Tipperary, will receive for their services to this group; his views that the formation of this group is biased towards north

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Tipperary based on its formation; his further views that an independent chairman would be more appropriate; the reason it was necessary to employ two retired civil servants for this group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29021/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I do not accept that membership of the Group is biased towards North Tipperary. The appointment of members was based, inter alia, on their specific working knowledge of local government in Tipperary, expertise in local government matters generally and extensive experience of public administration at a senior level. While the County Manager from North Tipperary County Council will act as Chair, the Group will operate in conjunction with an independent external evaluator who will assist in covering all aspects of the Group's mandate in an objective and effective way. Moreover, the inclusion of a member from outside the local authorities in question will further underpin the objectivity of the Group. There is no remuneration for members of the Group.

Sheltered Housing Projects

138. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the sheltered housing provisions for recovering drug addicts in Dublin; if any of these services cater to families with children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29038/11]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Willie Penrose): Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with the housing authorities and implementation of the homelessness strategy at local and regional level is being carried out through the framework of statutory homelessness action plans adopted by housing authorities. Dublin City Council (DCC) is the lead authority for the Dublin region and the Assessment and Placement Service at 160 Capel Street provides information and advice and an initial assessment to place people presenting as homeless into temporary accommodation. Accordingly every individual, whether they are recovering addicts or otherwise, will have their needs assessed by the Assessment and Placement Service and, subject to the outcome of their needs assessment, will be provided with appropriate accommodation.

There is a wide range of homeless accommodation options available in the Dublin region that cater for families including private emergency accommodation, supported temporary accommodation and permanent supported accommodation. There are also options available under the SLÍ scheme which assists people progress from homelessness to independent living in mainstream housing by co-ordinating appropriate tenancy and other mainstream supports to meet each individual's needs in their local community setting. In respect of social housing need more generally, under Section 9 of the Housing Act 1988, the statutory responsibility for determination of eligibility and assessment of housing need is entirely a matter for the relevant housing authority, in this case Dublin City Council.

Foreshore Licences

139. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding an application for a foreshore licence (details supplied) in County Mayo. [29109/11]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): When Mayo County Council initially applied for a foreshore licence in 2009 they acknowledged

that additional information comprising a screening report for appropriate assessment and an ecological survey would need to be submitted to progress the application. This material was received by my Department on 15 September 2011 and has been forwarded to the relevant statutory consultees for examination. Instructions will shortly be given to the Council concerning public consultation. On completion of all consultation procedures the Marine Licence Vetting Committee will report on the case following which I will make a determination.

Proposed Legislation

140. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timescale for introducing legislation based on the report of the medical negligence working group which recommended the introduction of a periodic payment order scheme as an alternative to the current lump sum system of paying compensation in catastrophic injury cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29036/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Programme for Government includes a commitment to introduce legislation to facilitate courts making provision for structured settlements in circumstances where lump sums are currently awarded as a consequence of individuals suffering catastrophic injury because of the negligence of another.

Among the recommendations made in the Report of the High Court Working Group on Medical Negligence were that:

- legislation be enacted to empower the courts, as an alternative to lump sum awards, to make consensual and non-consensual periodic payments to compensate injured victims in cases of catastrophic injury where long term permanent care will be required, for the costs of (a) future treatment, (b) future care and (c) the future provision of medical and assistive aids and appliances,
- periodic payment orders should only be made in circumstances where the court is satisfied that continuity of payment under the periodic payments order is reasonably secure, and
- the State, through the agency of the NTMA, be empowered to provide injured victims with the necessary security for periodic payments either by the provision of annuities to insurers and others or in such other manner as may be appropriate. Alternatively consideration should be given to the introduction of a statutory scheme whereby payments made under periodic payment orders will be statutorily protected and fully guaranteed.

Critical therefore to the successful operation of a statutory scheme for periodic payments will be the establishment of the necessary financial infrastructure to ensure continuity of payment is secure. In this regard the National Treasury Management Agency is conducting an actuarial review to examine the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of periodic payment orders as an alternative to lump sum payments, or other options. The review will examine in particular the feasibility of the State acting as an annuity provider to insurers and indemnity providers in personal injury actions to enable compliance with the continuity and security of payments principle. The outcome of the review which I understand is expected to take six months to complete will inform the development of proposals underway in my Department to meet the Government's commitment to legislate in this area.

Coroners Service

141. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there has been an

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audit on C71 forms completed by coroners' offices in public hospitals; if there is any monitoring of these forms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29041/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The C71 is a form completed by An Garda Síochána to notify a sudden, unexplained, violent or unnatural death to a coroner. It is copied to the District Officer of the Garda and Crime Investigation Branch. This form gives particulars of the deceased and a summary of the facts and circumstances surrounding a death. It is used by the coroner, who is an independent officer responsible for the medico-legal investigation of certain deaths, in his/her preliminary inquiries. I am advised that the question of auditing these forms in respect of deaths in public hospitals has not arisen in the context of coroners' inquiries which are limited to establishing identity and how, when and where a person died.

Council of Europe Conventions

142. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he will sign the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. [28787/11]

143. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he will sign up to the Council of Europe Convention on violence against women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28932/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 142 and 143 together.

Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, an executive office within my Department, actively contributed to all stages of the drafting process in relation to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Cosc is currently considering the steps which need to be taken to pave the way for a submission to the Government on the question of signature of the convention by Ireland. I anticipate that the matter will be submitted to the Government in the near future.

Proposed Legislation

144. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeframe in which he will introduce consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence, threatened violence and intimidation, in a way that provides protection to victims; and if he will include a review of all court procedures. [28933/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The commitment in the Programme for Government is to introduce consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence, threatened violence and intimidation, in a way that provides protection to victims. The commitment will be progressed as soon as possible having regard to the need for consultations and the need to dispose of urgent legislative matters in my Department under the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for the State.

The Deputy will appreciate that some significant reforms have been introduced over the last two years. The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 allows civil partners to apply for a safety order or a barring order subject to the same rules as a spouse. Further reforms were introduced by me in the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011. That Act removed the minimum required period of cohabitation before one of a

cohabiting couple may apply for a safety order (previously, the applicant was required to have resided with the respondent for at least six of the previous twelve months), gave equal access to the protections of the Domestic Violence Act to opposite-sex and same-sex couples (the relevant provision previously referred only to couples “living together as husband and wife”); and widened the scope of section 2, which specifies who may apply for a safety order, to enable a person to obtain a safety order against a person with whom they have a child in common.

Human Rights Issues

145. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will make provision for the working group established to advise him on the new human rights and equality commission to receive submissions from the public and from civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations; the timeframe for the conclusion of the work of the group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28940/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have established a Working Group to advise me on the establishment of a new Human Rights and Equality Commission. This Group has been provided with clear terms of references and the process will also be informed by recent studies of the equality and human rights bodies commissioned by my Department, in which a broad range of stakeholder groups have been consulted. The timeframe for the Group will be short as I intend to have a new Commission in place by the end of February.

Deportation Orders

146. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will allow a person (details supplied) to remain in County Longford until he has completed his secondary education at a local school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29034/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned arrived in the State on 24th March, 2006 and applied for asylum. His application was refused following detailed consideration of his case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and, on appeal, the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

Subsequently, in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 11th February, 2009, that it was proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of submitting written representations setting out reasons why he should not be deported. He was also advised of his entitlement to submit an application for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006. The person concerned submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection and also submitted representations pursuant to Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

Following the consideration of his application for Subsidiary Protection, a decision was taken that the person concerned was not eligible for Subsidiary Protection. This position was notified to the person concerned by letter dated 19th May, 2010.

The case of the person concerned was then considered under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement before a Deportation Order was made in respect of him on 3rd June, 2010. This Order was served by registered post dated 9th June, 2010. Once a Deportation Order has been served, the enforcement of that Order becomes an operational matter for the Garda National

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Immigration Bureau. As the person concerned remains the subject of a Deportation Order, he is required to leave the State and remain thereafter out of the State.

I am satisfied that the case of the person concerned was given careful and detailed consideration at all stages of the asylum and immigration processes. I am equally satisfied that all representations submitted by and on behalf of the person concerned were given the fullest consideration before the decision to make a Deportation Order was taken. Against this background, I see no reason to re-visit the case of the person concerned.

I should remind the Deputy that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. The service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek this information through the more administratively expensive Parliamentary Questions process.

Crime Prevention

147. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his policy on tackling domestic violence and supporting victims of domestic violence; the number of refuge centres in place for persons at risk of domestic violence; the location of these centres; the level of support they receive from him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29072/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Government is very committed to tackling the scourge of domestic violence in this country. It is a very complex issue and a broad range of action is being taken across the country by many state and non-state organisations to prevent and respond effectively to such violence. Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, an executive office within my Department, has the key responsibility to ensure the delivery of a well co-ordinated ‘whole of government’ response by the organisations concerned to domestic violence.

Central to the Government’s policy on tackling domestic violence is the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010 — 2014, which was developed by Cosc, in consultation with a broad range of partner organisations, and is available on Cosc’s website (www.cosc.ie). The strategy is a statement of the Government’s priority actions to address domestic violence up to the end of 2014. The main focus of the strategy is, on the one hand, to prevent the violence concerned and, on the other, to respond effectively to the violence. A Strategy Oversight Committee meets twice-yearly to review progress on the implementation of the strategy. The Committee, which is chaired by the Secretary General of my Department, includes senior officials from key government departments and state agencies responsible for implementing actions in the strategy. In addition progress on the implementation of the strategy is driven and monitored by Cosc on an ongoing basis.

I am informed by the Department of Health that every HSE region in Ireland has at least one refuge providing crisis emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence. All but one (located in the Western region) are accessible on a 24 hour basis. The locations of refuges in each region are as follows: HSE South (6 refuges) — Kilkenny, Kerry, Tipperary, Cork, Waterford, Wexford; HSE West (5 refuges) — Limerick, Galway, Clare, Donegal, Mayo; Dublin North East (5 refuges) - Coolock, Blanchardstown, Dundalk, Drogheda, Meath; Dublin Mid Leinster (4 refuges) — Bray, Athlone, Rathmines, Tallaght.

As regards support for domestic violence refuges provided by my Department, this year Cosc, through its Local Awareness Raising Grant Scheme, provided funding to 8 refuges totalling just over €21,000. In 2010 the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime, an indepen-

dent body under the aegis of my Department, approved funding for 10 domestic violence refuges, mainly for the provision of a court accompaniment service. The funding involved came to a total of €207,345.

I am informed that state funding is also provided to domestic violence refuges by the HSE and by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. I understand that in 2010 the HSE provided €10.5m. in funding for domestic violence refuges. The same year the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government provided in excess €1.9m. towards the maintenance costs of domestic violence refuges. The equivalent figure for 2011, up to the end of September, is over €1.3m. I am also informed that in both years additional funding, in the region of 10% of the Department’s funding, would have been provided by the relevant local authorities.

I would ask the Deputy to note that the information provided above is in relation to refuge centres, which is the subject of the Deputy’s question, but that the State also provides resources to domestic violence support services which are not refuge centres.

Mother and Baby Homes

148. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to investigate the activities of mother and baby homes that operated here; if there is a register of all the mother and baby homes that operated here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29127/11]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I will contact the Deputy directly in relation to this matter.

Defence Forces Reserve

149. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence the effective strength of the Reserve Defence Forces officers by rank and brigade. [28977/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): A table outlines in detail the effective strength of Officers of the Reserve Defence Force, Army, Naval Service Reserve & RDF Training Authority — DFTC by rank as of 31 August 2011, the latest date for which figures are available. As of 31 August 2011 there were five hundred & thirty eight effective officers in the RDF.

Officers of the Reserve Defence Force — Effective Strength at 31 August 2011

	Lt Col	Comdt	Captain	Lieutenant	Total
1 S Bde RDF	1	31	52	99	183
2 E Bde RDF	1	24	48	78	151
4 W Bde RDF	1	29	62	75	167
Naval Service Reserve		3	10	7	20
RDF Training Authority — DFTC		4	8	5	17
Total	3	91	180	264	538

150. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence the number of officers promoted under DFR R5 para 31(2) each year since 2005 and to date in 2011; and if it is his policy to continue such promotions for those qualified in 2011. [28978/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The military authorities advise that in order to provide the information requested by the Deputy it is necessary to consult with each of the RDF Formations across the country and for this information to then be collated. It has not been possible to do this within the time available but the military authorities assure me that the work is being prioritised and will be provided to me for transmission to the Deputy at the earliest possible opportunity.

I would like to advise the Deputy that the issue of promotions within the Reserve Defence Force is something that I have given consideration to recently. In doing so I was mindful that a Value for Money Review of the Reserve is ongoing and additionally there is a Comprehensive Review of Expenditure which places a requirement on Government Departments to identify opportunities for savings across all aspects of business. Following consideration of the issue and pending completion of these two Reviews, I agreed to sanction limited promotions within the Reserve Defence Force to bring the current strength in all ranks to 70% (60% at Corporal rank) of the established strength in each rank as provided for in Defence Force Regulations.

Departmental Staff

151. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Defence if a person (details supplied) in County Galway will be allowed to retire on grounds of ill health in line with medical advice. [28983/11]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned, a civilian employee of this Department, has applied to retire on grounds of ill health. In line with normal practice, the Department, in assessing the application, has sought the advice of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for the Civil Service. The CMO has advised that the application should not be accepted and that alternative working arrangements might be appropriate in this case. A second medical practitioner appointed to deal with an appeal from the employee in question has upheld the advice of the CMO.

The Department, on foot of the recommendation of the CMO, recently wrote to the employee to inform the person of the advice received in relation to the case and to enquire whether arrangements could be put in place to assist with a return to duty in the near future. The Department is awaiting a reply to that letter. Following receipt of a reply, the Department will, with the assistance of any further advice that may be required, be in a position to assess the employee's case further.

Grant Payments

152. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the digitisation process will be completed on an agri-environment options scheme application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that great financial hardship is being caused by this delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28902/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the Agri-environment Options Scheme with effect from 1st September 2010. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. During these checks a discrepancy arose in relation to the area claimed on one of the land parcels. Officials in my Department have been in direct contact with the person named and the problem is now being addressed with a view to issuing payment as quickly as possible.

I am well aware of the financial pressures on many farm families and of the importance of grant and scheme payments to their incomes and cash-flow. I have given the highest priority to the processing and payment of outstanding Agri-Environment Options Scheme payments and to the elimination of all unnecessary delays.

153. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding a headage scheme application payment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28936/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2011 Single Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 11 April 2011, processing of which has recently been completed, thereby allowing payment to issue under the 2011 Disadvantaged Area Scheme on 7 October 2011. The 50% advance payments under the Single Payment Scheme are scheduled to commence issuing as and from 17 October 2011.

154. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the remaining 25% of 2010 agri-environment options scheme payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28970/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was paid €456.08 on 29th August representing 75% of the 2010 entitlement under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme. I expect the remaining 25% of the 2010 entitlement to issue before the end of October. Payments in respect of 2011 will commence in December.

155. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when single farm payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28971/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): In the case of the Single Farm Payment, it should be remembered that, while the earliest payment date provided for under EU rules is 1 December, as I am particularly conscious of the difficulties caused for farmers by the current financial crisis and am also acutely aware of the significance to the wider rural economy of the Single Payment, earlier this year I successfully sought the approval of the Commissioner to have advance payments made as and from 17 October. This is the earliest possible legal date for making payments, it being the start of the new EU financial year.

With regard to the person named, an application under the 2011 Single Payment Scheme was received on 12 May 2011. On processing the application an over-claim was identified on one of the parcels declared by the applicant. The person named was written to in this regard on 3 October and an official from my Department also contacted the person named directly. This issue has now been resolved thereby allowing the application of the person named to be further processed, with a view to payment issuing as soon as payments under the Scheme commence issuing generally.

Departmental Agencies

156. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason some agencies under his remit that have staff reduction targets under the Croke Park agreement are not participating in transfer procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29001/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): All the relevant Agencies under my Department's remit are participating fully in all aspects of the Croke Park Agreement.

Grant Payments

157. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway was only paid for three of their six calves under the suckler cow scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29020/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named registered six beef breed calves in 2010 Suckler Welfare Scheme. Payment in respect of three animals issued on 20 June 2011. Errors have been identified on the remaining animals and a letter regarding these errors issued to the applicant on 10 October 2011. The case will be further processed on receipt of a response from the applicant.

Alternative Farm Enterprises

158. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the position regarding mink farming (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29045/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The keeping of mink in this country is prohibited except under licences which are issued by my Department under the Musk Rats Act, 1933 (Application to Mink) Order 1965. Licences are issued under this legislation only if the applicant, following an inspection, is found to be compliant with a number of conditions. I am satisfied that all licensed fur farms operating in this country meet current national and EU legislative requirements. There are no fur animals other than mink currently being farmed in this country.

Grant Payments

159. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when agri-environment option scheme will be paid to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if his attention has been drawn to the financial hardship that is caused by delays in such payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29060/11]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the Agri-Environment options scheme with effect from the 1st September 2010. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. During these checks a query arose in relation to the accumulation of actions on one of the land parcels. Officials in my Department have been in direct contact with the person named and the problem is being addressed with a view to issuing payment as quickly as possible.

I am well aware of the financial pressures on many farm families and of the importance of grant and scheme payments to their incomes and cash-flow. I have given the highest priority to the processing and payment of outstanding Agri-environment Options Scheme payments and to the elimination of all unnecessary delays.

Early Childhood Education

160. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has been

furnished with an estimate of the numbers of children that miss out on early childhood care and education scheme payment due to their birth date falling in July or August and they commence school having reached four years; her views on the extra cost involved if she were to extend the date of the scheme to the end of August; if same will be worthwhile to cover this cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28906/11]

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 pre-school year to all eligible children in the year before commencing primary school. Almost every pre-school service in the State is participating in the ECCE 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 free pre-school year in 2010/2011.

Children qualify for the free pre-school year where they are aged more than 3 years 2 months and less than 4 years 7 months at 1 September in the relevant year. This means, for example, that children born between 2 February 2007 and 30 June 2008 qualify for the free pre-school year in September 2011 and children born in July and August of 2008 will qualify for the programme in September 2012. It is estimated that in the region of 3,500 children commence primary school when they are aged less than 4 years and 2 months, the majority of whom will have attended pre-school. The estimated cost of extending the programme to include this cohort of children would be approximately €9 million.

The ECCE programme will continue to be evaluated and developed as resources permit. In this context, I have asked officials in my department to examine options for the further development of the programme and the matter of age will be looked at as part of this.

Health Services

161. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo is entitled to dentures free of charges. [28954/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that the Irish Dental Association is seeking an increase in the dental treatment services scheme budget from €63 million to €80 million to meet the demands of the scheme and the restoration of preventative treatments for all medical card holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29108/11]

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding dental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29087/11]

194. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views that under the 1970 Health Act the Health Service Executive is obliged to take care of people's oral health and it is failing to do so at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29091/11]

195. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a matter (details supplied) regarding dental treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29092/11]

196. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a recent study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29094/11]

197. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that the Ombudsman recently, in her annual report, stated that it is a sad reflection on a system when a person with decaying teeth who has no resources to fund private treatment has to put up with decaying teeth until their annual entitlement recommences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29097/11]

198. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on the statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 99.5% of dentists reported that the cutbacks are causing patients to leave decay and gum disease untreated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29098/11]

199. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 82% of dentists reported an increase in patients presenting in pain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29099/11]

200. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 74% of dentists reported an increase in gum disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29100/11]

201. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 74% of dentists reported an increase in patients presenting with loose teeth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29101/11]

202. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 56% of dentists reported an increase in patients presenting with broken dentures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29102/11]

203. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 11.5% of dentists reported that patients are aware of their entitlement under the dental treatment service scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29103/11]

204. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 74% of dentists reduced the working hours of staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29104/11]

205. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 64% of dentists decreased the number of staff working in their practice [29105/11]

206. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a statement by an organisation (details supplied) that 67% of dentists reported that there are referring more patients to hospitals as a direct result of the patient being unable to obtain treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29106/11]

207. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on the job losses in the dental sector (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29107/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): I propose to take Questions Nos. 162, 192 and 194 to 207, inclusive, together.

Unfortunately due to the current position of the public finances, it has been necessary to reduce the services available under the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS). However

the Health Service Executive (HSE) has measures in place to ensure that patients with special needs, high risk patients and those who have greater clinical needs receive priority for treatment. In addition, a free oral examination every calendar year and free emergency dental treatment with a focus on the relief of pain and sepsis are available to all eligible patients.

In the current year to the end of August, treatments paid for under the DTSS included over 211,000 oral examinations, over 4,000 prophylaxis procedures (scaling and polishing), over 221,000 restorations (fillings) and almost 76,000 exodontic treatments. In addition over 17,500 prosthetics (dentures and denture relines) and over 15,700 denture repairs were provided. The operation of the DTSS will continue to be monitored to ensure the most beneficial, effective and efficient use of available resources.

I am aware that the Ombudsman made reference to current restrictions on dental services in her Annual Report for 2010. The duty placed on the HSE to make dental services available to persons with full eligibility has to be read in conjunction with Section 7 of the Health Act 2004 which requires that the HSE have regard to the resources available to it and to secure the most beneficial, effective and efficient use of those resources.

Neither my Department nor the HSE have any functions in relation to the staffing of dentists' private practices. However, the Deputy may wish to note that in 2009 there was a net increase of 233 in the number of dentists contracted to provide services under the DTSS. During 2010 there was a net increase of 40 contracted dentists and in 2011, to date, there has been a net increase of 20 contracted dentists. Fees for dentists under the DTSS were reduced under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009. A review of these fee reductions will commence in the near future. It should be noted that these reductions did not affect the income derived from dentists' private practices. Responsibility for the Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme rests with my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, Ms Joan Burton TD.

Health Service Staff

163. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding nursing administration fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28903/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): An Bord Altranais is the regulatory body for nurses and midwives wishing to practise in Ireland. The principle objective of An Bord Altranais is to regulate the professions of nursing and midwifery and to enhance the protection of the public in its dealing with these professions. An Bord Altranais is a self—funding body and is reliant on the collection of fees, authorised under the provisions of the Nurses and Midwives Act 1985, to continue to provide its many important functions. The Verification of Certification Fee referred to here is one of the authorised fees that may be levied by An Bord Altranais.

Health Services

164. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recognise fibromyalgia as an accepted Health Service Executive illness, allowing sufferers to benefit from a range of HSE supports and services, including home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28917/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): This classification of disease is the international standard by which diseases are classified and is accepted by Ireland and endorsed by the World Health Organisation. The diagnosis and management of Fibromyalgia takes place in a number

[Deputy James Reilly.]

of settings including primary care, specialist services and rehabilitation, if required. There are no plans to change the range of supports available to patients with Fibromyalgia.

165. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health if he intends to recognise Ménière's disease as an accepted Health Service Executive illness, allowing sufferers to benefit from a range of HSE supports and services, including home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28918/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): This classification of disease is the international standard by which diseases are classified and is accepted by Ireland and endorsed by the World Health Organisation. The diagnosis and management of Ménière's disease takes place in a number of settings including primary care, specialist services and rehabilitation, if required. There are no plans to change the range of supports available to patients with Ménière's disease.

Medical Cards

166. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health his plans to remove the requirement for Apert syndrome sufferers to have to continually re-apply for their medical cards; if his attention has been drawn to the stress that the current re-application requirement and procedure places on sufferers and their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28923/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): Under the General Medical Card Scheme, medical cards are made available to persons and their dependants who would otherwise experience undue hardship in meeting the cost of general practitioners services. Eligibility for the medical card is based primarily on the means of the adult and his/her spouse or civil partner. Two years is now the average period nationally for which an individual or family holds a medical card before formal review under the General Medical Scheme (GMS). The review process is an important quality assurance aspect of the management of the GMS. The HSE has no plans to change these arrangements.

Health Services

167. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health his views that a third review of domestic violence services by the Health Service Executive is an appropriate response by him to the increasing numbers of domestic violence victims as detailed in Safe Ireland's annual figures recently released. [28934/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In the context of increased demand for domestic violence services, the HSE is currently engaged in a national and regional review of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services that are funded by the HSE. The aim of this review is to ensure that funding is allocated according to need and areas of high demand are appropriately resourced. The review will be completed by the end of 2011.

Health Service Staff

168. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health the number of retired Health Service Executive staff who are directors of limited companies that have consultancy contracts with the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28939/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE does not have a facility to determine whether consultancy companies with which it contracts have former HSE employees as direc-

tors. The Executive considers that, were it to seek such information in the course of a procurement process, this could be deemed prejudicial. The Executive has procedures in place to ensure that employees who avail of a redundancy or early retirement scheme which prohibits re-employment within the HSE or the wider Public Sector are not re-employed either as employees or on a contract for service basis. However this does not affect such persons' rights to establish or become an employee of a private company.

Hospital Services

169. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide as a matter of urgency a dedicated fully equipped stroke unit at Kerry General Hospital, as evidence from the national clinical programme points to improved outcomes for patients who attend such units. [28958/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

National Lottery Funding

170. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will acknowledge the tremendous fund raising efforts of the Kerry based charity Build 4 Life which has already fund raised €2 million, €450,000 of which was paid in VAT, towards the cost of opening a dedicated cystic fibrosis unit at Cork University Hospital, by allocating €300,000 from the national lottery fund in order to complete this facility. [28959/11]

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.

Mental Health Services

171. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who prior to 1 November 2011 were included under the terms of the psychiatric scheme; and if he will provide a breakdown of the percentage of these persons holding full medical cards. [28960/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): Under the former Eastern Health Board, it was the practice to provide psychiatric medicines free to all patients who attended an outpatient clinic for services regardless of their eligibility status. Such arrangements were unique to the greater Dublin area. In all other former Health Board Areas, patients used either their medical card or Drug Payment Scheme card to access psychiatric medicines.

In 2009, the HSE decided to bring the arrangements for the supply of medicines to patients attending mental health outpatient clinics in the greater Dublin area into line with those operating in the rest of the country. These changes were introduced on a phased basis, starting on 1 October 2010 when medical card holders in the HSE Dublin North East area requiring psychiatric medicines were referred to their own GP for a GMS prescription. This arrangement is being extended to the Dublin Mid Leinster area from 1 November 2011. At the same time, Drug Payment Scheme cardholders will be required to pay for their prescription up to the co-payment threshold of €120 per month. Medical card holders will continue to receive their medication free of charge, subject to any applicable prescription charge. These arrangements will be kept under review.

[Deputy Róisín Shortall.]

There are no current figures available for the number of persons who were availing of the scheme that applied in the greater Dublin area. However, in 2007 there were 19,000 attendees at mental health out-patient clinics in the former Eastern Health Board area. For the basis of calculations, the HSE has assumed that half of these attendees were medical card holders.

People affected by these changes 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 will take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family, including the cost of medication.

Hospital Accommodation

172. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will increase the number of beds in the critical care unit in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28964/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Staff

173. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin; his plans to fill these vital positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28965/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

174. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the impact to the provision of acute services in County Roscommon of the redesignation of up to 20 acute medical beds at Roscommon County Hospital as step-down rehabilitation beds; the reason other acute hospitals servicing County Roscommon have failed to transfer back to Roscommon County Hospital non-critical acute medical patients from the county even after being requested to do so by local consultants on foot of its accident and emergency department being taken off call; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28981/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE plan implementing the changes to the Emergency Department Service at Roscommon County Hospital came into effect in July. The Urgent Care Centre now in place at Roscommon operates from 8am to 8pm seven days a week and is provided by non-consultant hospital doctors (NCHDs) with clinical governance provided by an Emergency Medicine Consultant at Galway. In addition there is a Medical Assessment Unit at the Hospital and an out of hours GP service is in operation. An enhanced ambulance service has been put in place.

The changes at Roscommon were necessitated by the serious patient safety concerns of the HSE and of the Health Information and Quality Authority in relation to the accident and emergency service at Roscommon following the publication of the Authority's Report on Mallow Hospital in April 2011. This was compounded because of NCHD recruitment difficulties.

Roscommon County Hospital has a clear future and will continue to provide acute hospital care for the population of the Roscommon area. It will do this as part of a wider network of

acute hospitals across the Western area and it will be supported by the other hospitals in the region.

I believe that smaller hospitals can and should provide as wide as possible a range of services, close to the local community. The key concern is that they are safe. A framework for the development of smaller hospitals is being prepared. The HSE has been asked to work up detailed draft proposals in this regard which will take account of the results of consultation with stakeholders.

The framework will specify what services will be transferred to smaller hospitals. Too often the focus has been on taking away services from smaller hospitals rather than on the services that they can provide.

I am pleased that services at Roscommon have recently been enhanced with the establishment of outreach plastic surgical services at the hospital. This is the first of a number of service enhancements at Roscommon. The issue of locating a satellite service centre of the National Rehabilitation Hospital at Roscommon is also actively being examined in the context of enhancing the hospital's role. I fully support the role of smaller hospitals like Roscommon in providing for patients whose care no longer requires them to be treated in larger centres. The transfer of patients back from surrounding hospitals occurs when the patient's acute care is complete, and by agreement with the patient, the referring consultant and the receiving consultant.

Mental Health Services

175. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his priorities for mental health services; if he will ensure that there are no cuts in expenditure in this area in budget 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28994/11]

184. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the implementation of the mental health strategy, *A Vision for Change*; the funding in place for the implementation of this plan; the timeframe for its implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29070/11]

208. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the mental health services scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29111/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175, 184 and 208 together.

The Government has prioritised the reform of the mental health service in line with *A Vision for Change*. This commitment was clearly shown in the Programme for Government which provides that €35 million will be ring-fenced annually from within the overall health budget to develop community mental health services and to ensure early access to more appropriate services for adults and children. This is currently being considered as part of the Estimates process for 2012 and future years. In addition, as 90% of mental health needs are dealt with at primary care level, the Government is committed to developing closer links between mental health services and primary care. It is envisaged that the provision of improved community-based services will ensure that people with mental health problems receive the treatment and after-care support needed to facilitate recovery.

A Vision for Change contains some 200 recommendations to be implemented over a 7-10 year timeframe. As implementation of the recommendations is primarily the responsibility of

[Deputy Kathleen Lynch.]

the Health Service Executive (HSE), the HSE appointed an Assistant National Director as the national lead for mental health to ensure delivery of mental health services in line with Government policy. While it is accepted that progress on implementation has been slower than originally anticipated, services in many parts of the country are pressing ahead with implementation which includes the phased closure of psychiatric hospitals. Significant progress has been achieved to date including: shorter episodes of in-patient care, improved child and adolescent mental health services, fewer involuntary admissions and the involvement of service users in all aspects of mental health policy, service planning and delivery.

It is the Government's intention that over time access to modern mental health services in the community will be significantly improved and my priority as Minister of State with responsibility for Mental Health will be to further advance the implementation of *A Vision for Change*. Towards this end, I have asked the HSE to prepare an implementation plan, which will identify specific recommendations of *A Vision for Change* that can be progressed over the next three years, with timelines, detailed costs, structures and identifiable person(s) responsible for driving the change including delivery on the commitments in our Programme for Government. Issues related to staffing levels particularly in community mental health teams will be examined in this context.

A Vision for Change also recognised that all citizens should be treated equally and that access to employment for people with mental health difficulties should be on the same basis as any other citizen. We are endeavouring, through housing, education and community based health care, to provide the environment in which employment opportunities can be availed of by all on an equal basis.

Hospital Accommodation

176. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he has received a request from the Health Service Executive for additional financial resources to address the overcrowding problem at our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28995/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE National Service Plan 2011 which was approved in December 2010 requires the HSE to operate within the limits of its voted allocation of €13.456 billion. This represents a net reduction of €683m on the 2010 provision. The Service Plan also commits the HSE to delivering service levels for 2011 which are broadly in line with 2010 levels. All hospitals are required to operate within their allocated budgets and to meet the service level activity targets that the hospital has agreed for 2011.

I recognise that the management of funding allocations by public hospitals poses a serious budgetary challenge. It is clear that if existing spending trends remain unchecked there will be a significant overrun at the end of this year. I have made it clear that such an overrun is not acceptable given the state of the public finances and this country's obligations under the Memorandum of Understanding with the IMF and EU. I am in ongoing contact with the HSE to ensure that all necessary steps are being taken to avoid any budgetary overruns while at the same ensuring the maintenance of services in line with the commitments given by the HSE and public hospitals.

I am on record as saying that every individual agency must take responsibility and do everything possible to stay within budget while delivering their planned level of service. Under its reform programme the Government has committed to achieving greater efficiencies in patient care and service delivery. These efficiencies will not be easy to achieve but I am certain that over time they will help to ensure that more people get access to services within a given

quantum of funding. In this regard it is important that the management capacity in our public hospitals is sufficiently robust to meet these challenges. The Deputy will also be aware that it is the role of the Special Delivery Unit, which I recently established, to address issues around the better and more efficient delivery of health services. The work of the SDU will contribute significantly to improving outcomes for patients and to greater efficiencies in the system to avoid any budgetary overruns while at the same endeavouring to ensure the maintenance of services in line with the commitments given by the HSE and public hospitals.

Emergency Services

177. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health, further to Parliamentary Question No. 484 of 20 September 2011, if he will furnish an accurate table clearly indicating the location of advanced paramedics; if he is satisfied with the fact that the west has the lowest level of APs to qualify in the next two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29002/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The number of advanced paramedics (APs) who have completed their training and the numbers due to qualify in January 2012 and July 2012 are as outlined to the Deputy in reply to his previous Parliamentary Question.

Candidates entering the advanced paramedic programme agree to work anywhere within an operational area. In order to ensure maximum flexibility in their deployment, on successful completion of the two year course candidates are not permanently assigned to specific ambulance stations, but are assigned to wherever they are required at a particular time. The average cost of training an AP is €127,000 and the skill level that they attain makes them extremely valuable resources in pre-hospital emergency care. Accordingly, it is essential to have the most flexible use possible through dynamic deployment, to ensure maximum availability to patients. Roscommon is a prime example, with a number of APs have been deployed to the greater area to operate a Rapid Response Vehicle twenty four hours a day.

Given the investment involved, it is essential that suitable candidates are nominated for what is a very onerous course, hence the need for a robust selection process. The National Ambulance Service assures me that it makes every effort to distribute course places across the country based on service needs and available candidates. However, there is more interest among staff in some areas of the country than in others to compete for a place in the national selection process. In September 2011, for the first time in a number of years the National Ambulance Service was able to fill all 44 available places on the two courses per year.

Health Services

178. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health the efforts being made to reduce the extensive waiting times associated with audiology services in the public health system; his views on the use of the National Treatment Purchase Fund to allow those on waiting lists for extensive periods of time to seek appointments privately; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29003/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): The report of the National Audiology Review Group was published in April 2011. The HSE is currently pursuing a number of recommendations that will have a direct impact on waiting lists for audiology services:

- A group is carrying out an urgent workforce planning review for audiology. This group is due to complete its work by November 2011.

[Deputy Róisín Shortall.]

- The HSE has sponsored ten candidates to complete an MSc in Audiology. The graduates will be ready to commence work in September 2013.
- Newborn hearing screening is currently being provided in Cork University Hospital with a view to identifying congenital hearing impairment at a very early stage and will be rolled out in the remainder of the HSE South by year end. The programme will be rolled out in all other regions by mid 2012.
- Each HSE Region is currently in the process of validating its waiting list and evaluating methods to reduce waiting times.
- Consultation has commenced within the HSE in order to establish a unified patient management system for audiology. This will manage all scheduling and waiting lists.

There is a commitment in the Programme for Government, to tackle waiting times in our health system. The Government believes that, despite our economic circumstances, there is scope for real and sustainable improvement in waiting times for patients, provided we put the proper information management systems in place and there is real accountability for delivering the improvements. On 2 June, the Special Delivery Unit (SDU) was established. The core SDU team in the Department of Health works with closely associated teams from the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund. As part of that work, the SDU is establishing an infrastructure based on information collection and analysis, hospital by hospital.

179. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the future of the rehabilitation unit at a care centre (details supplied) in County Westmeath, which is already subject to restricted admissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29030/11]

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.

Departmental Offices

180. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his role and that of the Health Service Executive in relation to the confidential inquiry into maternal and child health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29037/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The title of the confidential enquiry into maternal and child health (CMACH) Ireland has changed to Maternal Death Enquiry (MDE) Ireland from April 2011. MDE Ireland aims to promote safer pregnancy by conducting confidential reviews into maternal deaths, identifying learning points, and using its findings to formulate and disseminate recommendations. The MDE is a 'stand alone' office working in partnership with the Maternal Enquiry UK. It is funded and endorsed by the HSE. I acknowledge the important role that MDE provides in improving provision of care for mothers and babies.

The Maternal Death Enquiry (MDE) was initiated in England and Wales in 1952 and became UK — wide in the 1980's. Ireland became a participant in 2009. The aim of the Enquiry is to investigate why some women die during or shortly after pregnancy, and to learn how such tragedies can be avoided in the future. The findings from previous maternal death enquiries in the UK have been published in a triennial report titled Saving Mothers' Lives. Irish data will be included in the next triennial report. The reports contain analyses and trends of maternal deaths and importantly, recommendations for improving clinical practice and for national

policy on delivery of maternity services. The overwhelming strength of successive Enquiry Reports has been the impact their findings have had on improving standards of care and clinical governance.

MDE Ireland's enquiry approach is based on a two-stage process of regional data collection and assessment of the case followed by central assessment to enable aggregation into a fully anonymised overall report. Until recently, the Centre for Maternal and Child Enquiries had the responsibility for providing the Maternal Death Enquiry in the UK. In April 2011, an expert group was established in the UK to determine the appropriate scope and plan for the future of the Maternal Death Enquiry. Until the review group has completed its work, all maternity units and other stakeholders throughout Ireland, in common with UK countries will continue to collect data in support of the Enquiry. The MDE Ireland office will continue to coordinate the process.

Proposed Legislation

181. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the human tissue Bill will be published. [29042/11]

182. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he has confidence that consent is sought from relatives prior to any tissue and-or organs being removed during post mortems; if there has been a recent audit on post mortem practices in hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29043/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 and 182 together.

A recommendation in Dr. Madden's report, published in December, 2005 was that "*An independent audit must be carried out of currently retained organs in all hospitals in the State*". In 2007, the Health Service Executive commissioned an independent audit in accordance with this recommendation. The terms of reference of the audit were:

1. To conduct an independent audit of currently retained organs in all hospitals in the State both pre and post 2000.
2. To assist the Health Service Executive to determine priority areas for action and inform the development of standards by identifying areas of good practice and highlighting areas for improvement.

The audit process involved validation visits to 36 hospitals and the report, published in July 2009 (The Willis Report), noted that consent was sought with regard to a hospital post mortem examination by doctors in all hospitals, supported by a multidisciplinary team in some cases. It is important to note that consent from the family of the deceased is not required if a post mortem examination is ordered by the Coroner. The report also provided a summary of policy and practice across all areas of post mortem examination practice, with examples of good practice and areas for priority focus.

The findings and recommendations of these key reports on post mortem practice and procedures have assisted the Health Service Executive and the National Post Mortem Examination Services Advisory Group in the development of the *HSE Standards and Recommended Practices for Post Mortem Examination Services*, which have been submitted through the HSE's Quality and Patient Safety Directorate and are awaiting ratification.

Departmental Records

183. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm that the files and information considered during the Dunne inquiry and Madden report are still in storage and will remain in storage for the foreseeable future. [29044/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I can confirm that the files/information considered during the Dunne inquiry and Madden report remain in secure storage and I have no plans to change this arrangement.

Question No. 184 answered with Question No. 175.

Mental Health Services

185. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the major lack of adequate child and adolescent psychiatric services in County Wicklow; the services that are currently in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29071/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter the question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services

186. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health his policy on palliative care; if he will provide details of the implementation plan for this policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29073/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The provision of modern, quality services is high on our agenda and is being approached in the context of overall health reforms as proposed in the Programme for Government. In this context, our immediate aim relates to advancing the priorities as agreed in the HSE Service Plan for 2011 which includes;

- Implementing the various Care at End-of-Life projects, agreed between the HSE and the Irish Hospice Foundation, via the Dignity and Design Challenge Fund.
- Progress the National Children's Palliative Care Policy.
- Develop a new Minimum Data for Palliative Care to give better information for future policies and services.

We also intend to progress various other initiatives, in line with overall resources and consultation with relevant stakeholders. These include progressing:

- The HSE Five Year/Medium Term Development Framework (2009-13).
- Bereavement Support Services
- The Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme
- On-going initiatives in relation to palliative care and advanced respiratory disease, heart failure and dementia.

The Department of Health will continue to liaise closely with the HSE, and relevant non-statutory providers, to ensure the best possible service provision for Palliative Care recipients.

187. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of a hospice for County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29074/11]

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.

188. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospices here; the location of these hospices and the level of support, financial and otherwise, that these hospices receive from him and the public health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29075/11]

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.

National Positive Ageing Strategy

189. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the National Positive Ageing Strategy (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29083/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Programme for Government published in March 2011 has committed to completing and implementing the National Positive Ageing Strategy so that older people are recognised, supported and enabled to live independent full lives. However important health and social care issues are in later life, quality of life in later life, as at any stage of the lifecycle, has many other determinants such as income, housing and the built environment, transport, education and lifelong learning, employment and retirement and opportunities for participation and contribution to social and civic life.

In recognition that a wide range of policies, programmes and services impact directly on the lives of older people, development of the Strategy is being assisted by a Cross-Departmental Group (CDG), comprised of officials from 11 Government Departments, the Central Statistics Office and An Garda Síochána, and is chaired by the Director of the Office for Older People. It is not the intention that the Strategy will propose new service developments, rather it will set the strategic direction for future policies, programmes and services for older people in Ireland.

The Strategy will set out a common framework for the development of operational plans by Government Departments. These operational plans will clearly set out each Department's objectives relating to older people. Mechanisms designed to monitor the implementation of measures contained in operational plans will also be developed in consultation with Departments. Work on developing the Strategy is on-going and taking place within the constraints posed by the present fiscal situation. This work will not be concluded before the end of the year.

Medical Cards

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry. [29084/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services

191. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will review an application

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in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29085/11]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Róisín Shortall): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 162.

193. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29089/11]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Questions Nos. 194 to 207, inclusive, answered with Question No. 162.

Question No. 208 answered with Question No. 175.

Road Traffic Offences

209. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason section 63 of the Road Traffic Act 2010 in relation to the presentation of licences in court has not come into effect; if he will confirm that more than 100,000 penalty points have not been applied to licences due to this loophole; if 96% of drivers who are before the courts due to traffic offences do not present their licence to the court; if this is the reason that so few drivers have reached 12 penalty points; if the resolution of this matter has taken so long due to the deficiencies in the information technology system of the Garda Síochána; if this loophole will be closed in October 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28904/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Road Traffic Act 2002, penalty points are endorsed on the Irish driving licence record held on the National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF). A current driving licence is required in order for penalty points to be served. At present, it is a requirement, under road traffic legislation, for a driver appearing in court in relation to a road traffic offence to provide his or her driving licence to the Court. Section 63 of the Road Traffic Act 2010 introduces a new requirement for a motorist to provide a copy of their driving licence to the Court, to speed up the logistical and administrative recording of the licence details. I expect to commence section 63 at the end of November.

Road Network

210. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the revenue and the profit raised from the west link toll bridge for the past three years for which figures are available. [28942/11]

211. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of fines for each category of vehicle on the west link toll bridge. [28943/11]

212. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the revenue obtained from fines for the west link toll bridge for the past three years for which figures are available. [28944/11]

213. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the use made of the profits from the west link toll bridge. [28945/11]

214. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way vehicles not registered in the Republic of Ireland, particularly UK registered vehicles, are tracked for the purpose of barrier-free tolling and the imposition of fines when necessary. [28946/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 210 to 214, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The implementation of individual national road projects, including the M50 Toll Road, is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2007. In particular, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll by-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors in respect of national roads is vested in the National Roads Authority (NRA) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007).

The NRA has primary responsibility for the operation of the barrier-free toll on the M50, and the tolling revenue generated accrues directly to the NRA and is reinvested by them in the national roads network. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NRA for direct response. Please advise my private office if there is no reply within ten working days.

Road Safety

215. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the research taken to support the proposed regulation making the wearing of high visibility clothing compulsory for motorcyclists; if he will consult with motorcyclists, the motorcycle industry and other interested parties before the introduction of any such measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29007/11]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): EU Regulations regarding motorcycle standards are under discussion in the EU at present. The Road Safety Authority (RSA) represents my Department at these discussions and I am informed that the proposals relate only to vehicle standards, not to the vehicle's use or the driver, and specify the standards to be applied to new motorcycles. The proposals present a legal framework for the type approval and increased market surveillance of mopeds, motorcycles and quads, which will replace and simplify the existing Framework Directive 2002/24/EC.

Contrary to suggestions that have been made by various parties, the proposed Regulations do not include provisions for mandatory wearing of high visibility clothing by motorcyclists, banning older motorcycles from urban areas or changes to driver licensing. The proposed Regulations are designed to improve the safety of those who belong to a vulnerable road user group and who account, proportionately, for the highest fatality and injury rates among all road users.

The main elements of the proposed Regulations relate to mandatory anti-lock braking system, prevention of tampering with the powertrain and automatic use of headlamp on. The Regulations are also designed to reduce vehicle emissions for these types of vehicles, which, statistics show, currently are not reducing in line with other road vehicles such as cars, buses and goods vehicles.

The Road Safety Authority has recently published an information note on the proposals on their website, and they are inviting feedback from stakeholders and the general public before

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29th October, 2011. The RSA's Motorcycle Safety Action Plan has an action for the compulsory wearing of high visibility vests by 2014.

This initiative is based upon research into road traffic collisions involving motorcyclists. Observation studies conducted by the Road Safety Authority have in the past reported already high visibility clothing wearing rates of approximately 40% by motorcyclists in Ireland and it may be higher now. The RSA are carrying out a follow up study which is due to commence this month. The RSA will have analysed the data and will release the findings by the end of the year.

In the event that there are high wearing rates by 2014, the Road Safety Authority will then re-evaluate the need for compulsory wearing of high-visibility vests. However if there is a need to make a high visibility vest compulsory, the Road Safety Authority will not make a decision on the type of high visibility vests without consulting with motorcyclists and the industry. It is the intention of the RSA to encourage the use of high visibility vests by offering them free of charge to motorcyclists.