



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# OFFICIAL REPORT

(Hansard)

## Volume 5

(5 June 2000 to 1 September 2000)

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# **Volume 5**

(5 June 2000 to 1 September 2000)



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## ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

(A = Alliance Party; NIWC = Northern Ireland Women's Coalition; PUP = Progressive Unionist Party; SDLP = Social Democratic and Labour Party; SF = Sinn Féin; DUP = Ulster Democratic Unionist Party; UKUP = United Kingdom Unionist Party; UUP = Ulster Unionist Party; UUAP = United Unionist Assembly Party; NIUP = Northern Ireland Unionist Party)

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Armstrong, Billy (UUP) (Mid Ulster)  
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Hutchinson, Billy (PUP) (North Belfast)  
Hutchinson, Roger (Independent Unionist) (East Antrim)  
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Robinson, Mark (DUP) (South Belfast)  
Robinson, Peter (DUP) (East Belfast)  
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Savage, George (UUP) (Upper Bann)  
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Tierney, John (SDLP) (Foyle)  
Trimble, Rt Hon David (UUP) (Upper Bann)  
Watson, Denis (UUAP) (Upper Bann)  
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Wells, Jim (DUP) (South Down)  
Wilson, Cedric (NIUP) (Strangford)  
Wilson, Jim (UUP) (South Antrim)  
Wilson, Sammy (DUP) (East Belfast)

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## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE ASSEMBLY

<i>First Minister</i>	Rt Hon David Trimble MP
<i>Deputy First Minister</i>	Séamus Mallon MP
<i>Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development</i>	Ms Brid Rodgers
<i>Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure</i>	Michael McGimpsey
<i>Minister of Education</i>	Martin McGuinness MP
<i>Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Development</i>	Sir Reg Empey
<i>Minister of the Environment</i>	Sam Foster
<i>Minister of Finance and Personnel</i>	Mark Durkin
<i>Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety</i>	Ms Bairbre de Brún
<i>Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment</i>	Dr Seán Farren
<i>Minister for Regional Development</i>	Peter Robinson MP
<i>Minister for Social Development</i>	Nigel Dodds

## JUNIOR MINISTERS OF THE ASSEMBLY

<i>Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister</i>	Denis Haughey Dermot Nesbitt
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## PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS OF THE ASSEMBLY

<i>Speaker</i>	The Lord Alderdice
<i>Deputy Speakers</i>	Sir John Gorman Donovan McClelland Ms Jane Morrice
<i>Office of the Speaker</i> <i>Private Secretary</i> <i>Special Adviser</i> <i>Counsel</i>	Ms Georgina Campbell Niall Johnston Nicolas Hanna QC
<i>Clerk to the Assembly Commission and the House Committee</i>	Tom Evans
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<i>Clerk of Bills</i>	Alan Patterson
<i>Clerk of Business</i>	Joe Reynolds
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<i>Head of Research</i>	Dr Stephen Donnelly
<i>Head of Information and Events</i>	Ms Gail McKibbin
<i>Principal Doorkeeper</i>	Kieran Mullan

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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 5 June 2000

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## ISLE OF MAN TT RACES

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I am sure that Members will wish to offer their condolences to the family of Raymond Hanna, who was killed in a race practice on the Isle of Man.

They will also, I am sure, want to congratulate Joey Dunlop on his twenty-fourth TT victory. He has definitely been crowned king of the road.

**Hon Members:** Hear, hear.

## PROCEDURES FOR MAIN ESTIMATES AND APPROPRIATION ACT

### **The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):**

I wish, with permission, to make a statement on the process for examining the Main Estimates for the services provided by the Northern Ireland Departments for the current financial year and the reflection of these Estimates in an Appropriation Act. The approval of the Estimates and the passing of an Appropriation Act are among the most important responsibilities of the Assembly.

Members will recall that on 15 December 1999 I presented the Executive's budget proposals for the financial year commencing 1 April 2000 to the Assembly. The intention, clearly expressed, was that the Assembly and the departmental Committees would have the fullest possible opportunity to scrutinise those spending proposals. Following that scrutiny the budget would be reviewed by the Executive before being placed before the Assembly for approval. The approved budget allocations are the basis on which Departments draw up their detailed spending estimates for the year and these require separate approval by the Assembly.

Suspension meant that the process of scrutinising the budget proposals through the Assembly could not be

completed before the beginning of the financial year. However, during suspension the Secretary of State confirmed the allocations for the Northern Ireland Departments in line with the Executive's December budget proposals. These allocations were further increased for health and education spending as a result of additional resources received in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget on 21 March.

Although it is not feasible for the Assembly to resume the scrutiny of the budget, which was interrupted in February, there is still the opportunity for substantive consideration of spending proposals for this financial year through the process of approving the Main Estimates. Members will appreciate that approval of the main spending Estimates for Departments and the voting of money through an Appropriation Act are matters of the utmost importance. They are the essence of responsible government.

As a result of suspension the Assembly was unable to deal with the spring Supplementary Estimates for 1999-2001 and the vote on account for 2000-01. These were approved by Parliament in March.

Taking a vote on account in advance of the incoming financial year is normal practice to allow the continuation of public services until the Estimates are approved in the summer. For most services a uniform 45% of the anticipated expenditure for 2000-01 was approved to provide Departments with the legal authority to continue to incur expenditure on previously approved services for several months into the new financial year.

The vote on account is only to provide interim financing for services. In most instances this funding will be exhausted before the end of the summer recess. Unless the Assembly approves the balance of the funds for 2000-01 before then, Northern Ireland Departments will be unable to incur any further expenditure on services.

There is a limited amount of time available to us to consider and approve the Estimates and deal with the Appropriation Bill before the start of the summer recess, and I have taken that into account in what I am now proposing.

There are two main elements in the procedure for approving Estimates, one of which is the consideration of a Supply resolution by the Assembly. That would seek the Assembly's approval for the total amount of the balance required for the 2000-01 Estimates. In effect the Assembly would be being asked to approve the spending plans as set out in the Estimates booklet.

I will be tabling such a resolution for debate next week, approval of which will require cross-community support. The 2000-01 main Estimates were published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

However, in order to give the greatest opportunity for consideration of this document, advance copies were given to Members last week.

As well as the Supply resolution, the Assembly has to consider an Appropriation Bill to confirm Departments' legal authority to incur expenditure. The Appropriation Bill is an important piece of financial legislation, the drafting of which must reflect the Supply resolution approved by the Assembly. A schedule to the Bill confirms the amounts approved for the services of each Department as set out in the Estimates. Only when this Bill has completed all its stages and received royal assent will the additional cash be available for services. I should add that Appropriation Acts are not permanent statutes but are repealed after the period they cover has expired.

The full procedure for the Assembly's consideration of legislation as set out in Standing Orders cannot be completed between now and the start of the summer recess. However, Standing Orders also provide for Bills to be taken by an accelerated passage procedure in exceptional circumstances. The need for urgent approval of the Estimates and the passing of an Appropriation Bill is very clearly exceptional in current circumstances.

I am therefore seeking leave to use the accelerated passage procedure for the Appropriation 2000 Bill, which is being introduced. The timetable I am proposing for the entire process, following the introduction and First Stage of the Bill today, is for the Supply resolution to be debated on Monday 12 June when the resolution will also be put to the vote. Also on the 12 June, immediately following that vote on the Supply resolution, the Second Stage of the Appropriation Bill will be taken. That will be followed on 19 June by the Consideration Stage of the Bill, and on 27 June by the Final Stage. Even though accelerated passage means that there will not be a formal Committee Stage, I have discussed the matter with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee, and my Department will give every assistance to the Committee if it wishes to examine the Estimates and the Bill within this timetable.

I accept that what I am proposing is not ideal. However, it allows the maximum opportunity both for consideration of the estimates for 2000-01 during the next month and for the passage of an Appropriation Act by a process allowed for in Standing Orders. The Assembly could attempt to take the Appropriation Bill by the normal procedure, but that would require special sittings during the summer recess. There would also have to be a Committee Stage, but that could not run for the full 30 days required by Standing Orders if the Bill is to be completed before the vote on account expires. I believe that the use of accelerated passage is acceptable in these circumstances.

I hope that I will not have to seek the Assembly's leave for accelerated passage for future Appropriation Bills. Generally, legislatures design special procedures specifically for routine financial business. It has not yet been possible for the Assembly to do this. I hope that we will do so as soon as possible, so that suitable procedures are in place the next time we consider Estimates and Appropriation. That could be as early as the autumn, depending on the requirement for any Supplementary Estimates in this financial year.

My Department and I stand ready to provide whatever assistance the Assembly may find helpful in identifying and evaluating the possible options. In the meantime we must make the best use of the procedures available to us. That is what I aim to do.

**Mr Speaker:** Members have up to 30 minutes for questions on that statement.

**Mr Close:** The Minister emphasised the importance of the Appropriation Bill. Members will share that sentiment. The essence of government is the getting and spending of money and the choosing of priorities. However, the Minister went on to say that the proper procedures could not be fulfilled. Does he consider the importance of the Bill to be outweighed by the prospect of eating into the summer recess? We have had three months imposed holiday. Is it not important to give more credibility to ourselves and to this House by giving up some of the recess in order to do our job properly?

**Mr Durkan:** I take the hon Member's point. I stressed the importance of the Appropriation Bill. The recess has been set by others acting quite properly on behalf of the Assembly. It is not for me to presume to change it. I have come before the Assembly to make it clear that if we are to be able to continue spending through the latter part of the recess we need to get the Appropriation Bill approved now. Even if we were to take this matter into the recess we still would not have sufficient time for a full Committee Stage and have enough money to spend. The options for the Assembly are clear.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I agree with Mr Close. This is very important. I understand what the Minister is saying about the time factor. Will he tell us how much Assembly time next week has been set aside for the matters for which he is responsible?

I wish to raise a further, important question. We have been delighted to hear the good news from Short's and from the shipyard. There is still a big question mark over the shipyard. Perhaps the Minister could resolve newspaper speculation. Will he allay our worries about the shipyard? He knows that an Appropriation Order can travel "from Dan to Beer-sheba" — I am only travelling to East Belfast to ask him if he can allay our worries.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member's first question was on timing. That is a matter for the Business Committee, not for the Minister. I can reassure the Member that the Business Committee is seized of the importance of the Assembly's having a substantial amount of time to address this matter. When it meets tomorrow the Committee will undoubtedly consider that. I expect substantial time to be set aside. This statement is entirely on the process of appropriation. The Member may wish to ask his question again after the Minister has made his next statement on the Estimates themselves. He may be able to respond then. It would not be in order to respond to that question at this point because we are dealing now with the process, not the content, of appropriation.

10.45 am

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I have to abide by your ruling, Mr Speaker, but I do not agree with it. Appropriation is a very wide matter. In the House of Commons there is always liberty given on these matters, but this House —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am afraid that the Member misunderstands the process being followed at present. This is not the Appropriation debate, which is the kind of debate to which he refers, nor is it a statement on the Estimates, where it would also be appropriate. That is the next statement the Minister will be making. This is a statement purely on the process of Appropriation and the question of possible accelerated passage. However, I have no doubt the Member will wish to ask his question again after the next statement.

**Mr Molloy:** I am pleased that the Assembly will have some opportunity to discuss the Appropriation Bill. It is a vital piece of legislation. As Members will be aware, the Finance and Personnel Committee would normally be handling the Committee Stage of the Bill. However, on this occasion we accept that is not possible because of the time factor. It is important that we look to the future and that we have an opportunity at different stages for the Committee to deal with the issues in question.

The Committee is happy at this stage for the Appropriation Bill to be passed. That is essential so that the Departments are not left short of funds. The Finance and Personnel Committee must also be able to co-ordinate with other Committees to ensure that their concerns can be put before the Assembly.

**Mr Durkan:** I welcome the points made by the Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee. It is simply not possible to pass important legislation of this sort in the time necessary, using the normal procedure. I accept that this is not satisfactory for the Assembly, the Committee or the Executive Committee. However, these are exceptional circumstances, and I remind Colleagues that Standing Orders provide for accelerated passage in precisely such circumstances.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Can the Minister confirm that even if we proceed with the proposals he has outlined, the figures in the Estimates are fixed in stone? Can they be adjusted? For example, I am not convinced that the money set aside for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is sufficient to deal with the problems with which the agriculture sector is currently beset.

**Mr Durkan:** The budget allocations were effectively made during suspension. That followed the budget proposals as set out by myself in the Assembly in December. To that extent, it would be impractical to re-open the budget at this stage. However, the debate on the Estimates will give Members such as Mr Paisley Jnr a full opportunity to examine the budget allocations in each Department. If his question implies that there could be a further vote on account, to allow time for further consideration, that in itself would require a new Appropriation Act. It would not ease any of the problems I have identified.



## **MAIN ESTIMATES (2000-01), SUPPLY RESOLUTION AND APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Mr Durkan:** I wish to make a statement on the Main Estimates for the financial year 2000-01 and the Supply resolution that is being tabled, and which the Assembly will be asked to debate next week. I also wish to comment on the substance of the Appropriation Bill that I hope to introduce today.

It is highly appropriate, on our first day of business following the restoration of devolution, to have an opportunity to review the full range of public services for which we are now responsible. As I emphasised in December, the management of public spending is one of the fundamental responsibilities of any Government.

The restoration of devolution again gives us the opportunity to assume our full and appropriate responsibilities — to move from championing a few issues to deciding among all the issues, and from opposing to leading. We have an opportunity to work together in a unique form of administration, pursuing quality and equality in the management of public services for the good of all the people. The Main Estimates and the Appropriation Bill are at the heart of our responsibilities. Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and in line with principles that apply in both London and Dublin, it is my responsibility on behalf of and with the agreement of the Executive Committee to seek the Assembly's authority for spending on public services. These formal processes very strongly emphasise the Assembly's role in protecting the interests of the public and ensuring that money is spent well.

I have been working, and will continue to work, with the Finance and Personnel Committee on the process of planning public spending. Members can, and will, hold Departments to account for the money they approve in this process through the Public Accounts Committee. The Main Estimates document provides the reference point and detailed analysis of the spending plans of Departments for this purpose.

It may help if I set out briefly the main financial planning and control processes, which are now our responsibility under devolution. That is the context in which these financial issues should be considered. The key planning process is, of course, the formulation and approval of a programme for government, linked to a budget, which sets out the total expenditure which each Department or programme expects to incur over one or more years ahead.

In normal circumstances the Executive's proposals for the programme for government and the budget would have been considered by the Assembly and

settled before December. However, Members will recall that the start of devolution late last year meant that the budget proposals for this financial year were only put before the Assembly on 15 December, and it was not possible to complete the scrutiny of the budget before the process was interrupted by suspension. During suspension the Executive's budget proposals were confirmed at Westminster. The Secretary of State supplemented them by additional allocations for spending on the health and education programmes from new money provided by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his March Budget.

The approved budget is the basis on which Departments plan expenditure. However, separate authority to spend money on specific services in a financial year must be sought from the Assembly through the process of Supply. The Supply process involves a number of distinct steps, each of which is important. In the first instance, the Executive must inform the Assembly of the amounts it seeks for specific services. That is the purpose of the Estimates booklet published today and made available to Members. Copies have also been placed in the Library. An advance copy was made available to Members on Friday. As Members will see, the Estimates are quite detailed requests for cash for specific services. They show the estimated amount that can be drawn from the consolidated fund to support each service this year. In some instances receipts will arise in an area of expenditure, and the estimate will show how much of these receipts can be set against spending to reduce the need to vote new funds.

The next stage is that the Assembly should be afforded the opportunity to scrutinise and approve the Main Estimates as published. The means by which that opportunity is provided is the Supply resolution that the Assembly will be asked to debate next week.

In order to give statutory authority to the moneys voted for services, and to ensure that funds provided to the Executive for one purpose are not used for other purposes, the sums voted are legally appropriated to the specific services and the authority to draw money to meet these expenditures will be confirmed in an Appropriation Act.

Members will recognise from this brief description that the Estimates and the Appropriation Act are central to the Assembly's control over the use of public funds. The appropriation accounts, which will be produced after expenditure has been incurred, will be produced on a corresponding basis to the Estimates. This will enable the Assembly to compare actual expenditure with the Estimates that it approved and to have an explanation of any significant differences.

I emphasise that the form of the Estimates is a matter to be agreed between the Executive Committee and the

Assembly. For the moment I am content to proceed on the basis of the well established practice of presenting Estimates for the cash amounts needed to finance services.

Looking to the future, the Assembly should be aware that work is well advanced on moving the planning and control of government expenditure to a resource accounting and budgeting basis. This would bring the treatment of the Government's finances into line with commercial practices. It would also allow a better appreciation of the full resource cost of pursuing each of the objectives in Departments and hence help to improve decision taking. This shift in accounting and budgeting practice would have to be reflected in changes in the form of the Estimates. I look forward to discussing these matters with the Finance and Personnel Committee and the Assembly in due course.

The figures in the Estimates booklet are testimony to the importance of the business we are dealing with today. For the health sector, we are seeking to spend almost £2 billion this year to sustain hospitals and pay the doctors and nurses who provide health care for everyone. In the education programme, the £1.2 billion we are seeking will fund over 1,300 schools and pay for 20,000 teachers to educate more than 350,000 schoolchildren.

The same holds across the total range of public services. Roads and public transport, support for industry and our farming community, support for the housing programme and the many other important services and programmes across all Departments depend on the money the Assembly is being asked to approve in the Estimates and in the Appropriation Bill.

I hope that the Assembly has found this brief description of these important financial instruments helpful. There will be a full opportunity to examine matters in detail in the debate next week, but I will endeavour to respond to any general queries on the Estimates which Members may have.

**Mr Speaker:** Members have up to an hour for questions to the Minister.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I misunderstood what was happening today. Had I heard about a second statement I would have reserved my remarks for that. If I offended you in any way, Mr Speaker, I apologise. As you have indicated, I can raise that matter now.

People were thrilled to know of the situation in the aircraft industry and delighted to know that the union between the Canadian company and Short's has been so fruitful. I am sure we all wish them well. We were also delighted about the shipyard news, though what was announced was different from what happened with the investment from Canada in Short's

There have been some alarming newspaper accounts about a big question mark hanging over the company concerned. It is dealing with large luxury vessels of immense price, yet it can only find an office in a red-brick villa in a street somewhere in Luton. It could not be contacted by phone, and people who ought to know seem to have no knowledge of it.

I do not know what truth there is in those rumours. However, I would like the Minister to set our minds at ease. Some of my constituents say that their jobs must now be in greater jeopardy than ever.

11.00 am

**Mr Durkan:** The hon Member is correct in referring to the great sense of encouragement everyone felt when they heard the news about Short Brothers plc and Harland and Wolff Shipbuilding and Heavy Industries Ltd. Some of the questions asked recently about these firms are connected with the issue of the Estimates. However, there are particular matters on which the Minister of Trade, Enterprise and Investment is working, and I am aware that the IDB is working closely with Short's and Harland and Wolff to maximise the prospects that were apparent for both companies. It would be inappropriate for me to talk up any other difficulties or to speak out of turn about a matter which is the responsibility of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

**Mr Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. I am seeking guidance from the Minister or from you, a Chathaoirligh, because, as has been said, the suspension made it impossible to deal with these Estimates in the normal way. I am reminded of the recent announcement about the IDB's essential failure despite its substantial budget. I am concerned, even from my own constituency perspective, that if the money spent by IDB had been allocated in a better or different way there might be a far better record — or even a record — of job creation in quite a number of constituencies. Mr Durkan and you, Mr Speaker, have touched on a matter specific to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: when will we have an opportunity to discuss that Department's estimates in detail? How was that money spent, and how might it be spent better in the future?

**Mr Durkan:** In my statement, I outlined the different stages that I propose would be used for the Appropriation Bill and the Supply resolution. I indicated that, next week, the debate would be much more comprehensive and detailed. Members will be able to pursue aspects of the Estimates that are of interest or concern to them.

I take it that the Member was referring in particular to the recent report of the Public Accounts Committee. The IDB is preparing a formal Department of Finance

and Personnel memorandum of reply to the Public Accounts Committee, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the report until that document has been provided. That is established practice.

**Mr Leslie:** I thank the Minister for his statements and for his efforts to brief the Department of Finance and Personnel Committee on these matters. We realise that we have an inherited programme and, therefore, inherited costs. At this stage there is little opportunity to tweak them. However, we will have an opportunity to tweak them with the preparation of a programme of government which, the Minister has indicated, will be completed before December.

It is essential to remember that when we move into the next set of Estimates the debate will, to a large extent, have taken place before it comes to the House. The allocations will have been horse-traded before that point is reached. Can the Minister advise us on the timetable he sees being pursued in order to have that debate carried out. Also, what role does he see for himself, as the person holding the ring in many of those negotiations?

**Mr Durkan:** As Mr Leslie is aware from previous discussions we have had with the Finance and Personnel Committee, we want to improve the planning process in relation to public expenditure, and we want to make sure that the Committee and the Assembly have far more foresight in relation to these issues than the procedures that we have had to follow on this occasion have allowed. As I indicated in my statement, I believe that the shift to resource accounting and budgeting will help afford us greater opportunities in that regard in terms of the quality of information available and the sense of direction people will be able to give through the different sort of procedures we have been talking about. Clearly it is not a matter for me as Minister of Finance and Personnel to ordain precise procedures. We genuinely want to discuss and develop these with the Committee and with the Assembly. I previously had some discussion with yourself, Mr Speaker, on exactly how we could improve these procedures in everybody's interests, but not least in the interests of the Assembly being able to have a significant and helpful say, in terms of both scrutiny and proper planning of expenditure.

**Mr Close:** The Minister refers to the key planning process of government as being the formulation of a programme of government. I totally agree. Does he agree that we are indulging in what is, to a large extent, a cosmetic exercise? The cart has been put before the horse. In effect we are following, rather slavishly, certain attitudes. We are seeking to impose a form of government which is being brought about by a totally unaccountable regime. If we are to fulfil people's dreams and achieve a new beginning, we have got to change — fundamentally change — the direction in

which government has been going and the way in which it has been applied to the people of Northern Ireland.

Very recently, for example, we all received a press release from the Housing Executive. This year the Housing Executive is faced with a budget reduction of about £13·7 million compared to last year. We know, for example, that 40,000 dwellings are unfit for human habitation, yet, by following slavishly a programme drawn up by unaccountable administrators, we are going to be approving these types of figures. Until we get a programme of government — one which has to be fundamentally different to that which applied before — we, if we are truly going to be doing the job for which we were elected, have got to move in a totally different direction. If we do not, we will be failing the people, failing to give them new opportunities and new hopes and failing to fulfil their aspirations.

Today, many parents will have had dropping through their letter boxes —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I must remind Members that this is meant to be an opportunity to pose questions, not to make speeches.

**Mr Close:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

My question is about the letters to young people who are hoping to go to university this October. They are being told that their circumstances will have to be assessed. Forms will be sent out on which they will have to give details of income. I am sure that the Minister will agree that that is not right. We must restore student grants and get away from the fact that the ability to pay is some sort of gauge as to whether students can afford to go to university. Does the Minister agree that there are many areas like this where direction must be changed through a new programme of government?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I must invite the Minister to respond to the question or questions.

**A Member:** Which question?

**Mr Durkan:** I was going to ask the same thing.

The hon Member, in his opening remarks, described today's exercise, and, I assume, the exercise that I have talked about for the coming weeks, as cosmetic. It is not a cosmetic exercise; it is a vital legal requirement. If we were not to go through such a process we would not have the money to continue to discharge the vital public services that we have been talking about.

When I originally brought the budget proposals to the House on 15 December I did not pretend that we were working on any basis other than that of the allocations previously laid down by the Labour Government in the comprehensive spending review. We have been upfront and open about it. It was agreed by each Member of the Executive Committee, and we put proposals to the



House on that basis. It was the only way we could conduct business in the absence of the programme of government, which we are seeking to develop.

Some aspects of the points raised are for relevant departmental Ministers. However, the gross resources available for housing under these Estimates could be around £602 million — hardly cosmetic, and not to be dismissed. Within that total, the Housing Executive's gross resources will be £528 million, and £71 million of that will be for housing associations, whose funding will be supplemented by an additional £49million from private finance. I note the point made in relation to the Housing Executive press release. However, I would make the point relating to the total Estimates provision for the housing programme.

In relation to the issues of young students hoping to go into further and higher education, the Member is aware that my colleague the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment has initiated a review of student financial support and we await his report.

**Mr Speaker:** Members may be having difficulty hearing what is going on in the Chamber. I encourage all Members to put their questions and make their remarks as clearly as possible. We are looking into the technical side of things to see if improvements can be made.

**Ms Morrice:** I will be as clear as possible.

I would like to raise the issue of European funding because there is much concern that money under the European programme — Peace I — may be exhausted at the end of June. Hundreds of jobs could be lost, particularly in the community sectors — valuable sectors — because Peace II, the second European peace programme, will not be coming on stream for some months. I note that the Department of Finance and Personnel has the authority to borrow on the credit of the sums. What does the Minister intend to do to ensure that the gap between Peace I and Peace II is bridged, possibly by borrowing? Can he ensure that jobs will not be lost as a result? *[Interruption]*

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** A mobile phone is ringing.

**Mr Speaker:** It was in the Gallery, and the owner has left.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for her question. The development of the new structural funds programmes — an important development — is a lengthy process and involves negotiation and agreement of a community support framework, the operational programmes and the programming complements. We are pressing ahead with negotiations with the European Commission with all speed, partly to ensure that the gap between the old and new programmes is minimised. All

the funding bodies in the existing programmes were fully aware of the need for sustainability and to have suitable exit strategies in place. However, I recognise that some existing projects, particularly those under the single programme, will have difficulty in sustaining their activities and interim funding arrangements have been introduced by Departments, in particular the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment. There does not appear to be the same need under Peace I, particularly when £160 million of the total programme allocation remains to be spent before 31 December 2001.

11.15 am

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** Would the Minister agree with me that when exercising government, meeting demands for additions to some budgets means, because of the block allocation of finance, reductions to other budgets? It is easy to make demands, but it is not so easy to fill the hole.

I note that the allocation in the Estimates for local government services shows an increase that is below the rate of inflation. Local government elections will be held next year. Can the Minister assure us that sufficient finances have been allocated to ensure that local democracy will go ahead unhindered?

The Environment Committee has identified a very serious lack of education officers for road safety. Will the Estimates that the Minister has put before the House today assist in the employing of such officers as a matter of urgency?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his very helpful and responsible observation about how easy it is to propose spending as opposed to resourcing. I am sure that that point will be used repeatedly by my Department and me in reply to him and others.

In answer to his second question, I refer him to his initial remarks.

Most of the matters that Mr McCrea raised are the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. On some of the issues of local government funding, the Department has been working closely on options with a representative group of council chief executives and finance officers. They have been reviewing the formula for the distribution of the resources element of the general exchequer grant to district councils. That review is being progressed as a matter of urgency, and I hope a new formula can emerge. That would, however, require the amendment of primary legislation, and that would entail full consultation with district councils and the Assembly. Expenditure on road safety is a matter for the Minister and the Department to determine.

**Mr Fee:** I think that the Minister will agree that the accelerated passage of the Estimates is not the most

ideal way in which to deal with them, but will he agree with me that this book of Estimates is in itself a statement of the enormous advances that we have made over the last number of years and months? It is a detailed account of a programme of government which we will be pursuing for the next 12 months, and it is a tribute to the civil servants and officials who have reorganised government in Northern Ireland into the new Departments. It is also a tribute to his own Department. Will he accept that I will not be so kind to him next week?

**Mr Durkan:** I am surprised that he has been so kind to me even today, so I certainly have no expectations for next week.

I would like to take up the point about the production of the Estimates themselves. I did say that we issued advance copies of the Estimates last week. Clearly things have moved quickly. Estimates do not just reflect the allocations as outlined in my statement here on 15 December; they also include the further Estimates that have resulted from the Chancellor's budget allocation, the allocations to health and education that were made by the Secretary of State and confirmed by the Executive Committee only last Thursday. Estimates are absolutely up to date, and it is a tribute to the various civil servants involved that we have completed so much. It is certainly not their fault that we are caught in circumstances, not of our own making, that mean that we cannot subject the Appropriation Bill to the length of stages that would ordinarily be available to us under Standing Orders.

Once again, I emphasise the importance of ensuring that we get as much certainty and clarity about this as about all the other matters on which people have said we need certainty and clarity. It is not in anyone's interests to conduct Assembly business in ways that lead people to worry that the money needed to continue to fund public services could run out before the end of the summer recess. That is why we need the accelerated passage — to ensure that the money is available and that everyone's efforts and concentration can be directed towards managing the money properly, rather than worrying about whether it is available.

**Mr S Wilson:** First, I wish to thank the Minister for saying that he will give us some clarity and certainty in the answers that he provides to the House. I hope that will be clearer than the clarity given to some members of the Ulster Unionist Party and that it will not take the form of secret letters. With regard to allocations, I understand that the process is not satisfactory and all Members will agree. However, because of the interim arrangements, it is probably something we have to live with.

The figures are based on the outcome of the comprehensive spending review and, as some Members

have indicated, there are questions as to how satisfactory that has been in ensuring the allocation of moneys to particular issues. After we adopt the Appropriation, I am unclear as to whether there will be an opportunity during the year for reallocation, not only within Departments but between Departments, if it is thought that there will be an underspend of budget allocations at some stage. We have already seen the problems with the Housing Executive, and with other areas, and we will need to look at these. I understand the opportunity cost of doing this. However, will there be an opportunity to look again at reallocating between Departments?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his question. A series of monitoring rounds conducted during the year help to identify programmes under particular pressure because of greater demand than expected and identify easement in terms of anticipated spend. Clearly, one of the reasons for the monitoring round is to ensure the identification of available resources in-year and to properly and strategically redirect them, at that time, to areas where they are needed. Members will recall the exercise that took place after the December monitoring round when further moneys were made available to various programmes and Departments. In particular, extra money was allocated to the Department of Health to deal with apparent winter pressures. It is for this type of circumstance that the in-year monitoring round exists. I intend to work with Departments to try to make the most of those opportunities, and I am sure that Departments will work with their Committees in that regard. I have had discussion with the Finance and Personnel Committee to ensure that they have earlier sight of, and a better insight into, some of the issues involved in the monitoring round.

I accept what people have said about this process. By and large, it is better if people feel that they are not finding out everything about public spending by looking in the rear-view mirror, but that they can see these things coming up ahead and can get information from the dashboard. That is part of what we are trying to do and improve.

**Mr O'Connor:** When the Chancellor allocated an extra £3 billion in his budget statement, only £86 million came to Northern Ireland for additional public spending. Proportionately Northern Ireland should have received about £140 million. Does the Minister agree that we lost out because no Minister or Executive was in place at that time?

Can the Minister assure us that when additional funding is made available from Westminster we shall not be sold short again?

**Mr Durkan:** The issue raised is much bigger than the question implies. That does not mean, however, that I shall give a much bigger answer at this point. The

question clearly raises issues that touch upon the Barnett formula, and precisely how Northern Ireland gets its share of the money identified and allocated at UK level. Obviously, it is an issue which not just my Department and the Committee on Finance and Personnel wish to examine and work on. It is being considered by the Executive Committee itself, since we are in a further Treasury spending review due to end in a matter of weeks. That spending review will determine the levels, forms and patterns of public expenditure throughout the United Kingdom up to 2003-04. The issues raised by the Member are therefore certainly on everyone's minds.

However, I stress that the money from the Chancellor's Budget was very welcome. Last week the Executive confirmed the Secretary of State's allocation of over £14 million to the schools programme and £53 million to health. There will be further decisions on the allocation of a further £18 million soon, along with moneys available from last year's end-of-year flexibility exercise of the spending round. We shall shortly allocate that pool of money.

**Mr Shannon:** I wish to raise a point about the Estimates in the Appropriation Bill specific to the Minister. He said that £1.2 billion would be spent on education. Can he confirm that the £7.1 million made from the sale of the former Scrabo High School will be included in that money? Can he also confirm that all moneys received from that sale will be used for education provision in the Strangford constituency?

**Mr Durkan:** Unfortunately I cannot give the Member the confirmation he seeks regarding the latter point. I cannot pledge, or promise, that money allocated to, or released in, the overall programme, whether at the Department of Education or at any other Department, will be spent in a particular constituency. I simply cannot start to deal with questions about different Departments' programmes in that fashion — it would be inappropriate. That may be disappointing to the Member, but it is the honest answer.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** The Minister has said the role of the Assembly is to protect the public interest and ensure that money is spent well. Therefore it is incumbent on Members to ensure this is the case. Is the Minister convinced that sufficient resources are available to combat social security fraud in Northern Ireland? There is a strong perception that one area of social security fraud — namely, motability fraud — is causing great public concern, and it appears not to be beneath some people in this Chamber to rip off the most needy in our society.

**Mr Durkan:** Again, the Member has raised a matter that is the particular responsibility of a ministerial colleague—in this case, the Minister for Social Development. Clearly, I want all programmes operated with total probity, effectiveness and value for money.

Public expenditure has many areas, and it is distributed in a variety of forms. All sorts of questions might be raised or impressions given concerning the degree of abuse with regard to different public moneys.

We want to see proper and appropriate use of all public moneys. Where any Minister or Department comes forward with analysis that identifies levels of abuse that they wish to tackle, my Department would want to work with them positively on that basis.

11.30 am

**Mr Ford:** I noted with interest the exchange between the Minister and Mr McCrea on the limitations of the budget being considered. Can the Minister confirm that my Colleague, Mr Close has been consistent in his attitude to the need for tax-varying powers in order to provide the essential services for the people of Northern Ireland? Will the Minister also acknowledge that he and his Department have accepted that principle by their own proposal to increase the regional rate by 8% this year, thereby dealing with the potential arguments about block grant being reduced because of taxes being added here? Perhaps he could also tell us if he is just as keen as the DUP on the consequences of his policy leading to, for example, a £13.7 million reduction for the Housing Executive this year.

**Mr Durkan:** I accept the point in the Member's question about the consistency of his party Colleague in terms of seeking tax-varying powers. I would ask people, before they think that is going to be the panacea for everything, to remember, whether we have tax-varying powers or not, that we are still going to have finite resources to allocate. Even with the additional moneys that might result from tax-raising powers, we are going to have to take priority-based decisions on their allocation and on their management. We need to consider carefully the experience of other places with tax-varying powers. I have warned previously about the risks of us experiencing a concept of subtractionality in our dealings with the Treasury in that regard, as opposed to some of the questionable experiences of additionality we have had in the past in relation to some moneys.

With regard to the housing money, I stress, yet again, we should not forget the money that is going in to the housing programme. Yes, it is a housing programme which, by its nature, has actually been changing. Like all other programmes, it will have to be examined and assessed in the context of the development of the programme of government. I want to see that all these programmes that are of concern and interest to Members — because they do perform vital services for people throughout the community — are given proper and adequate consideration and, in turn receive the proper and adequate funding. As Members of the Assembly, we are all here to satisfy ourselves on that



matter. I will work with the Committee on Finance and Personnel to improve the systems which assure us on that. I have no doubt that the Ministers in their respective Departments and all the Members of the respective Departmental Committees will want to contribute to that. When we made the original budget statement in December we said we wanted all the departmental Committees to peruse the budget proposals in respect of the programmes that came under their Departments. We want these things properly proofed on behalf of Members of the Assembly.

**Mr Dallat:** I thank the Minister for his work. Does he take comfort from the fact that all political parties have shown sincerity this morning in taking charge of their own affairs and that never again will the affairs of Northern Ireland be in the hands of absentee landlords from Westminster?

**Mr Durkan:** Certainly I do, but when I consider the range of questions I am facing here, and being given notice of some of what I am facing next week, I am not sure that I entirely agree. It is a bit like what Talleyrand is reported to have said of Voltaire and Robespierre:

“When I think of either I prefer the other”.

Therefore, in this situation, some of the devolution decisions do not look too bad, or it looks handy enough that somebody else is taking those particular decisions. The Member's point is a good one. This is part of our political induction in taking up our new responsibilities as an Assembly and an Executive. Unfortunately the procedures do not lend themselves to the sort of input and exchange that we would want, but those are circumstances in which we are particularly caught.

I am certainly encouraged by Members' very positive and well-motivated interest across the range of programmes and the range of Departments. I have made it clear all along that I see the job of the Department of Finance and Personnel as being working with and for all the other Departments. And that means working with and for the Assembly, as well as all its Committees.

**Mr J Kelly:** A Chathaoirigh, in terms of health services, Minister, are you making provision for areas that might be deemed disadvantaged? I am thinking in particular of areas west of the Bann. Ian Paisley Snr asked a question about the shipyard and Short's. I do not know if he has asked you for money for those projects. If money is going to be allocated to them, will the allocation be equality-proofed in terms of the employment position, particularly in relation to Harland and Wolff?

**Mr Durkan:** In respect of the question about additional money for Harland and Wolff, I have made the point that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the IDB are working on this. If additional assistance were to be made available beyond

what has been talked about and what has been provided for, that would be a matter for future estimates; it is not covered in these Estimates.

In respect of the Member's equality question, the Estimates have been drawn up on the basis of expenditure plans which meet the requirements of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and, indeed, the new targeting social need policy. The Member talked about the breakdown of the allocation in the area of health and personal social services. He is perhaps a bit like Mr Shannon when he asked if money in a particular Department's programme could at this stage be earmarked on a subregional basis. It would be inappropriate for me to do this simply because in the nature of most programmes, and not least in one such as the health and personal social services programme that applies right across the region, it is not always easy to specify.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, like the other Departments, is trying to bring forward new targeting social need measures and achievements in that regard, and clearly it would be a matter for the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to articulate those plans. I would, however, like to point out again the significant amount of money that is going into the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, particularly towards health and social services.

It is not just the extra £53 million that came from the Chancellor's last Budget announcement — we are talking about £169 million above the planned amount for last year for health and personal social services. That is a cash growth of 9%, and obviously we hope that that cash growth will manifest itself in a helpful and an attractive way in all areas of Northern Ireland.

**Mr Hussey:** I agree with Dr McCrea's reference to the swings-and-roundabouts nature of the process, and Mr Close voiced his concerns, particularly in relation to the Housing Executive. In replying to Mr Shannon, the Minister said that he could not specify what would happen to any funds that would result from the sale of the school in his constituency.

But, going back to the housing issue, many Members will have heard from district and regional managers their great concern about the shortfall in the Housing Executive budget. They are also concerned that they cannot make use of the funds from the sales of houses. Will the Minister, in liaison with the Minister for Social Development, look into this issue in order to redress the housing shortage?

**Mr Durkan:** I am aware, as all Members are, of the pressures felt throughout many public service programmes, including housing. Housing Executive district managers talk to me as much as they do to any

other Member. I refer Members again to my earlier remarks about the money going in to the housing programme. It is not uncommon in these exercises for everyone to talk about the little bit of money that is not going in rather than the large sum that is. Housing programme resourcing questions for the medium to long term are a matter on which the relevant Minister may bring forward views, not least in the context of the programme of Government. I wish to ensure that arrangements are in place to allow such resources, as can be released, to go to the various programmes. We have to look at that in the context of all the priorities and experiences in the Northern Ireland block. Arguments and cases brought forward will have to be carefully examined.

**Mr Molloy:** A Chathaoirligh, this time I am speaking with my Mid Ulster hat on. I want to return to the question of directing funds to particular areas. It is accepted that ours is a society emerging from conflict, and that has social and economic consequences. If we are to redress some of the problems emerging from that and rebalance the services, it will be necessary to target social need in the area west of the Bann, and we will need to direct finance to that area. Mr John Kelly asked about the hospital service. We need to rebalance the hospital service west of the Bann and redress the neglect that has occurred over a number of years. Will the Minister consider directing most of the 9% increase in the health budget this year to that end, specifically to ensure the South Tyrone Hospital is not allowed to close for lack of funding?

**Mr Durkan:** I am glad the Member welcomes the extra money for health. Pay and inflation have been particular problems within the health budget for some time. The funds now available remedy the pay deficit and raise the baselines to 2000-01 price levels. I will not pretend that all the extra money is going in to service developments. However, approximately £79 million will be available for that purpose, and Members will want to address the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how that should best be used.

With regard to the wider questions of equality and targeting social need, all Departments and public bodies are obliged under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to conform to clear and proper equality standards in their plans. The Executive will be developing its work in that area. It is already developing new Targeting Social Need policies, measures and standards. My Department wants to see real targets and indicators in use, rather than the unsatisfactory, impressionistic and anecdotal measures that have been relied on to date. We do not want Targeting Social Need to be another “It’s the thought that counts” — or, worse still, “It’s the afterthought that counts” — exercise. We want to see real targets and indicators used, as far as possible, throughout all programmes. My Department has a

role in helping all Departments to come up with sound indicators and targets.

11.45 am

**Mr R Hutchinson:** Can the Minister assure me that within the budget set aside for regional development there will be moneys allocated to the upgrading of certain roads in east Antrim — in particular, the A8 from Larne to Belfast? That route is essential for tourism and for the transportation of goods to the rest of the United Kingdom and throughout Europe.

**Mr Durkan:** The Member will be aware of announcements already made by the Minister for Regional Development and the announcements that were made on the basis of the budget allocations as indicated. If the Member was satisfied with those announcements I do not think he needs anything else from me.

**Mr McMenamin:** With regard to our beleaguered textile industry, will the Minister provide extra funding for training? In my constituency, West Tyrone, a factory in Plumbridge has closed, with the loss of 145 jobs. That is the equivalent of almost 2,500 jobs in Belfast.

**Mr Durkan:** The pressure on the textile industry is something we are all very much aware of. From experiences in our constituencies, many of us know just how vulnerable the textile industry is. The issue has been actively taken up by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The Member mentioned training. The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment has a direct interest in that regard. He and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment have been trying to look at ways of helping to strengthen the textile industry. They want to mitigate the sort of pressures which make it so vulnerable, resulting in job losses, and help to make it sustainable and viable, both on the marketing and trading sides. Also, very importantly, they want to bring positive developments to bear, as well as provide assistance on the training side — something that the Members touched on.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat a Chathaoirligh. I would like to welcome the Minister’s commitment to Targeting Social Need. I understand the time constraints on the passage of the Appropriation Bill. Nevertheless, the public expectation of the Assembly is that it will do things differently. It should seriously consider directing finances to areas of long-term disadvantage. Even a cursory glance at this year’s Estimates indicates that we are going to have more of the same. This is unfortunate. There is a finite amount of resources, but how is the Minister going to balance the finite amount and address the areas where there has been serious long-term underspend by the Government under direct rule? In particular, I would like him to explain why £91 million

of public money has been committed to the Odyssey project. How does this address the area of targeting social need?

**Mr Durkan:** I am sure the Member was not suggesting that the £91 million she mentioned towards the end of her question would be sufficient to address social need in Northern Ireland. The Executive is going to have to develop how we properly articulate and manage an effective policy in relation to targeting social need, and I have tried to explain that previously. Those are responsibilities for the Executive. There are measures that Ministers and their Departments will want to develop within their own particular programmes. We are also going to have to agree priorities and measures across the full gamut of public affairs and public management. We are committed to doing so. It is simply not within my gift to say that I will direct all the money to every social need that everybody in this Assembly can identify with.

We need to ensure that we design the overall allocation system and manage all our spending programmes in ways that effectively target and meet social need.

The Odyssey Project is costing a total of £91 million. There is a range of funding partners — the Millennium Commission, £45 million; the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, £2.5 million; the Sheridan Group, a private sector investor, £16.9 million; Lagan-side Corporation, £9.25 million; with £16.9 million coming from the Government. It is important that that detail be noted. The total spend is not coming out of our programme; Lottery money and private money are also involved.

**Mr Poots:** I remind the Minister of the previous question asked by Dr McCrea about the council elections. Is sufficient funding being set aside next year for those elections, as the amount of money does not seem to take account of inflation?

The Minister of the Environment was possibly one of the most mean-spirited Ministers during the 72 days of the Assembly prior to suspension. He did not spend any money. Can the Minister assure Members that there is enough money in the Environment budget to do something about the major planning backlog, in particular in relation to area plans? Has the Minister of the Environment enough money to take action to help alleviate these problems?

**Mr Durkan:** The budget was agreed by the Executive Committee. All Ministers and Departments would obviously like more money. All Ministers and Departments are able to point in a very real and credible way to pressures they are experiencing in the management of their budgets. In the Department of the Environment, there are future issues in local

government, along with current and pressing issues, and some long-standing matters like the difficulties in the planning area. My Department will continue to work with the Department of the Environment and others to ensure that they have sufficient resources, and that they make the best use of those resources to provide Departmental services efficiently and effectively.

**Mr O'Neill:** I add my thanks to the Minister for the clarity and transparency with which he has handled the many different questions. Can he assure us that when the INTERREG III programme comes into effect later this year the mechanism agreed in line with EU considerations — namely, that the money be administered at local level, in our case by the three cross-border committees at local authority level — will continue to apply? Can he assure us that the Department will not be indulging in any kind of additionality or centrality?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for the question. First, I remind Members that the special EU programmes body, established as a result of the agreement, will have a direct interest and a real management role in relation to a variety of EU funds and programmes, including INTERREG.

Secondly, we want to see the sort of models — that ensure more local delivery and local appraisal of the use of key European funds — develop right across all the future European funding programmes. We also believe that it is a model that could usefully be applied in many of the departmental mainstream programmes.

**Ms McWilliams:** Will the Minister comment on what seems to be a huge percentage increase in the forecast for the superannuation budget for health and personal social services? It is more than the Housing Executive was looking for, and £15 million more than was forecast. Has something incredible happened to bring about a 54% increase, way above the 1999-2000 forecast of about £28 million? The figure has turned out to be about £43 million.

The New Deal money is ring-fenced and often cannot be touched by Northern Ireland. It has been reprofiled and some of that money has been spent elsewhere. How did this happen? Was that a precedent? Can it be done in future years? I congratulate those who succeeded in doing it, but will the Minister comment on it?

**Mr Durkan:** In terms of the detail of the reprofiling, I would appreciate more details from the Member so that I can properly pursue the matter and give a fuller and better answer. I am not quite sure about the facts she is raising. I am not disputing them; I am simply asking for more details so that I can give a fuller reply. I certainly will pursue the matter.

In terms of the increases in superannuation, let us remember all that happened in previous years when a

Department was bidding for its budget allocation and the Department of Finance and Personnel was agreeing overall budget allocations. We have been informed by previous experiences and by the upcoming pressures that we know about. There is nothing provided for that is not needed, and for which real demand is not clear, visible and apparent. That is why the increase is there.

## APPROPRIATION BILL

### First Stage

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):**

I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 5/99] to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund certain sums for the service of the year ending on 31 March 2001; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes and to authorise other sums to be applied as appropriations in aid for those purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance and Personnel to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; and to repeal certain Appropriation Orders.

*Bill passed First Stage.*

**Mr Speaker:** The Bill is now available from the Printed Paper Office. For most Bills there will have to be a little more time, but to have this available immediately to Members, the Department of Finance and Personnel took the requisite action. The Bill will be put on the list of future pending business until the timing of the Second Stage is determined.

## GROUND RENTS BILL

### First Stage

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):**

I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill to make provision for the redemption of certain ground rents and other periodic payments.

*Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.*

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** When will this Bill be available?

**Mr Speaker:** The Bill should be available first thing tomorrow. The normal course of events for Bills is that

when they pass the First Stage they are published overnight, but special efforts were made in respect of the Appropriation Bill for obvious reasons.

## DOGS (AMENDMENT) BILL

### First Stage

12.00

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development**

**(Ms Rodgers):** I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 7/99] to make provision regarding the destruction of dogs under the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983.

*Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.*

**Mr Speaker:** Members will be given a list of further pending business, when a date for Second Stage will be determined.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Will it be available tomorrow?

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, that will be the case with all the Bills that receive First Reading today. Members should now assume that when Bills are given a First Reading they will be available the following day, unless we know otherwise, in which case I shall take responsibility for advising the House.

## WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (AMENDMENT) BILL

### First Stage

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment**

**(Sir Reg Empey):** I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 8/99] to amend the Weights and Measures (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 to allow self-verification of weighing and measuring equipment, testing by Official EEA testers and pre-test stamping.

*Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.*

**Mr Speaker:** The Bill will be put on the list of future pending business until a date for the Second Stage is determined.



## **EDUCATION: NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL SECTORAL MEETING**

**The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):** A Chathaoirligh. Dia daoibh go léir. Tá áthas mór orm bheith anseo ar madin. With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about the first sectoral meeting on education of the North/South Ministerial Council held in Dublin Castle on Thursday 3 February.

Following nomination by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on 1 February, Mr Dermot Nesbitt and I attended the sectoral meeting of the Council. The Irish Government were represented by Dr Michael Woods TD, Minister for Education and Science, who was accompanied by Mr Noel Treacy, a Junior Minister in his Department. This statement has been approved by Mr Nesbitt and is also made on his behalf.

Although the Council's main focus was on education matters, it first noted the resignation of Dr Vincent Cavanagh from the Food Safety Promotion Board, and it agreed the appointment of a replacement board member, Mr Michael Walker.

The objective of the meeting was to agree areas for co-operation on education matters. The Council discussed matters for enhanced co-operation in education which were mandated by the inaugural plenary of the North/South Ministerial Council in Armagh on 13 December 1999. These were: educational underachievement; special educational needs provision; teacher qualifications; and school, teacher and youth exchanges. The Council also noted other areas of co-operation, some of which may have potential for further co-operation.

In relation to educational underachievement the Council decided to establish joint working groups to focus on three issues: developing proposals which would contribute to encouraging pupils' attendance at school, particularly how parents may be better equipped to support their children in the learning process; improving the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils, including the training of support staff, especially in the specialised areas of early years and dyslexia; and developing a means of establishing a register of child protection so that people who may present a risk to the safety and well-being of our children are prevented from working with children and young people.

The council decided to establish a North/South special education co-ordination group, which will undertake a range of work to promote co-operation and to share information and best practice between those involved in special education.

The council also decided to establish a teachers' working group to examine a range of issues related to teacher mobility.

The council agreed to commission an evaluation of the range and effectiveness of current programmes involving school, teacher and youth exchanges. The research will be undertaken by the Centre for Cross-border Studies in Armagh. A report will be submitted to the next meeting of the council and will include recommendations which will contribute to the development of a more coherent approach to exchanges not just on this island but with other countries. The council will also give further consideration to the administrative mechanisms and support required in this field.

The working groups have been charged with developing initial proposals for the next meeting of the council on the priorities which they have identified, the delivery measures they propose to put in place and the projected timescale for addressing and reporting on these tasks.

The council approved an indicative timetable for future sectoral meetings. The first of these will take place shortly, with further meetings in September and December.

The council agreed the text of a communiqué which was issued following the meeting. A copy of the communiqué has been placed in the Assembly Library.

**Mr Speaker:** There will now follow a period of not more than 45 minutes for questions to the Minister.

**Mr Kennedy:** The Minister will recall that I wrote to him in my capacity as Chairman of the Assembly Education Committee regarding the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council to which his statement refers. I remind the Minister that the Education Committee, on a cross-party basis, expressed its concern that it was not consulted either about the meeting or, particularly, its content. How does the Minister intend to keep his commitment to work closely with the Education Committee on all issues of mutual interest, with particular reference to matters of North/South co-operation?

With regard to the matters raised by the Minister in his statement, may I advise him that the Education Committee has identified the issue of educational underachievement as a possible subject for inquiry by the Committee later this year. Will he and his officials keep my Committee completely informed in the light of his previous commitments?

I note from his statement that the Minister referred to other areas of co-operation. Will he inform the House what these matters are or what these matters are likely to be? In relation to the make-up of the Special



Education Co-ordinating Committee and the teachers' working group on mobility, may I ask who will oversee these groups. What report-back mechanisms will be put in place with regard to the Assembly?

Finally, with reference to the research by the Centre for Cross-border Studies in Armagh regarding school, teacher and youth exchanges, will the Minister refer the detail of this to the Education Committee in advance of the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I accept that during the course of the previous administration of this institution, there were some difficulties in relation to the Education Committee's being informed and given due notice about announcements and meetings which were to take place. I am very committed to resolving the difficulties which resulted from that. It was also very interesting that they appear to be the only difficulties between the Education Committee and my Department. There will shortly be a meeting between the Member and myself. I think that we can put into effect good working practice, and I undertake to overcome whatever problems and difficulties have arisen. The whole issue of educational underachievement is vitally important, and I look forward to discussing our approach to that.

There has been long-standing co-operation between my Department and the Department of Education and Science in the South on a wide range of issues. Here are a few examples. The European Studies project has been operating since 1986. It began as a joint venture between the Departments of Education in Belfast, Dublin and London and, for the first couple of years, involved a small number of schools. The project has grown in the intervening years and has over 400 secondary-level schools in 21 countries throughout Europe. It engages teachers and young people in teaching and learning in the context of multi-national partnerships using modern information technologies.

The Cross Connect project is a joint venture between the Western Education and Library Board, the vocational education committees of Cavan and Leitrim, and the University of Ulster. It aims to provide a programme of curriculum enrichment in small rural schools.

A further project, sponsored by Eircom with the support of the Departments of Education North and South, involves 50 schools linked through the Internet and by school exchanges. We will want to explore opportunities for further development of these types of activity, which benefit teachers and promote inter-cultural learning among our young people, not just on this island, but, in some cases, in a wider European setting.

The question about who the working committees are ultimately responsible to — whether it be the teachers'

co-ordinating group or the other working groups we have set up — is very important. Ultimately, they have to be responsible to me, as the Minister of Education, and, in the Southern context, to Dr Michael Woods, the Minister for Education and Science. We are content that we have very dedicated and committed civil servants in our Departments who will deal meticulously with all of these issues. Accountability rests with me, and I must report to the Assembly so that people will have the opportunity to question us on our contribution. In effect, that is the position. The work will be overseen by the North/South Ministerial Council, which will meet again in September, although no definite date has been agreed.

**Mr McMenamin:** Will the Minister take all steps necessary to protect the long-term needs of rural schools so that they can continue to play a key role in sustaining rural communities?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Yes. I am keenly interested in this very important issue. Over a number of years, rural communities have experienced particular difficulties due to the threat that hung over some small rural schools, and which still does.

I appreciate the work that has been done in these schools and the efforts of the boards of governors, the local community, and the teachers, some of whom are working in difficult circumstances. As I have highlighted before, in the issue of education, the conditions under which teachers are teaching in the rural schools are particularly difficult, because some of the schools are old — in some cases, over 100 years old — and are in need of replacement.

I have been very keen to point out to the officials in my Department that all of these matters ultimately will come back to me for decisions, and I have said that there should be a review of how the Department of Education handles the issue of rural schools. I have made it absolutely clear to officials that I would be very reluctant to close any rural school if a large part of the local community is arguing for its retention. It is an important issue and it is one that I take very seriously. My officials are conducting a review and I hope to make the result public soon.

*12.15 pm*

**Mr S Wilson:** I want to reiterate a point that was made by the Chairman of the Education Committee. The Committee agreed unanimously to send a letter to the Minister about the way in which cross-border meetings are handled. We only find out what happens at the meetings after they have taken place; we have no prior knowledge of the agenda or of how the business links in with the work being carried out in the Assembly. The whole Committee feels that this degree of secrecy is unacceptable and should stop.

The Minister's statement made reference to educational underachievement. He said that the working group would focus on

"developing a means of establishing a register of child protection so that people who may present a risk to the safety and well-being of our children are prevented from working with children and young people."

Perhaps he can tell us whether the working group will be looking at how the Minister might be prevented from putting impressionable schoolchildren at risk by recalling and boasting about his terrorist involvement when visiting primary schools. Maybe the Minister would like to give us an assurance that, as his contribution to the work of this working —

**Mr Maskey:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I thought that the purpose of this session was to deal with the Minister's North/South statement. I do not see what this has got to do with that whatsoever. In fact, I think that this is the second contribution that has not had any bearing on the Minister's statement.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member is absolutely correct. This is an opportunity for questions to this Minister, as there are questions to other Ministers, on the subject of the statement which he has made. It is an opportunity for questions, not for speeches, and the questions should be about the statement and not about other matters.

**Mr S Wilson:** Thank you. If I had said it in Irish he might have understood it — or maybe not. May I finish the question?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member might try.

**Mr S Wilson:** I have asked about the working party. I am asking now if the Minister will give us an assurance that, as his contribution to the work of this working party — overseeing the safety and well-being of children — he will on no future occasion boast of his terrorist activities when visiting schools where there are impressionable young children present.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Go raibh maith agat, a Sammy. There is going to be no secrecy about what happens at North/South Ministerial Council meetings. After every meeting that I attend I report back to the Executive, and it would be highly valuable and useful, for the Member's information, if his two Ministers would attend the Executive and get the reports at first hand. They would then obviously be in a much better position to inform the Democratic Unionist Party that no sneaky deals are being done on education. I do undertake to report back faithfully to the Executive and to the Assembly the content of all of the North/South Ministerial Council meetings on education which I attend.

On the second matter, this may be an opportunity to make it clear that the allegations which the Member has

made against me in the course of the last few minutes are totally and absolutely without foundation. If the Member would care to check up on what happened during my first visit to a school after becoming Minister of Education, he would find out that the discussion which took place was between me and a single journalist. I did not boast to any child; I did not mention in any public way or in front of children from any school, the fact that at one time in my life I was on the run from the British forces. What was I on the run from? I was on the run from internment.

I was on the run from internment, not from any charge or the ability of the RUC, or anybody else, to bring me before a court. I was going to be interned because I was a Republican. I had not committed any offence, other than being a Republican. It is important to get this in perspective.

Finally, it is an appropriate moment to wish Mr Wilson well in his capacity as the new Lord Mayor of Belfast and to express the desire, which I believe will be shared by the vast majority of our people in this changing situation, that he will make strenuous efforts to be a Lord Mayor for everyone in Belfast.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Is it in order for a Member to deliberately mislead the House? We have all read about this matter and seen reports on television. He was there; he talked to those children and told them about when he was on the run. It was a good thing that he was on the run, and my party hopes that he will soon be on the run again.

**Mr Speaker:** It would be wise for all Members to read Hansard before taking any of these matters up and making comment. I have listened very carefully to what has been said on all sides.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis seo ceisteanna a chur ort, a Aire, faoin ábhar fíor-thábhachtach seo. I welcome this opportunity to put questions to the Minister.

Issues have been raised this morning about the Education Committee and an alleged unanimity that is not there. These issues will be taken up within the Education Committee, and I would be grateful if the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of that Committee would not refer to decisions or recommendations as unanimous that, in fact, are not.

I ask the Minister — and I know and appreciate that the issue — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Kennedy:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For the record, it is important that I, as Chairman of the Education Committee, confirm that the decision to write to the Minister in respect of the earlier debate was the

unanimous view of my Committee on a cross-party basis.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. This is not an opportunity for debate, and if a question arises where Members try to confirm or deny the veracity of what other Members have said we enter immediately into a debate. This is not an opportunity for debate; it is for questions that are brief and to the point, single when possible, rather than having as many feet as a centipede, and followed by responses from the Minister.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Surely it is entirely in order for the Chairman of a Committee to counter an attack made upon him from the other end of the House, even though it is during questions to the Minister. Surely it is never right for a Minister to — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. If an opportunity is given for Members to resume after they have already asked questions on such matters, then we will be drawn into a debate. The point that I have made is that this is not an opportunity for debate; it is an opportunity for specific questions to be asked, and I am addressing that to all Members, not only the Member who was called to order.

Please complete your question, Mr McElduff.

**Mr McElduff:** Will the Minister work closely with Mr Woods, Minister of Education and Science, and Dr Farren, Minister of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment, to task the teachers' working group to look at harmonising the qualification requirement for admission to teacher training colleges in both parts of the island? For admission to teacher training colleges, GCSE examination result requirements are higher than they are for the leaving certificate.

Secondly, will the Minister also look at the inequity of salaries between teachers North and South?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I have no doubt that Dr Michael Woods, Seán Farren and I will be able to work together in a positive fashion on what is obviously a hugely important issue for all of the people of this island.

Only last week we attended an important education conference at Stranmillis College, accompanied by Richard Riley, the United States Education Secretary. We finished with a short lunch, over which we had discussions. It is clear that the relationships between Dr Woods, Seán Farren, Richard Riley and myself are excellent. Offers of assistance from the United States in relation to their huge bank of research into all sorts of extremely important educational matters can be taken up by Seán Farren, Dr Michael Woods and myself.

Under European Union Directives we have already gone a long way towards the mutual recognition of

teaching qualifications. The South already accepts graduates from certain teacher training courses here, and it would be useful to see if it were practicable to extend that both ways. The key issues will be assurance about the quality of the training provided and the competence of teachers to teach in our schools. It is very important to understand that the issue of salaries is outside the working group's remit, and some consideration should be given as to whether it can be included later.

2.30 pm

**Dr Birnie:** My question arises from the focus, in relation to educational underachievement, on increasing standards in literacy and numeracy. Clearly there are significant problems worthy of attention. I understand that, according to some surveys, up to one in five of the adult population here cannot decipher the instructions on a medicine bottle; something indicative of basic literacy. Given that both Northern Ireland and the Republic do badly in basic functional literacy and numeracy — we know this from international surveys, so it is no longer a matter of doubt — will the joint working group, to which the Minister has referred, avoid becoming too insular by simply restricting itself to comparison between the two jurisdictions? Will it be able to take into account best practice in numeracy and literacy improvement in Great Britain, the United States of America, Europe, the Far East, and indeed anywhere else in the world which is relevant?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Obviously, I accept the huge importance of the issue the Member raises. I think that there are three key areas in tackling educational underachievement. In most of our schools where performance is lowest, attendance rates are also too low. We all know that teachers cannot teach pupils who are not there. Literacy and numeracy are, of course, the basic skills which open the door to the rest of the curriculum. Employers and others complain of poor results from many school leavers in these areas. Child protection is simply a fundamental duty for all of us.

These issues were identified because they are priorities both North and South, and in the case of the measures needed to stop unsuitable people finding work with children, east and west also. However, there will in due course be opportunities for us to look at other areas where joint working could bring benefits. The Member is absolutely right when he says we should not be insular in dealing with this matter. We must be open about it and recognise that there are deficiencies. There is a responsibility on the educational authorities, North and South, to examine education systems in other parts of the world to see if ideas can be harnessed to benefit the children of this island. We are very committed to doing so.

As I stated earlier, the contacts we now have with the Department of Education in the United States will be



invaluable to us, but we should not restrict or confine ourselves to that country. We must examine other education systems throughout the world to see if we can put into practice processes which will benefit all our children, eventually eradicating the many deficiencies in the system.

**Mrs E Bell:** I thank the Minister for his statement. This is one of the first instances of good communication between the Minister, the Education Committee and the Assembly. I did voice my concern about the North/South Ministerial Council meeting during the Education Committee meeting, and I supported the letter, as the Chairman said. My concern was that there should be good communication. There was no question of having concerns about secrecy because secrecy would not be allowed.

Within the priorities for enhanced co-operation the Minister has outlined education underachievement and special education. As the Chairman pointed out, quite rightly, we are looking at those issues as well. I am concerned about the overlapping of research and work, so we need to have some co-operation and information. How will this be co-ordinated? Will you ask the Council, at its future meetings, to look at the question of integrated and Irish-medium education so as to enhance the co-operation of the North/South Council?

**Mr Speaker:** I remind Members to address their questions through the Chair.

**Mr M McGuinness:** To repeat what I said earlier, I am very committed to having an open Administration and I would hate to think that anybody felt that there was secrecy at work. It is vitally important that there is a good relationship between the Department of Education and the Minister, in particular, and the Education Committee. I am committed to try to bring that about.

Also, it is important that the Assembly be aware that the first meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council on Education came before the suspension of the institutions. It is important that people understand that during the period of suspension we had a situation where no work was taking place in relation to the sectoral meeting. The officials, in fact, had to discontinue the meetings which Michael Woods and I had authorised on behalf of the North/South Ministerial Council during that period. Obviously that puts us at a tremendous disadvantage insofar as it is not possible, even at this time, for me to have full information, simply because of the backlog of work.

It is also important for people to understand that many of the areas we are dealing with are high priorities North and South, and officials, North and South, are dealing with these issues on an ongoing basis. In relation to working in a joint fashion, during the course of recent months that has not been happening and it has

only recommenced when the institutions were restored. We are behind schedule in relation to all the matters that we are dealing with.

In relation to Irish-medium and integrated education, obviously these are issues that we are going to have to deal with as we proceed. The Executive Committee, this Assembly and the Department of Education in the South will have to consider whether or not there are other matters that can be dealt with by officials. My statement makes it clear that we are dealing basically with the four areas that have been mentioned: educational underachievement; special education provision; teacher, pupil and school exchanges; and teacher qualifications.

We recognise that the delay has put us all behind schedule. There are obviously difficulties that need to be dealt with.

Officials have hit the ground running as I hope we have done so here, and the Ministers in the Executive. The officials have returned to attend to their responsibilities under the North/South Ministerial Council, and I am satisfied that they are working very hard to get it back on track as quickly as possible.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** Does the Minister recognise that the present funding arrangement is one cause of the underachievement in many schools? Does he also recognise, in terms of development, proposals which encourage pupils to attend school and better equip their parents? I know from my experience as a councillor in Belfast, that there are many schemes throughout the five education and library board areas that are doing this, and we should recognise their work and achievements. Has the Minister's Department been in contact with the boards to find out about the good practice schemes which deal with such issues?

Moving onto numeracy and literacy, I recognise, particularly in my constituency, that there are low levels of numeracy and literacy, and that there is a cost to all in that. The Belfast Education and Library Board does not have the money to implement schemes to deal with this problem. Will it be getting additional money to deal with this, or will the money come out of the Department's current budget? There have been a number of changes to the curriculum, changes, it seems, from one year to the next. Does the Minister recognise that a lot of pressure has been put on teachers by these changes and that they too can contribute to educational underachievement? The Minister also referred to school attendance and to the problem of underachieving schools which pupils do not attend. Has the Minister looked at the differences between schools in disadvantaged areas and schools in affluent areas and at why the teachers and pupils seem to perform better in the latter?

**Mr M McGuinness:** School funding arrangements are under review at the moment, as I have mentioned previously in other debates. They are under review with an eye to achieving a fairer allocation. Money has been made available to enable the education and library boards to promote good practice, literacy and numeracy. They have, I think, each received £900,000 this year for that. The point that the Member made about focusing on areas of social disadvantages needs to be taken seriously and not just by ourselves and the Department of Education. There is a huge responsibility on the Government to face the reality that many disadvantaged areas have tremendous pressure on them in this. I know for a fact that absenteeism from schools in socially disadvantaged areas is much greater than in other areas, and that needs to be focused upon. My Departmental officials and I are committed to focusing on this point in order to find ways of improving the situation.

Richard Riley made a submission to a meeting at Stranmillis College and said that the state of Connecticut, which pays the highest salaries to teachers in the United States, has the best examination results. Now that was not a scientific study and does not prove any case, but we all know and understand that teachers are under tremendous pressure. I agree with Mr Hutchinson that every time there is a review of the curriculum, it is hugely difficult for teachers to make the changes that need to be made. I know for a fact that computer technology has now effectively dominated all of our lives and not least the lives of teachers.

There are all kinds of stresses and strains on the teaching profession. It is important to recognise the huge contribution that teachers have made to the welfare and teaching of our children in difficult circumstances.

In disadvantaged areas, there is a schools support programme that gives professional support to schools. Substantial funding is directed to improving standards in these areas. We must recognise the pressures on teachers. From discussions with my officials, it has become clear that people are focussed on getting these things right. It is going to take some time, but it is within our ability.

My final point is one that I developed in the 'Belfast Telegraph' during my previous period in this job. The schools estate is not in a good condition. As I said then, we will need hundreds of millions of pounds to resolve the outstanding problems. If we are to educate our children properly, it must be done in a conducive atmosphere. I was unable to attend the opening of the new school in Keady last week, but doubtless Members saw the photographs and the television coverage. It looked to be a beautiful development. I would like all our children to be educated in such conditions. We will not achieve that overnight, but we need to work towards that end.

It is important that the Assembly, the Executive and indeed the British Government recognise the dire need for extra education funding. All these problems — educational underachievement, social disadvantage, dyslexia and special needs education — require funding. If the funding is not there, we will always be fighting an uphill battle. We know what the problems are and my officials are focussed on them. They will work hard to eradicate the problems within the education system.

**Mr Speaker:** Quite a number of Members wish to ask questions. We agreed on 45 minutes, so I ask Members to be concise with their questions and the Minister to be concise with his answers so that we can deal with as many as possible.

**Ms McWilliams:** I commend the Minister on his report. I agree that children need to be educated in an atmosphere conducive to their personal development.

Will the Minister tell us why the proposed child protection register is listed under educational underachievement? Some abused children do underachieve, but others dedicate themselves to getting an education to show that they have survived. These children might be stigmatised if the register were associated with underachievement.

Secondly, is the Minister aware that the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee agreed last week to inquire into children's services, and in particular the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995? The Committee will be considering child protection. Does the Minister's proposal cover only those working in education, or will it also cover those working outside that sector? If that is the case, then the proposal should be referred to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee.

*12.45 pm*

I would also like the Minister to note that in Northern Ireland we are falling far behind England, Wales and Scotland where there is currently in existence the Protection of Children Act 1999. That legislation does not exist here, and if it is the case that such legislation does exist in the Republic of Ireland, it may be something that the next meeting would like to look at.

Finally, I share the Minister's view that we should share good practice and information, particularly where there are administrations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It is most important that in this matter of child protection we look at the issue of prevention. In a country as small as ours — Northern Ireland has a population of just over 1.5 million, and the Republic a population of just over 3 million — this is a very pertinent issue, and if there is anything we can do to prevent the future abuse of children then a register may help. However, it is only one piece of the work in

the whole area of action that is needed. It is not a new problem, but it has now been named, and we need to do something about it urgently.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I take the point in relation to how we categorise these particular issues. I will strive to consider this further because the Member makes an important point. It is very important to understand that the register is basically for adults who are judged unsuitable to work with children, not the children. The register is intended to cover all education and health workers. It will cover the North in collaboration with everywhere else around these islands. There is undoubtedly excellent contact between the officials in all areas, and people do understand the need to get this right.

The points Ms McWilliams made are absolutely valid, and I would not dare to suggest that we have in place at the moment the proper structures, programmes or systems required to deal with the matter in an adequate fashion. We all know that the debate about child abuse has taken off recently. Clearly we now have a society prepared to face up to all the difficulties that this issue has for children, for families and for society in general. We are absolutely committed to dealing with these issues. I cannot deal with all of them here today because I do not have the details, but my Department will write to the Member in detail about the points that she has raised.

**Mr A Maginness:** I also welcome the Minister's statement. This meeting shows the practical benefits of North/South co-operation in the field of education. My question is also about the register of child protection. May I ask the Minister to make that a priority. There is a danger that unsuitable persons are slipping through the net in both jurisdictions, and I believe that we should work with haste to establish the register in order to prevent this happening.

Finally, everyone here should deplore the frivolous party political manner in which Assemblyman Sammy Wilson approached this very serious matter of the protection of children.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I appreciate the Member's comments and his support. I will make a register on child abuse a priority with my Department. I also think

that Dr Michael Woods and others throughout this island will have no difficulty whatsoever in supporting that.

**Mr Campbell:** The issues raised at the Ministerial Council between Northern Ireland and the Republic — which, coincidentally, do not have the consent of our community, but that is a side issue — were, according to this statement, approved and made on behalf of Mr Dermot Nesbitt. These issues apply equally if not more so to other regions of the United Kingdom such as Scotland and the North of England. What provision has been made to have these and similar issues raised at the appropriate ministerial level within the United Kingdom?

**Mr M McGuinness:** To answer the first part of that question, it is important that we understand that all the institutions established as a result of the Good Friday Agreement were put to the people in a referendum in 1998, and over 70% — Unionist, Loyalist, Republican and Nationalist — voted for them. Let nobody be under any illusion about the support achieved here in the North for the new institutions and the huge support that we achieved in the South. Overall, there was over 80% support on the island for the establishment of the Assembly, the Executive, the all-Ireland Ministerial Council and the Implementation Bodies. There is democratic support on the island for these institutions, and I take my responsibility very seriously, as I believe all the pro-agreement parties, which are participating in a very positive and constructive way, consistently do.

On the second point, we are all open to learning as much as we can about all the issues that affect the lives of our people and children. I have no difficulty at all in talking to people in England, Scotland, Wales or anywhere else about how we can improve education for our children. We need an open-minded approach, and to recognise that we are living in a changing world. Everybody has the duty to move forward positively and constructively, with openness, to improve the educational standards of our children; I am absolutely committed to that.

**Mr Speaker:** The time for questions is up.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.52 pm.*

*On resuming —*

**FOYLE, CARLINGFORD AND IRISH  
LIGHTS COMMISSION:  
NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL  
SECTORAL MEETING**

2.00 pm

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement on the meeting of the North / South Ministerial Council held on 9 February 2000.

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about the first North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting for the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The first meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council for Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission sector took place on 9 February.

Following nomination by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Mr Dermot Nesbitt and I represented Northern Ireland. The Irish Government was represented by Mr Frank Fahey TD, Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources.

The papers for the Council were cleared in draft by the Executive Committee on 1 February and were circulated in final form on 8 February.

The main thrust of the meeting was to give impetus to the new Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. Accordingly, the meeting opened with an oral progress report from Mr Peter Savage, the chairman of the Commission, and Mr Derick Anderson, the chief executive (designate), who attended for this item only. They were able to confirm that staff had transferred without difficulty from the Foyle Fisheries Commission, that the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) Order 1999 had also transferred successfully their prosecution and enforcement powers, and that good progress was being made in respect of their new headquarters. In addition, they described the interim agency arrangements which allowed the Commission to exercise its jurisdiction in respect of the Carlingford area through the Fisheries Conservancy Board and the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board.

The Council noted that the legislation to give the new Commission its powers to develop and license aquaculture forms part of the Executive's legislative programme, and Mr Fahey confirmed that he would aim to keep in step with the progress of the Northern Ireland

legislation in making parallel legislation in respect of the Irish jurisdiction.

The Council also took note of a progress report on the transfer of Irish Lights to the new Commission. Mr Fahey confirmed that the Irish authorities were content with progress.

The Council discussed the consultation arrangements which should apply in respect of the new Commission. The Council considered that it was important that the Commission should, as a priority, bring forward proposals for a new non-statutory advisory body which would draw in a range of those affected by its functions.

The Council approved a list of key duties which it wished the Commission to bring forward at an early date. These comprised: appointment procedures and terms and conditions for chief executive; mission statement; year 2000 corporate plan proposals; staffing proposals, structure and terms and conditions; proposed revisions to staff contracts; draft code of conduct for board members and staff; and finally, proposed programme of work.

The Council discussed the schedule of sectoral meetings likely to take place during 2000. These were provisionally set for early May, September and the first week in December. The Council agreed to meet again in this format in early May 2000.

Finally, the Council considered and approved the draft joint communiqué, copies of which have been placed in the Assembly Library.

**Mr Speaker:** We now have up to 45 minutes, if required, for questions to the Minister.

**Mr Poots:** Can the Minister enlighten us a little on the new non-statutory advisory body? There is already a substantial amount of money being expended on the North/South body itself. How much is this non-statutory advisory body going to cost? How many members will it have and who will they be? Is it going to be more jobs for the boys?

**Ms Rodgers:** There are no proposals as yet and, as I reported, this is a matter that will be considered. Many people from the fishing industry who use the Foyle and Carlingford Loughs have expressed concerns to my Department, and I think it would be useful to consult with them. I assume that the advisory body will be a means of taking on board the views of people who are not actually on the Commission, but as yet there are no proposals.

**Dr Birnie:** I welcome the Minister's statement. My question is about lighthouses and the Commissioners of Irish Lights, and arises from the report which was presented to the Assembly by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on 18 January 1999. Under the



section relating to the North/South body in aquaculture and marine matters it says

“Given that the CIL functions in an East-West context, arrangements will be made to maintain linkage with the relevant British authorities.”

I understand that the context is that for over a century now lighthouse provision in this island has been funded out of a general lighthouse fund to which the current Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, John Prescott, acts as trustee. He subsidises the operation of lighthouses in the North and, it has to be said, in the Republic of Ireland as well.

Were arrangements relating to the East/West aspect of lighthouse operation discussed at the recent meeting which the Minister reported on?

**Ms Rodgers:** Legislation is being prepared to deal with the important issues that come under the jurisdiction of the Commission of Irish Lights, in particular, where the British Government has a concern. However, the arrangements were not discussed at the last meeting.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Will the Minister tell the House which waters the Irish Government now controls but did not control prior to the setting-up of this body? There is, take it from me, deep concern in the Carlingford Lough region about what is happening there.

Will she explain how the body has an estimated spend of £431,000 since it was set up? What has that money bought for the people of Carlingford or Foyle? I would like to know where the money is to be spent or was spent. According to page 25 of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2000-01 it will be spent on services under the Government of Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2001.

**Ms Rodgers:** The Commission is now responsible for the Newry area including the Newry canal, Clanrye river and others.

The rest of the question related to the money spent on—

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** The money spent as listed in the Estimates.

**Ms Rodgers:** That is the provision for next year.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** What is it buying?

**Ms Rodgers:** I think that that will be a matter for the Commission.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I will raise the matter with the Minister at the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, which I chair. I hope she will have answers then.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I remind Members that these are questions to the Minister about the statement. Questions to the Minister on the Estimates, for example,

will be taken at another time. Clearly the Minister cannot be prepared for questions on Estimates when the statement is about the North/South Ministerial Council meeting. The purpose of the questions is to address that particular issue.

**Mr Bradley:** I note from paragraph seven of the Minister's report that the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources, Mr Fahey, confirmed that the Irish authorities are content with the progress of the transfer of Irish Lights to the new Commission. Will the Minister say whether the transfer will have any bearing on the jobs of those currently employed by Irish Lights?

**Ms Rodgers:** I thank the Member for that question. No, it is intended that the contracts of employment of Irish Lights staff will transfer with their functions and there will be no detrimental change in their working conditions.

**Mr Ford:** Aquaculture is one of the important functions of the new body. Given what she has said, will the Minister expand on the timescale for legislation in this area?

I noted her comments on the idea of an advisory body to work with the cross-border body. Given the wide range of functions included in that body's remit, I find it difficult to see why representatives of anglers or landowners on the Owenkillew river would necessarily want to be on the same advisory body as those who fish or sail on our saltwater coasts. Will the Minister give consideration as to whether more than one body might not be more appropriate?

**Ms Rodgers:** With regard to the licensing of aquaculture, the legislation amending the Foyle Fisheries Act 1952 to extend the functions of the Loughs Agency, including the development and licensing of aquaculture in Lough Foyle, continues to be progressed. A number of policy matters between the two Departments sponsoring the Loughs Agency — the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources in Dublin — proved more difficult to settle than anticipated. However, instructions are now being finalised and forwarded to the draughtsmen in both jurisdictions. I hope that the legislation will be brought forward in September.

The second part of the question related to consultation. We are awaiting proposals which will include sub-committees for the areas and functions.

**Mr O'Neill:** I welcome the Minister's statement. I wish to draw attention to the need for work to be done on the conservation and management of our fishery stocks as a natural resource. Does the Minister agree that that should receive priority status amongst the work of the Department and the council?



**Ms Rodgers:** I wish to thank Éamonn for that question. The Commission will deal with the need to conserve stock, to develop the fisheries and to manage the whole area. The answer to the question is “Yes”. I accept the importance of the issue, and I look forward to seeing the Commission work very fruitfully in that area.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** In her statement the Minister said that good progress was being made. Is she concealing the reality of the situation? A departmental memo from Mr Derick Anderson to a Mr Lavery contains the most disturbing news that seizures of illegal nets and boats on the tidal Foyle have fallen from over 700 nets and 80 boats in 1996 to 350 nets and 40 boats in 1999, and that illegal fishing has been taking in excess of 10,000 salmon from this area per annum.

That is the equivalent of between one half and one third of the legal commercial catch. As the Department is unable to recruit the temporary staff required to maintain this river, should the Minister not have brought this material to our urgent attention in her statement today, to make us all aware of the current dire and, indeed, most disturbing situation?

2.15 pm

**Ms Rodgers:** My report was on the central meeting, which dealt with the legislative and administrative arrangements that must be put in place to deal with the many issues that will come under the commission’s management. There is good evidence of deterrents: continuous vigilance will be needed, and temporary staff are, in fact, being recruited to deal with this. I was reporting on the discussions we had on putting the arrangements in place. There has, of course, been a three-month gap. We had intended to have a meeting in May, but, unfortunately, we were unable to. We hope that that meeting will now take place at the end of this month.

**Mr Dallat:** Can the Minister assure the House that the Commission will avail of every opportunity to promote angling tourism on an all-Ireland basis? What proposals are there to encompass the activities of The Honourable The Irish Society, which controls fishing rights on other rivers in Northern Ireland?

**Ms Rodgers:** I can assure Mr Dallat that I want to see the Commission developing the tourist potential of angling and fishing in particular, on a North/South basis, and I have no doubt that it will proceed to do that.

**Mr Wells:** The Minister thanked the hon Member for South Down, Mr O'Neill, for his question — and very helpful it was too — but I can assure Members she will not be thanking me for my question. Will the Minister take it from me that many of the anglers who fish in the waters that flow into Carlingford Lough remain totally and implacably opposed to this whole process? They see this as artificial interference in the good management of Carlingford Lough, as was carried out

by the Fisheries Conservancy Board, and they also see it as being done for pure political expediency.

Many of the anglers feel very aggrieved that they now have to liaise with a body whose local office will probably be based in the Irish Republic and that they will have to buy two licences, one from the old Fisheries Conservancy Board, and one from this new body. This will do absolutely nothing to promote angling and fishing in Carlingford Lough, and there will not be one more fish left alive as a result of this vast expenditure.

**Ms Rodgers:** I thank the Member for his question, which is, indeed, very welcome. All questions are welcome; that is what I am here for. In relation to the licensing situation, the Fisheries Conservancy Board in Northern Ireland and the Eastern Fisheries Board in the Republic of Ireland operate as agents of the Commission in delivering services. Arrangements are in hand for the commission to begin delivering services itself as soon as possible. The commission has approved staffing and accommodation, and there are other proposals which await approval. The Commission will be taking over the ongoing work.

The staff of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission have an effective track record in the protection of fisheries in the Foyle area as part of their role in the Foyle Fisheries Commission. I expect that they will continue to deal effectively with poaching in their extended areas of responsibility. In relation to licences, it is not true that people will have to pay for two. Those who have mistakenly bought a licence to fish in one or other area, will, if they write to the Commission, be given the right to fish in both areas.

With regard to the areas which come under —  
[Interruption]

They will be allowed to fish in both areas with whichever licence they have bought. There is no problem with that. When they want to fish in areas that come under the Fisheries Conservancy Board, they will be able to buy, at a very cheap rate, an endorsement of the licence they have, not two licences. The licence that they already have can also be endorsed at a very small fee, which is much less than the sum of the two fees added together.

**Mr Hay:** The Minister said that there was no real difficulty for employees of Foyle Fisheries Commission to transfer to the Implementation Bodies. I know, from Foyle Fisheries Commission employees, that they have had great difficulty and could not understand why they were doing it. Following on from that, can the Minister guarantee that those people who have transferred their pension rights, employment rights — and every other accompanying right — will have those rights safeguarded?

My other question concerns the North/South Ministerial Council. My understanding is that Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners, who control a fair portion of the River Foyle and have a reasonable amount of activity on it, have not been consulted on any issue concerning the area they control. I hope, that when the Minister sets up the advisory committee about which she is now talking, the Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners are brought into the equation. She may rest assured they have a great deal to say concerning the whole issue of this advisory panel now being set up by the Minister. I wish to make it clear to her that Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners very much wish to be contacted by her concerning the whole issue of the area they control.

**Ms Rodgers:** I thank the Member for his question and advice. I hear what he says about Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners. As I have already stated in response to an earlier question, employees of the Foyle Fisheries Commission will be guaranteed that there will be no detrimental impact on their employment, and their contractual rights will be transferred.

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPLEMENTARY AGREEMENTS

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee agreed an indicative time of two hours for the debate on the Memorandum of Understanding and Supplementary Agreements. I remind Members that they will have seen only one amendment on the Marshalled List.

**Junior Minister (Office of First and Deputy First Ministers) (Mr Nesbitt):** I beg to move

That this Assembly takes note of the Memorandum of Understanding and Supplementary Agreements between Her Majesty's Government and the Northern Ireland Executive Committee.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. What is the time limit on these speeches today?

**Mr Speaker:** Under the new Standing Orders — and I hesitate to advise Members of this — there is no limit on time. Members will recall there was a time limit of 10 minutes in our Initial Standing Orders. Now that is no longer the case. The Business Committee has, however, given an indicative timing for the debate as a whole of two hours. Clearly, Members speaking for longer will limit the amount of time available to their Colleagues and other Members of the Assembly. Those in the Chair will try to assist Members to keep to reasonable brevity, consistent with being able to express their views with clarity.

**Mr Nesbitt:** The purpose of the Memorandum is to set down principles which will underlie relations between the United Kingdom Government and the devolved institutions. As such, it is central to the way in which business will be conducted in each part of the United Kingdom. The Northern Ireland Assembly is part of the governance of the United Kingdom. It is our task to formulate and deliver public policy for which we have the responsibility in Northern Ireland, in line with the needs of the local electorate. However, we are also part of a bigger picture, and we need to take account of what is happening elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

This document is therefore designed to reconcile these two roles. It is not legally binding but it is a statement of political intent, binding in honour only. It reflects the post-devolution politics of co-operation, goodwill and a recognition of mutual responsibilities. Some may say that the document should be legally enforceable. However, trying to make the arrangements enforceable in law would not be in keeping with the spirit of co-operation, which is necessary for devolution to work. Such an approach would merely serve to indicate a breakdown of relations and a distrust in the goodwill of others to implement these proposals.

The Memorandum was agreed between the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Ministers and the Cabinet of the National Assembly of Wales on 1 October 1999. The Executive Committee has now considered the documents and agreed them with one addition, which I will come to shortly. It is useful to have a document setting out clearly and sensibly the ground rules for our relations with the United Kingdom Government and the other devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales. I now propose to say a few brief words about each of the five documents in the Memorandum that is laid before the House today.

First, the overall Memorandum of Understanding contains the main principles to be followed, and it deals with communication, consultation among Administrations, exchange of information and confidentiality, and the monitoring and management of the devolution settlements. It establishes a commitment by the Administrations to good and timely communication with each other, to co-operation on matters of mutual interest, and to the exchange of information on scientific, technical and policy issues. It also provides for the arrangements set out in the Memorandum to be reviewed and updated at least once each year.

Secondly, the agreement on the Joint Ministerial Committee sets out the terms of reference for that committee, and how it will operate. The committee brings together Ministers from each of the devolved Administrations and from the United Kingdom Government. It considers reserved matters that have an impact on the Executive Committee's responsibilities, and in turn, devolved matters that have an impact on reserved matters. Plenary sessions, chaired by the Prime Minister, will be held at least once each year. The committee will monitor relations generally and will be able to address particular problems and issues that may arise. Already there is what could be called a small family of subject-specific Joint Ministerial Committees. They have been established, for example, on health, poverty and the knowledge economy. These committees have embarked on a useful programme of work. Indeed, it is interesting to note that today the First Minister and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety have been in London attending a meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee on health.

Thirdly, on the co-ordination of EU policy issues, the concordat sets out how EU business is to be handled, including the exchange of information, the formulation of a single UK policy line, attendance at EU councils and related meetings, implementation of EU obligations and infraction proceedings. The agreement recognises Northern Ireland's distinctive position within the United Kingdom in terms of its relationship with another member state and therefore extends the terms of the concordat to cover the North/South Ministerial Council as well as the European Union dimension of the

cross-border bodies. This is the additional aspect to which I referred earlier.

This EU concordat also sets out the United Kingdom Government's intention that Ministers of the devolved Administrations should be fully involved in discussions about what could be called the UK policy on issues falling within their areas of responsibility.

The status and functions of the UK's permanent representation in Brussels are unchanged, and the devolved Administration will be able to take part in less formal discussions with EU institutions and interests within other member states. Northern Ireland has always had a strong interest in European affairs. The agreement will enable us to have our devolved status acknowledged and also retain the benefits of having the weight of the United Kingdom behind us on agreed policy positions.

2.30 pm

Fourthly, the arrangements proposed in the Financial Assistance to Industry agreement are consistent with the provisions in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and aim to balance fairness and value for money with the need to negotiate flexibly and effectively. The aim of this concordat is to resolve the difficulties that arise from competing UK agencies bidding against each other for large mobile investment projects. The arrangements give the commitment that Northern Ireland Ministers and their officials will be fully involved in discussions on United Kingdom policy in this area.

Fifthly, the International Relations concordat covers the formulation of UK policy on implementation and conduct of international relations, co-operation over legal proceedings, representation overseas, visits, public diplomacy, trade and investment promotion, and finally diplomatic and consular relations. It makes clear the Executive Committee's responsibilities for implementing international obligations on the UK which relate to its devolved responsibilities, and also the arrangements for the Executive to play its part in the conduct of international relations. It reflects a mutual determination to ensure close co-operation in these areas between the United Kingdom Government and the Executive Committee Ministers in Northern Ireland, with the objective of promoting the overseas interests of the United Kingdom and all its constituent parts.

Sixth, and finally, for the statistics concordat, it is sensible that each Administration has the comparative information it needs. The agreement will help ensure that such information continues to be available at Northern Ireland and UK levels. The concordat sets out an agreed framework for co-operation between the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations on all matters in relation to statistics. I would like to add that the Northern Ireland Statistics

and Research Agency (NISRA) was involved from the outset in its preparation.

I have spoken briefly about what these documents are. They are a first attempt to set out a basis for a working relationship in this new era of devolution within the United Kingdom. More detailed provisions relating to individual policy areas will follow in bilateral concordats to be drawn up between individual Departments of the United Kingdom Government and their devolved counterparts. As a first attempt, therefore, I think these documents are both comprehensive and comprehensible. Provision has been made for the concordats to evolve and be developed in the light of experience. They are merely working documents and part of the machinery that potentially will allow the Executive Committee to work well with the rest of the United Kingdom. As I said at the outset, Scotland and Wales have already considered and agreed their respective documents and are already putting the principles into practice.

I commend the memorandum and the supplementary agreements to the Assembly.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I beg to move the following amendment: Delete all after “Assembly” and add

“will not take note of the Memorandum of Understanding and Supplementary Agreements between Her Majesty’s Government and the Northern Ireland Executive Committee until the political parties have been consulted thereon.”

On Thursday, these documents were delivered to our pigeon-holes, and today we are expected to rubber-stamp something of deep significance. It is all right for Mr Nesbitt to tell us that these are not legally binding. This is a statement of political intent, and that is just as binding as a legal document.

The problem is that we have an Executive that has run wild taking powers to itself, and whether those powers are legal or whether we are just talking about political intent, they lay hold of them, as has been seen by the action of two of the Ministers, the First and Deputy First Ministers, who threatened two of my Colleagues with a grand inquisition chamber today. I am glad that my two Friends said no.

It is very interesting that they did not summon the two IRA/Sinn Féin Ministers who saw to it that no Union flag flew, in keeping with the present status of the law, on their buildings on Friday. I even understand that no flag could fly over the office of the Secretary of State, because that property too is under the control of the Minister of Health.

I find it highly reprehensible that the First and Deputy First Ministers quoted newspaper reports without naming the newspapers and said that, because of those newspaper reports, they were summoning my Colleagues to attend a meeting. When Members of the

Executive think that they have the power to summon Members — *[Interruption]*

**Mr J Kelly:** Does this statement by Dr Paisley have any relevance to the discussion of this document?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** May I ask Dr Paisley not to stray from the document in front of us.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Yes, but I am illustrating a point. If this deaf and dumb man does not understand the point — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Dr Paisley, I must ask you to desist from that type of language.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** What did he say?

It is quite parliamentary, I assure you. The Clerk could not show you anything in the book that says that calling a man deaf and dumb is either unscriptural or out of keeping with the laws of this particular place.

I am seeking to illustrate how power has been seized by people who are drunk on it — they are not going in accordance with legality.

We have a new word here, and I congratulate the ecumenist who introduced it. He has got into religious language for the first time. This is a concordat.

It is interesting to know the history of such concordats. I went into the Library, and consulted our brilliant Librarian friend, Mr George Woodman, who is good to us all and treats us all with great respect. I must say that I respect him for his wisdom and for his love of books. He found for me the meaning of “concordat”.

A concordat is an agreement, a compact, between the Vatican and secular government on matters of mutual interest. I laughed when I saw that. I wondered why his Leader had been away to the Vatican early on in this Assembly to see Papa himself, and I wondered why the Deputy Leader on the other side was also away visiting the Pope — but things are coming out in the wash. The word “Papa” is Italian for “Pope” — in case this dear man gets excited.

At least they have this ecclesiastical language. A famous concordat was signed in the 1920s between the fascist Mussolini and the Vatican. We are in good company. The name they have used to describe this particular document is most interesting.

There are many things I could say today, but I am a parliamentarian and there are others who want to take part. I could speak for two hours on this subject, and rightly so, and you could do nothing about it, Mr Speaker. I am not going to do that. I will allow time for capable people to serve their own interests. This concordat on co-ordination of European Union policies on Northern Ireland is the most one-sided document I ever set eyes on. For the information of Mr Nesbitt,



there are three parts to Europe. Only one part is emphasised in this document: the Council, which consists of all the member states' Ministers on the relevant subject. There are also the Commission and the Parliament. This document says nothing whatsoever about the European Parliament. It ignores the fact that the leader of the SDLP is a member of the European Parliament. It ignores the fact that Mr Nesbitt's own party has a representative in that Parliament, and it ignores the bitter fact that in the last five European elections I have beaten them all, and I am still in Europe.

What mighty benefit did this country ever get from Europe? Even our enemies would cite the peace and reconciliation money. Who got that? The three MEPs got it, but they are now to be ignored. There is no place for them in this document. Why is that? Love of greed for power. Little birds fly through the windows where the Executive meets, and then they fly to me and tell me what is happening. They tell me of great discussions, held secretly and with laughter. "We can put a spoke in Ian Paisley's wheel in Europe" they say, "We will set up our own office, financed by the people of Northern Ireland, and use it for party political ends to forward our own selfish interests, and we will not need to consult the MEPs. We might whisper a few little things in John Hume's ear to keep him sweet and happy, but the others, especially Ian Paisley, will not know." If that is the way they want to play it, let them. It is an outrage to the people of Northern Ireland.

This House knows that all the vital decisions for the agriculture industry are made in Europe. They are not made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. If we are going to get agriculture out of its present mess and bankruptcy, we need a regional policy for Northern Ireland in Europe that is different from any policy for Scotland, Wales or England. We have different needs, which must be met. Now there is talk of unity, of a single common policy.

2.45 pm

That happened with the present Minister of Agriculture. I regret that she is not in the House today. She went to Europe with the Fisheries Minister and came home telling us that she had got the best of a bargain, yet 15% of our cod industry disappeared. Why? Because she was part of one presentation. We need to have the power, and the right, to make a presentation on a regional basis.

Other European countries that have devolved government such as Germany have catered for their areas and the needs of those areas, even though they are different from the national needs. In fact, when they suffered from swine fever, special legislation was passed in Europe to exempt parts of Germany, the

national territory, from those regulations. We have a set-up here in which we are all going to be one, and the Executive thinks that this is how it is going to get anything better for Northern Ireland.

I have sat in Parliament and heard fierce criticism of the peace and reconciliation money. I have heard English Members of the House crying out "Why do we not get this? Why is it not for us?" It was given by M Delors of whom I was never a fan, but at least he realised, because of the pressure that we were putting on him, that people who had suffered tragedy in the past should be tended to, and their needs attended to, by places that got vast amounts of money from Europe. We won that argument, and we got that money.

We need time to consider this document. We need to get provision into it to enable every representative, whether in Europe, in the United Kingdom Parliament or here, to get his voice heard on this.

Various Assemblies and Conventions have met in this House — I have sat in them all. There were only two that I was delighted to sit in, and they were the two that my dear wife was a Member of. It was always a delight to come up and be with her in this House, because I do not see as much of her as I would like. Even when it was only a consultative body with no power, we were able to get the Commissioner to our Committee meetings. The Commissioners are now asking why. The reason is that the Executive does not want them to come to Committee meetings here.

Why should the Commissioner for Fisheries not attend the Agriculture Committee of the House? Why should the men who are responsible for industry not attend the appropriate Committee of the House? The way to get into Europe is to bring these men here, let them see the country and get them to our Committees where they can hear from the representatives who are on those Committees. That has all been swept away; there is not a word about that — not even a consideration or a mention.

We are told that this is a consideration document and that it is easy to understand. I understand what they are doing, and the people of Northern Ireland will understand it. I have marked certain things in this document, and I could go over them. However, it seems that the Executive is intent on driving this through today. We got it on Thursday, and we have to come here today and make these decisions.

These decisions, although they are not legal, are the policy under which the Executive is going to work. They are going to have sad effects upon our economy, our fisheries, our agriculture, our health and social services and all other matters that have now very much become part of Europe. I wonder how all these supposed good Europeans that I have heard are in the Assembly think that the European dimension can be

dismissed. Three representatives are needed. In fact, we were done out of the number we needed. Compared with the South of Ireland, we should have at least five or seven members in Europe. We were done out of that. In fact, at the beginning they only wanted us to have two members.

The Official Unionist Party said that only two should go to Europe. It thought that they would both be Official Unionists, and was glad there were three, because it discovered that its man was always the third to be elected. That is why that was changed. However, we should have five representatives in Europe, and we should not be diminishing their value. Members in this House may not like me. I do not care a fig — I will sleep well tonight and wake in the morning and have my porridge as usual.

Members in this House are saying to their MEPs “We are finished with you now. You have had your say; you got the money and we have spent it. Now, as there is no more peace and reconciliation money coming, we can dispense with you.” I must tell the rest of my story. They said “We will set up this wonderful office.” I have heard of offices being set up before in Europe. They did a mighty lot of good!

The poor businessmen who went over were highly charged for what I, a Ballymena man, could have offered them for nothing. I said to a man “What did they charge you?” “Well,” he said, “it was a large sum of money”. I asked “What for?” “To take us round”. Any goat could surely take a person round that place. It is desperate what that office did. Then it tried to get all the parties to be members of it. It actually put on the names of two of my Colleagues. I wrote to tell it that the Democratic Unionist Party was not in the office and to take the names off. I had a terrible job getting it to take my Colleagues’ names off the notepaper. It insisted that it was a broad church, taking in everybody. That is a church of which I do not want to be a member.

Now another office is going to be set up. Perhaps Mr Nesbitt, seeing that he knows all about this, has defended it, and is its chief apologist, could tell Members some things about this office that is going to be set up. Where will it be located? How much money is being set aside for it? There is not a word about that. It is just passed over without any detail. How many people are going to work in it? Who is going to supervise it? Is the hon Gentleman going to have a continual junket to Brussels, Strasbourg or Luxembourg?

**Mr Nesbitt:** Hear, hear.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** He is saying “Good”. I thought that he, as a friend of Sir Reg Empey, would not like any perks. However, he did not get on as many quangos as Sir Reg, and so he was unhappy. Let us talk about

this office. Where is it going to be? How many members are there going to be? What standing and influence is it going to have? Who is it going to sway? Does he think that the representatives he sends, civil servants, will be able to do for him what public representatives find great difficulty in doing — getting through to the heart of Europe and getting what we deserve from it? Everyone should remember that, per head of population, we have never got out of Europe the tax money we have put into it.

That is not my statement; that is the statement of the British Exchequer. Let us get down to what is going to be beneficial.

So as far as I can see, these concordats are about strengthening the hold of the Executive, and strengthening the hold of the First and Deputy First Ministers on the levers of government. Well, if people want them to strengthen their hold, let them. But what about Northern Ireland’s key industry, agriculture? We cannot have the same laws as the rest of the UK. Our system of agriculture is different. It grew out of a land war, out of people who owned everything and had to let go. Some of the great contenders among the leaders of Northern Ireland were men eminent in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who fought the tenants’ rights for the Ulster Protestant farmers. There were tenant rights fought for the Roman Catholic people as well. Our farming system is different. Our people are not tenant farmers. Their farms are smaller than those in England. It is a different type of farming. What does for the farmers of England does not do for our farmers.

Let us look at what happened in the BSE crisis. The Baroness was Minister at the time. Some of the farmers worshipped her. They always said “We had a lovely meeting with the Baroness”, but I found her absolutely barren as far as farmers’ needs were concerned. The farmers decided to hold a great rally at the King’s Hall, and I was asked to go along and say a few words.

I was not highly critical of anybody, but a man from the Agricultural Producers’ Association was. However, the Baroness thought that it was I. Now, I could have said “Amen” to what he had said, but I did not. She got furious with me, and when we went in to see the Prime Minister she said “How dare you say what you said?” I asked what she meant, and she repeated what this spokesman from the Agricultural Producers’ Association had said. I told her that I had not said it but that I agreed with it. I said “When you were in Tokyo you said Ulster farmers will be treated the same as farmers in the rest of the United Kingdom.” We did not have a BSE crisis. In fact, there is a bigger BSE crisis in the Irish Republic today than we have here in Northern Ireland.

It is because of what happened back then that we have a crisis in our industry today. Eventually the

British Government had to admit that we were different after John Hume, Jim Nicholson and Ian Paisley met the authorities in Brussels and insisted they would not take no for an answer. They agreed that we were different and that they were prepared to make some slight move, but we are not out of that yet. What would happen if everyone agreed there was no such thing as a special place for Ulster's agriculture, not because we are Cinderellas, but simply because it is our right? Would the Minister come back and tell us that another 15% of an industry has gone simply because we have had this concordat, and they have had one vital matter considered and agreed?

3.00 pm

The British Government also tell us that they will know what is happening, that they will start early. I defy them to tell me what is happening in Europe — for Europe does not know what is happening. There is more business brought to the House in speed in Europe than anywhere else. And there is special legislation whereby the Commissioners can get a thing through the House in a gallop. To say that there is going to be a way whereby we will all know what is coming and will have weeks of discussions and be able to be in on the bottom floor is an amazing statement. For even those in the various Commissions do not know where the bottom floor starts in some of those proposals, and they certainly do not know where it ends.

Overall, the United Kingdom representative will be the Office who will approach the European biggies. It will not be public representatives doing the approaching, he will. I always thought that the Parliament was a place for lobby, but, evidently, now it will be a place where lobbying will be ineffective because the Commissioner can say "We have a concordat. We have agreed with your representative that this is what you are getting." And if the representatives from the Executive in Ulster say "This is the way", then they can say "We do not want to listen to you."

So here we have something that we need to take care of. I have spoken too long already, but it needed to be said. I have no apology for what I have said. I say to the representatives "What skin is it off your face to take this back for at least a week, or for two weeks, so that the parties in the House can all have a look at it and then come back and say where they differ and have a proper debate on it?"

**Mr Neeson:** I have a fair amount of sympathy for the points that Dr Paisley has made, and there are a number of issues within the documents that need clarification. If Dr Paisley were to establish some form of timescale whereby this could be brought back to the Assembly, I would be prepared to go along with that.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I do not want to prolong the thing. But I want to have time to look at it.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask Dr Paisley to address the House through the Chair.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Mr Speaker, in reply to the question that has been put to me, we can have a timescale — a reasonable timescale — and we must have an opportunity to put down amendments to various things that the Executive wants to carry through. That would be reasonable. Let it go back to the parties, for there is no use in taking it back to the Committees, because they are divided. Let them go back to the parties and let the parties then come. But I would be happy to go to the various Committees if that were the mind of the House. I would have no problem with that.

**Mr Neeson:** There are a number of issues that need clarified on what is being proposed. I do not necessarily agree wholeheartedly with Dr Paisley, because in many ways what is being put forward strengthens devolution, but there are concerns. For example, does the Pledge of Office undertaken by individual Ministers oblige them to fulfil the understandings reached within these concordats? On the question of the memorandum of understanding, what measures are envisaged for general consultation with the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly — rather than the Secretary of State — on non-devolved matters in which the people of Northern Ireland have a particular interest? One example, from the Scottish Parliament, is that Jack Straw has allowed the entry into the United Kingdom of Mike Tyson, a convicted rapist.

The event will take place in Scotland, and the Scottish Parliament has spoken out against his being allowed into the country. I see a serious conflict of interest arising in that situation.

I agree with what Dr Paisley said in relation to the concordat on co-ordination of European Union policy issues as they relate to Northern Ireland. I quote directly from the document, underlining the case that has already been made:

"The role of Ministers and officials from the devolved administrations will be to support and advance the single UK negotiating line which they have played a part in developing."

The case of the BSE crisis is crucial in showing the fallacy of going forward with a single UK policy. Devolution is there to reflect the interests of the individual regions of the United Kingdom.

What plans do the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have to bring European legislation to the attention of the Assembly, and to ascertain the views of Members?

One other issue that greatly troubles me is in the concordat on financial assistance to industry. All the



regions of the United Kingdom are in competition. A few years ago, the textile company Hualon wanted to establish a large factory at Mallusk. However, due to the delay resulting from the intervention of another UK region that opposed the grant assistance which was being proposed for Hualon, Northern Ireland lost the opportunity of a major investment.

With regard to financial assistance to shipbuilding, the Government are abiding strictly by the European legislation — other regions of Europe are not.

There are a number of issues that need to be clarified in relation to the document, and I ask the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to seriously reconsider pushing this through the House today. Let us have some further consultation on it.

I recognise the need for these concordats to develop the necessary linkages, and I appreciate Mr Nesbitt's point that they will be reviewed annually. However, I ask for more time for the Assembly to consider a meaningful input.

**Dr Birnie:** We should be grateful for the speech from the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party — not so much because it was a good example of Unionism, but because it was a good example of an exposition for Ulster Nationalism. The memorandum of understanding has been in public circulation since October 1999 in its Scottish and Welsh form — the Northern Ireland version differs slightly. A careful reading suggests that the arrangements are not about strengthening the prerogatives of our Executive, but are about a series of working arrangements aimed at trying to give coherence to the United Kingdom in an era of devolution. I would have thought that the Democratic Unionist Party would be in favour of maintaining the United Kingdom.

With respect to the amendment proposed by the DUP, if it wished to have more consideration of these provisions, its two Ministers could have been present at the meeting of the Executive last Thursday.

They need not have relied on little birds flying in and out to relay messages from the Executive Chamber. The amendment would negate the motion entirely if passed, so we do have to be somewhat unclear as to whether its intention or indeed its consequence suggests that it is truly an amendment indeed.

As the leader of the Alliance Party has already pointed out, there is currently a dispute between the Scottish Parliament and the Home Secretary in London, Jack Straw, over his decision. The dispute relates to who should actually control immigration policy for Scotland and, more specifically, whether Mike Tyson should go to Glasgow to fight. Perhaps he should come to Stormont instead. I use that example because it illustrates that what we are talking about today is not a piece of constitutional arcanery; it is not simply about

changing the constitutional furniture in a way which will have no impact on the lives of ordinary people. The relationship between decisions at different layers of government within the United Kingdom affects everybody. The intense public interest in Scotland in the Tyson decision is indicative of that point.

I welcome the publication of these concordats. The whole structure of memorandum of understanding plus concordats is to serve, as one academic observer, Prof Robert Hazell of the Constitution Unit in London, has put it, as a sort of gearbox within the rapidly changing post-devolution structure of government within the United Kingdom.

The idea of the memorandum of understanding, I think, first emerged back in July 1998 when Lady Ramsey was speaking in the House of Lords on the subject of Scottish devolution. But now the memorandum of understanding and the associated concordats are out in the open, and I trust that none of these mechanisms is designed to smother devolution at birth.

Now it has sometimes been feared, particularly by the SNP — and in a curious way it would seem that the DUP adopts a position somewhat similar to that of the SNP on these issues — it was feared, and perhaps still is feared by Scottish Nationalists, that the joint Ministerial Committees are some sort of device to discipline the devolved Administrations so that they toe the London line on policy issues. But I think that they offer the potential for those Administrations, including our own, to have a greater input into the formation of central United Kingdom Government policy. I welcome the Chancellor of the Exchequer's initiative in December of last year when he established JMC steering groups, and I understand that one is meeting today to bring together the various United Kingdom Administrations on topics such as child poverty, pensions and the digital age economy.

Chancellor Gordon Brown said that the purpose was to create

“a new covenant of common purpose”.

I think that even Dr Paisley, precisely Dr Paisley, could not object to the particular ecclesiastical allusion which is contained in that.

As regards EU matters the concordat speaks of maintaining a

“common United Kingdom negotiating line within Europe”.

I welcome this, notwithstanding what has been said by other Members who have spoken, because advice which I have received from experts in Germany based on their experience. Each of the 16 German provinces — or *Länder* — has on occasions attempted to pursue a separate position, be it on agriculture or industry, in Brussels. The result has been detrimental to the Federal



Republic of Germany's overall bargaining position in the Council of Ministers.

3.15 pm

The implication, I believe, is that in the long run we in Northern Ireland are better off with a common single United Kingdom position. This should, of course, be drawn up with input from the Northern Ireland Executive and, rightly, there is provision for that in the concordats. I also welcome the provision for and emphasis on monitoring industrial policy. The chief benefit here is the avoidance of expensive bidding wars between the various regions of the UK which would simply work to the benefit of a small number of global multinationals, by enabling them to move back and forth between regions where, they claim, they might set up a factory and to squeeze more and more Government grants out of long-suffering taxpayers. The concordat sets up a mechanism which will, hopefully prevent such bidding wars and hence achieve better value for money on behalf of the taxpayer.

In general these concordats follow the template already established last October in Command Paper 4444 relating to Scotland and Wales, though it is worth noting there are a few details relating to our own particular position — space is provided, formally speaking, for the operation of both the British-Irish Council and the North/South Ministerial Council.

To conclude, I welcome this take-note motion from the First and Deputy First Ministers. These arrangements are, as the junior Minister noted, not legally binding, but they are part of the evolution of the UK Constitution and, just as that Constitution has in previous centuries successfully adapted to earlier challenges, I have no doubt that it can do so again in this era of devolution.

**Ms Morrice:** I too took a great deal of time to go through these documents, and I have come to the conclusion that a great deal more clarification is needed, certainly on essential issues. If I may I would like to go through each of the memoranda and point out issues where certain clarification is needed. I will begin with the specific Memorandum of Understanding — and this is a simple point but one which perhaps lies outside our jurisdiction — but there are many references to four Administrations. Obviously, there is one in Northern Ireland, one in Scotland, one in Wales and one in the UK. I do not understand how the role of the UK Ministers, acting on behalf of England as well as of the UK, fits in here. A great deal more clarity is needed in order to understand England's position in this newly-devolved situation and how UK Ministers, acting on behalf of non-devolved issues UK-wide, can also act on behalf of English issues.

I go on to what is, perhaps, a less contentious but equally important point about the rules on financial assistance to industry. The document states

“Separate but comparable arrangements apply in Northern Ireland.”

There are common guidelines for industry. All parties to this concordat commit to mutual consultation in adequate detail and to a reasonable timescale where any party proposes to change its policy and practice. This is vitally important and could be very valuable to this devolved Government in Northern Ireland. For example, there is a consideration that we could, perhaps, change our support to industry and reduce our corporate tax rates, similar to the situation in the south of Ireland. When this was proposed in the past, the answer from London was always “Oh no. We must stick to the UK-wide line.” I am assuming that, within this concordat on financial assistance to industry, we have the right to change policy as long as we consult in time. It would be valuable to clarify that we have that right.

Next, I wish to make a general point concerning statistics. I do not know whether Members notice this, but often Northern Ireland does not appear when UK-wide statistics are issued. Perhaps this occurs simply because television news leaves Northern Ireland out, but it definitely does not appear on UK-wide statistics adequately enough. Perhaps we could make sure we insist that Northern Ireland always appears on UK-wide statistics.

My final point, the most detailed of all, concerns the European Union. Both Dr Paisley and Mr Neeson have mentioned our need always to share the UK line. The point that has been made that the BSE crisis exemplifies the problem where a solid, standard UK line is not appropriate in Brussels. I would also refer to parts of these concordats concerning the North/South Ministerial Council and the Special EU Programmes Body, and the fact that agreement will be reached at a North/South level on certain European issues. I want to know how agreement at that North/South level can be transferred into UK-wide agreement to adhere to a common line. There is no clarity on this issue. It has certainly not been thought through enough, and the UK-line argument must take much more account of the specific needs and demands of Northern Ireland as a distinct and special region within the UK.

On issues such as representation, I tend to agree with Dr Paisley when he speaks of the value of the role of European Parliament Members, for example. I am surprised that this document does not refer to Members of the European Parliament and their role in lobbying at European level. The question of representation does not in fact simply mean representation in Brussels, and I would be very interested in asking the junior Minister a

question. I noticed a reference to representation overseas in the concordat on international relations:

“The devolved administrations may establish offices overseas within the framework of their responsibility for devolved matters (including for the provision of information on devolved matters to the public, regional governments and institutions, and promotion of trade and inward investment).”

I would be fascinated to know what consuls, embassies or offices we intend to set up in Africa, Asia, Latin America or Eastern Europe. A great deal more information would be useful on these issues. I agree that these documents are important, and Members of this House would appreciate more time to understand their exact implications and the Executive’s exact intentions when we sign up to or at least take note of them.

**Mr Leslie:** I would like to add three or four observations to the comments already made by my Colleagues. In doing so, I want to focus on the fact that this memorandum, whilst not binding, is a statement of political intent. Political intent can always be changed by events, and there is plenty of scope in the wording of these memoranda for the devolved territories to probe the boundaries that have been set out. It does not say so in the document, but it is fairly obvious to me that it should be in the interests of the devolved territories to work together to find common interests. They may be remarkably effective in doing so.

It remains to be seen how that evolves in practice and it is, perhaps, the fear of this that has set the whole tone, certainly of the Memorandum of Understanding itself, to be quite schoolmasterly in the way that it continually reasserts the power and sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament to, in its own words, retain “the absolute right to debate, enquire into or make representations about devolved matters”.

It is a pity that Assembly Member Roche is not here because he always seems to be rather confused about sovereignty. He would undoubtedly find it helpful to read these documents, as they seem to be very specific on this point.

I will not go into the points that have already been made on the European Union, but I noted rather fierce wording about the differences of approach in implementing EU regulations. It is apparent that across Europe there is a very considerable difference of approach towards the implementation of regulations. Some European countries are very much more expert in this matter than others. I was struck by the emphasis, which occurred several times in the document, on the importance of having, effectively, a common approach and that Whitehall intended to have a close scrutiny role in this.

Furthermore, any devolved territory deviating from the central path would face any financial consequences that might accrue. I suggest that when the time comes,

this Assembly should, perhaps, be bold in some of these matters, and it would be interesting to discuss with the other devolved territories what approach they intend to take. This will become particularly apparent when we come to matters where there are marked differences of emphasis between what is important in England and what might be important in Scotland or Northern Ireland. The last thing that we should do at this stage is clarify these matters too closely. It would be much better if that were left to emerge over time.

My final comment relates to the concordat on international relations. I was particularly struck by paragraph 22, which pointed out that “the World Service aims to bring benefit to the United Kingdom and all its constituent parts by broadcasting authoritative and impartial news and information”. I wish that I felt confident that it did. I note that the devolved Administrations were invited to maintain direct links with the BBC World Service on matters of mutual interest. I very much hope that this Administration will attend to a matter of mutual interest by ensuring that its broadcasting is both authoritative and impartial. I commend this motion to the House.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Mr Deputy Speaker, you have had to endure your time in the Chair today. You are probably not enjoying it after listening to Mr Nesbitt’s death-inspiring speech and some of the other contributions. Indeed, I noted some of Mr Birnie’s comments were akin to being ravaged by a dead worm. The Assembly and my party appreciate the fact that the Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition have found merit in the proposal and the amendment that my party has brought forward. I hope that they will join us in the Lobby, if it comes to that, during the course of today’s sitting.

3.30 pm

The real purpose of bringing forward this amendment is to secure for this Assembly what it deserves: full and proper consultation on what are indeed important matters. The question before the House is essentially that of whose interests come first. Is it the interests of this Assembly, acting for the people of Northern Ireland, or, as Mr Leslie said, are we to throw our trust in with a joint interest over which we do not have the same influence as in this place? Indeed, Mr Leslie has just asked the Assembly not to seek clarification, but the purpose of this House is to secure clarification so it can act, it is to be hoped, in the best interests of the people we represent. It is absolutely essential that we have clarification in order to move forward.

I should like to deal with some of the specific points raised. One in particular caught my attention: the issue of communication and consultation. That is exactly what we seek today, proper communication and proper consultation. This document outlines that on those two

issues a certain set of procedures has to be followed. First of all, the Assemblies and the Ministers must alert each other as soon as possible to relevant developments within their areas of responsibility, preferably prior to publication. There is no established code of conduct as to how the Assemblies and the Ministers should alert each other. Is it by telephone call from Departmental Private Secretary to Departmental Private Secretary? Is it by letter or document? Is it by despatch between Departments or from the Minister? That point needs to be clarified.

It goes on to say that they must give appropriate consideration to the views of other administrations. We want to know what standard has been set for appropriate consideration. It is absolutely essential that we can at least assume that it will be higher than the consultation in this Assembly. Before Christmas we had the nonsense of the First Minister running off to Downing Street without even consulting his Agriculture Minister, and informing the Prime Minister about policy matters to do with agriculture. That was within the framework of this Assembly. Can we at least assume that consultation and appropriate consideration of people's views will actually occur, despite the previous standard of this House?

Mr Nesbitt is asking us to rubber-stamp a very unclear document. Indeed, if the issue of confidentiality — absolutely critical in some of the policies the memorandum deals with and will deal with — were to go through in its current form, we are told a code of practice would be established regarding access to Government information or that of equivalent devolved regimes, and, in due course, the requirements of future freedom-of-information regimes. Yet nowhere in these documents have we seen an outline code of practice. It is critical that the Assembly should at least be shown the code of practice so we can make a decision based not on trust — as some people would have us do — not on blind faith, but on the actual documents put before us. Without seeing that code of practice, this Assembly would be extremely foolish to endorse this Memorandum of Understanding. The junior Minister, instead of coming to this Assembly and asking us to rubber-stamp something incomplete, would be far better going back to his desk and completing the job he was given to do by his mentor, the First Minister. Perhaps if he came back with a better document, the Assembly would be pleased to lend it its full support. At the moment it is very difficult for him to ask for and, indeed, expect the full support and confidence of the House on this matter.

Parliamentary business, which appears on the memorandum, again shows some woolly-headed thinking by the junior Minister. He says in paragraph 14

“The United Kingdom Parliament retains absolute right to debate, enquire into, or make representations about devolved matters.”

Fine and true. That covers the issue of sovereignty, and I have no question about that not even later in the document. But two sentences later in the same paragraph he says that Parliament itself will in future be more restricted. But what is it? Does Parliament have an absolute right or does it have a restricted right? There seems to be uncertainty, so both points are put in. What role Parliament at Westminster will have with regard to the activities of the Assembly must be spelt out clearly. In the past — and we all know our history — people said that the old Parliament fell because certain issues could not be raised at Westminster. But what side of the debate is the Ulster Unionist Party on? What side of the debate are the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on in this issue? Do they want Parliament to retain its absolute right to inquire and to debate without restriction, or do they want to see Parliament's right to debate and inquire into events in the Assembly restricted?

It is essential that the junior Minister confirm this matter to the House, because it is not exactly spelt out clearly here. Perhaps if it were spelt out in very clear and precise terms, Sinn Féin and the SDLP would not support the memorandum. But the junior Minister should confirm that, if any future Westminster Parliament so determined, it could repeal the Northern Ireland Act 1998 without reference to the people of Northern Ireland and irrespective of referenda or whatever. That point was glossed over very quickly, but it should be spelt out and verified to the House.

In moving the amendment, my party leader mentioned the role of the MEPs, who are not, as far as I can determine, asking for special privileges. However, they are asking for one thing, and that is to be consulted about issues upon which, and this is clear, the three of them have a particular expertise. It ill behoves this Chamber, as it would ill behove the Administration, to ignore that expertise which has achieved, against the odds, tens of millions of pounds for Northern Ireland, for community and infrastructure projects, which for years were denied to us. All we are seeking is proper consultation, nothing else, just proper consultation.

However, unfortunately these concordats, especially the one on the European Union, actually wipe out that consultation altogether. The one on the European Union actually establishes that the Republic of Ireland has a greater influence on, say in and right to be consulted on Northern Ireland via the North/South Council than have Unionists or Nationalists directly elected in Northern Ireland itself. That should concern everyone in the House, no matter what his political baggage. Unionists in particular should be alarmed that if this goes through in its current form it will give Nationalists a greater say because Unionists are outnumbered on the North/South Ministerial Council.



The junior Minister is asking us, in the words of James Leslie, to trust and throw our lot in entirely with the United Kingdom representative. However, the United Kingdom representative does not always have the rights and interests of the people of Northern Ireland at heart. One would like to think that the United Kingdom representative, when he or she establishes the negotiating position for the United Kingdom, would be prepared to take on board the interests of Northern Ireland. But that is not always possible and it is rarely achieved. Usually the greater interests of England, and sometimes Wales, are achieved by the United Kingdom representative rather than the interests of all the regions. It is foolish for the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the junior Minister to ask us to sign a blank cheque for the United Kingdom representative on behalf of the Assembly and to let him expect, at any time, the full support of the Assembly on these important matters.

Mr Neeson and Ms Morrice raised the issue of investment, and their points were very well made with regard to financial assistance to industry. Indeed, if the procedures established under these terms and conditions had been followed, an industry in my constituency — one of the largest employers — would today be closed.

It would have considerably slowed down the rights of a company to determine where it should best be situated. Unfortunately, I do not believe that good business practice would be possible under paragraph 7 of the concordat on financial assistance to industry. That is not the way business is done in the modern world. It would preclude many businesses from operating effectively and from making arrangements in regions of the United Kingdom. Why should Northern Ireland have to wait before making offers to companies to locate or relocate here? We should not have to wait for another region to come up with a better offer, or until the prospective jobs go to a different member of the European Union. It would be better for Northern Ireland to strike while the iron is hot.

It is essential that the House, after considering the importance of what is before it, votes for my party's amendment. This amendment will allow all parties to have greater consultation and consideration on these important matters before they are rubber-stamped. The junior Minister should return to his desk and put together a more substantial paper that we can support.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Before I call the next Member, I want to say that we have two more Members who wish to speak, plus Dr Paisley, who wishes to speak to his amendment, with Mr Haughey winding up. I am aware of the time, and I hope that Members will also bear it in mind.

**Mr O'Neill:** I will indeed be brief, not least because many of the points that needed to be made have already

been covered. However, I reiterate that my party will be opposing the amendment, because we believe it to be disingenuous. The DUP did, as has been pointed out, have an opportunity to engage in full and meaningful discussions with the rest of the Executive. They chose not to. I can only describe it as disingenuous if they then call for further consultation.

Secondly, the whole notion that there is not enough time to discuss this is also disingenuous. The motion clearly asks the Assembly to "take note of" this memorandum, not to adopt it or make it a legal requirement. It has already been explained that there will be at least one annual opportunity to review this. If there are problems in the operation of this package that present difficulty for any part of the Assembly, there will be an opportunity to review it, because this is a *modus operandi* that will enable the various devolved Assemblies to interrelate and to work together.

3.45 pm

We heard this morning the Minister of Finance and Personnel's concern about the budget delays caused by suspension. We do not want to see any further unnecessary delays. It is unnecessary to delay if there are built-in opportunities to review, examine and change where required. On those two bases, it is disingenuous.

The play that Dr Paisley made on the word "concordat" was interesting. Members will remember from their history classes that the concordat was the conclusion of a row arising from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. It was concluded, as he rightly said, between the Vatican and Italy in 1929. In line with most of his analyses, Dr Paisley was at least a century or two out. If he had pursued his enquiries with that eminent librarian, he would know that the word concordat has had many uses and interpretations since then, even among peoples who have never heard of the Franco-Prussian War or Mussolini, or perhaps even the Pope.

It is out of date, and it reflects, as I have said, some of the other ideas that we are constantly getting from the DUP. Mr Paisley Jnr also referred to the good work that was being done by MEPs. I am glad he paid tribute to our party leader in this regard as well as in respect of the peace and reconciliation package. Our party leader had a similar agenda some years ago when he ensured the creation of the International Fund for Ireland which supplied money to people in need. Those are the kind of international pressures we should all be dealing with, and we should be working with the Governments involved in our devolved situation, in Europe and in an international situation. That would be a good benchmark for co-operation — the more co-operation we have at different levels, the better.

**Mr Savage:** I support the junior Minister's paper. Quite a number of things have happened in Northern



Ireland over the past two or three years and I am referring in particular to the agriculture industry. There has been crisis after crisis — BSE, the pig meat sector and right along the line. Every time proposals were put forward in Belfast or elsewhere, they seem to have got lost somewhere along the way. If a committee is going to be set up in Brussels, or anywhere else, I welcome that. In my experience we in Northern Ireland have lost out over the last two or three years.

I would not want this to be another quango — this country is full of quangoes — but it should be a place where people representing their industry can go to do a bit of straight talking. I am speaking primarily about the agriculture industry, but there are many smaller industries that also need an injection of funds. It would not take much to make a big difference, and I hope that the proposals put forward by the junior Minister will carry a lot of weight. Northern Ireland is a very small country, and we depend on our exporting industry so much.

This is going to be looked at every year, and we will have the opportunity to pull the rug from under the feet of these people if they are not fulfilling their obligations. One thing which concerns me very much is in paragraph 3 of Mr Nesbitt's paper, and that is that broadly uniform arrangements need to apply to the handling of matters with an EU dimension, notably financial assistance to industry. Financial well-being could have done so much to help the agriculture industry over the last two or three years — and could still do so. Finance has to come from various sources in order to get the industry back on to a level par with all our competitors worldwide.

I hope this proposal goes forward today. It will, in some small way, attempt to alleviate the problems facing the agriculture industry. Many of the small industries that we discussed today would also benefit from a bit of stability, but it would be a big bonus to the farming industry in Northern Ireland.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I have listened with interest to what has been said — especially to what Mr O'Neill said. I am glad we have such a brilliant man among us, who can revise the Oxford dictionary. I trust that he will immediately write to the compilers of the Oxford dictionary and give them his definition of a concordat, because I read in the dictionary that it is an agreement; especially one between the Vatican and a secular Government relating to matters of mutual interest. My definition is from the dictionary. I did not write the Oxford dictionary. I am blamed for writing many things, but Mr O'Neill is going to rewrite the dictionary. I congratulate him. I hope that he will do well, get the right definitions, and change the dictionary. Then, the next time I come, I will not need to waste the valuable time of this House explaining that the Oxford dictionary

is wrong and that it cannot be upheld. The argument that he puts is absolute nonsense because we have a right to call for the business of this House to be conducted in a decent manner.

Dr Birnie tells us that we should have seen the Scottish and Welsh memoranda. Who is he talking to? We are dealing with documents for this House. He had to admit that the memoranda were not even the same. Then he said that I am a Nationalist because of the speech that I made today — and him in harness with IRA/Sinn Féin. We know who the Nationalists in this House are, and who their fellow travellers are. I will not waste time in answering that. The House can roll this through because there is a majority — Members can do that. However, that will result in sad reaping because there are ways to influence Europe, and British Ministers have singularly failed in influencing Europe.

I pay tribute to my colleagues in Europe, as I always do, but M Delors addressed me, and me alone, at our meeting with him. I was the man who pressed him on the issue of giving money to those who had felt the cruel bondage of terrorism. At the end of the day he said to me "Yes, I believe we should help them."

That money was invaluable to us. Alas, the deadline will expire and, evidently, there will be no renewal. However, those who are elected to Europe and know how it works cannot be ignored. If the Executive want to go this way they can, but all these matters raised by other Members are important and they will result in suffering for the people represented.

I have been told that I should be in the Opposition. I am an Opposition Member of this House, and everybody knows that. However, I am then told that my two Ministers are responsible for this situation. I have never heard such balderdash in all my life. They were not present. They never received a letter summoning them to meet the inquisition. I would like to tell them that the inquisition days are over and the belts, the wheels, and the tortures are past. We are a free people, and we are not going to be railroaded by anyone. We will do our own thing within the law, and I congratulate my two Members.

I laughed. When it suited people in this House to applaud my two Colleagues, they applauded them. Then, when it did not suit their political way, they derided them. They cannot have it both ways. The two Departments will go on with their work no matter who is in the seat. We know what we are going to do — and we will do it.

Alas, the House has decided not to listen to the appeal that has been made today. Upon Members' heads be it — carry on. However, they should not try and make excuses before the general public. When the

general public questions Members on this matter, they should tell the truth.

Members must not try to say that they are giving a place to the MEPs when they are not. They did not even mention them. They did not see any place for them, and they should acknowledge that. They think that they can do better, but we will see. I wonder how many offices there will be and appointments made. They could have offices here, there and everywhere, but instead of spending money on offices they should be spending money on the people that need it most, and that is the farming community. Every extra penny should be going to the farming community, rather than on a grandiose scheme for offices round the world.

**Mr Haughey:** I want to begin by bringing some superior classical knowledge to bear upon the debate about the meaning of the word “concordat”. It simply means “it is agreed”. Perhaps Dr Paisley should have been looking at the old Latin primer and not the Oxford dictionary. It was used originally to describe the agreement between the Italian State and the papacy, but it has been used many times since to describe various levels of understanding between different bodies.

I beg leave to oppose the amendment and to call upon the House to support the original motion before it. In opposing the amendment I should say, with all respect, that Dr Paisley appears to have misunderstood the purpose of the memorandum and its supplementary agreements. As has already been said, the purpose of the memorandum is to set down principles which will underlie relations between the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is a declaration of intent to co-operate with each other, an administrative arrangement designed to facilitate best practice and good models of communication in dealing with business, so that good channels of communication can exist and the devolved Administrations and the United Kingdom Administration at Westminster and Whitehall are fully informed of what each of the others is doing and can communicate and discuss matters with them.

The memorandum was considered by the Executive Committee on three occasions, and the papers were provided to Executive Committee Ministers. Those papers clearly set out the purpose of the memorandum. I want to show the House the document that we are talking about. It was published in October 1999; it has been available since then; and explanatory papers and memoranda have been available to Executive Ministers. The DUP Ministers would have had a better appreciation of it if they had attended Executive meetings. However, they had all the papers and these should have been passed to their party colleagues and discussed with them.

Today’s debate arises out of the Executive’s concern to ensure transparency at all times and to keep the Assembly fully informed. Hence, the matter is being dealt with by way of a “take note” debate, rather than by a ministerial statement or a “teed-up” question for written answer, which would have deprived Members of the opportunity to ventilate and explore fully the issues involved. These documents, and all this material, have been in the public domain since last October. For many months now parties and Members have had the opportunity to read, to digest, to debate among themselves, to explore and otherwise to internalise the content. The Executive has, in fact, fulfilled the remit which is included in Dr Paisley’s amendment: it has enabled parties and Members of the House to examine, discuss and analyse the documents.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

4.00 pm

Given that the Executive has discussed them three times, with, as I said, all the papers available to them, the purpose and intent of Dr Paisley’s motion had already been anticipated and accomplished by the Executive before he tabled his amendment.

The further matters that I want to refer to arise out of points made by individual Members. I will come to them in the order that I noted them, and I will try to be as coherent as possible, although different Members did refer to the same points, and I may find myself repeating some considerations.

This concordat is between the Executive and the Westminster authorities. Dr Paisley raised the question of whether the MEPs had any role in this. Without meaning any disrespect to any of the three MEPs, the answer is “No”. Because the concordat is between the Executive and the Westminster Government, it does not concern or involve Members of the European Parliament. They are not central to the operations of this concordat.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** In the papers that I have — a Memorandum of Understanding and an agreement on the Joint Ministerial Committee — the word “concordat” has not been used. The word “agreement” has been used in the Joint Ministerial Committee paper. “Concordat” is only used in the papers on the co-ordination of European Union policies, financial assistance to industry and international relations.

**Mr Haughey:** The Memorandum of Understanding sets down the general principles. The supplementary agreements refer to particular areas of policy and explain how the Memorandum of Understanding is to be applied in those areas. The Joint Ministerial Council is simply a mechanism by which the members of the Executives of the devolved Administrations may consult with the Ministers and Secretaries of State at

Westminster, and among themselves. It is simply a mechanism.

However, I will deal with the points made by Dr Paisley in relation to the representation of Northern Ireland as a region within the European Union. On the one hand there was his assertion that Northern Ireland needs a separate line, a separate policy and a separate approach to European issues. He specifically enlarged on that in relation to agriculture, and our need to elaborate a quite distinct and separate line about Northern Ireland's interests.

I find it difficult to reconcile that with the assertion that he makes from time to time about the absolute supremacy and sovereignty of the Westminster Government. If we are to take a separate line in Northern Ireland then we need mechanisms, processes and facilities to enable us to pursue a different line, or at least a modified line on European policy.

Dr Paisley took issue with the intention of the Administration to set up a facility in Brussels. As he rightly says, that is where all major policy decisions are taken in very important areas, such as agriculture. If he is opposed to the setting up of a facility in Brussels that would enable the Administration to pursue its interests directly through having its own servants and facilities there, would that not leave us totally dependent on UKRep? That brings me to the point made by Mr Ian Paisley Jnr, who said we should not be totally dependent on UKRep. Father and son need to get their heads together on that and decide which exactly we want. Do we want the facility to pursue our own line, or do we want to be totally dependent on UKRep? The two are not reconcilable. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Haughey:** We intend to set up a regional office representing this Administration and our other regional interests in the European Union. Precisely because our interests totally diverge from the interests of English farmers we need to be able to pursue a different line. That is precisely the point I am making. I am glad to say that it would appear that on this issue Dr Paisley and I are as one person.

On a practical level, the processes and the mechanisms that the Executive will develop for pursuing the interests of this region in Brussels will, of necessity, and rightly, involve a primary role for the MEPs. Without appearing to be sycophantic, I pay tribute to them for the work that they have done and the many benefits that they have brought to this region through their co-operation, interaction and sharing of power in their roles as Members of the European Parliament.

Setting up the processes, the practices and the mechanisms by which we will represent our interests as

a region in the European community will involve a primary role for the MEPs, but will also, I hope, involve a role for Members of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Union, Members of the Committee of the Regions and their alternates, and many other people from a wide range of sectors in Northern Ireland society.

Dr Paisley said that we should have five representatives in Europe, rather than three. That confused me because in having three we have slightly more than our proportionate share of the 81 Members for the UK. If we were to have five that would indeed call into question the entire British link. And if that is what he wants to do he has an ally in me.

Dr Paisley said that we have never received from Europe what we have put into it. That may be true of the United Kingdom Government as a whole, but it is not true of Northern Ireland as a region. The United Kingdom Government has been a net contributor to the EU budget but Northern Ireland has been, enormously, a net benefactor of both the EU budget and UK internal budget. There is no real relevance in Dr Paisley's point.

The concordat and the memorandum mentioned the Council of Ministers because it is the primary authority in the European Union. It is comprised of Ministers from the Member States and the memorandum includes the right for Members of the Executive in the House to take their place in the Council when appropriate.

Some questions were asked about the office in Brussels. Work is ongoing by way of providing this information to the House. The office will be located close to the European Parliament building. Its staffing will be a matter for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the numbers and levels have not yet been determined.

The role of the office will be to liaise with the European Union institutions in order to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests are taken fully into account where relevant, to alert Government Departments here to issues arising in Brussels, to provide a base and support for visiting Ministers and to raise the profile of Northern Ireland in Europe.

Not all aspects of the shaping of the facility in Brussels have been agreed yet, but it will involve a formal level of representation where official business is carried out, and an informal level of representation where interests are pursued, information is gathered, lobbying is done and a facility is provided to representatives of the various sectors of industry and society in Northern Ireland.

Dr Paisley spoke about agriculture, which, in common with other major areas of policy, will be the subject of bilateral concordats agreed between the relevant departments in Whitehall and Northern Ireland.



Consequently, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will have its own separate concordat with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), which will set out a framework for relations within the overarching principles set out in the Memorandum of Understanding. These bilateral concordats between our Departments and those in Westminster will be published as and when they are finalised and agreed.

Mr Neeson referred to the Pledge of Office. The Memorandum of Understanding is not legally binding either on Departments or on Ministers. Rather, it represents models of best practice which, I hope, all Ministers and Members will support. Communication is a two-way street, and the Memorandum of Understanding also applies to the United Kingdom Administration and their obligation to inform and consult us.

With regard to matters such as the visa for Mike Tyson, I should say that the Memorandum of Understanding and the concordats do not affect the constitutional position. There are still issues, such as immigration, which remain within the remit of the Westminster Government. The Memorandum of Understanding provides a framework within which consultation can take place on these issues, but at the moment it does not replace the United Kingdom Government's authority under the legislation.

Mr Neeson also raised the Mallusk case. I cannot comment on specific cases. Clearly competition will continue amongst United Kingdom regions, and the IDB will continue to make every possible effort to secure success for Northern Ireland. However, the concordat will ensure — as Dr Birnie pointed out — that competition does not lead to regions paying a higher price than they might otherwise do in order to secure inward investment. The current situation lends itself to competitive bidding between the regions. This can be to everybody's disadvantage. In certain circumstances one might be able to sneak an advantage from it, but in the main it is to everybody's disadvantage. The concordat and the memorandum of understanding provide us with a framework within which we can prevent that and, by creating jobs, reduce the subsidy burden on the taxpayer.

Ms Morrice made reference to the role of United Kingdom Ministers in relation to the supposed duality of their position in representing, first of all, the whole of the United Kingdom, but specifically the English interest in circumstances where there are three other devolved Administrations. Constitutionally that does not arise. United Kingdom Ministers do not represent England as a region. They represent all of the United Kingdom, while the Ministers from the devolved Administrations represent only the regions.

Ms Morrice also asked about Northern Ireland not being adequately represented in United Kingdom statistics. I should say in reply that this is exactly the sort of thing that the concordat is designed to deal with.

Dr Ian Paisley made reference to communication and consultation, and he set out principles and procedures for the Assembly. He mentioned telephone, fax, meeting, letter, and so on. All methods will be employed. In order to make sure that the public record is adequately maintained, in the main it will be done by writing, but in circumstances where urgency arises it may well first be done by telephone call or by other means.

Mr Paisley Jnr or Snr asked about the code of practice on access to Government information. This has been in the public domain since 1993 or 1994 and, therefore, is not a matter that has been kept from either himself or anyone else.

4.15 pm

It was Mr Paisley Jnr who raised the matter of whether the United Kingdom Parliament's authority was to be absolute or restricted. In the modern world no Parliament or Government's authority is absolute anymore. The UK Parliament, under the legislation that stands at the moment, retains overall authority but, essentially as a courtesy to devolved Administrations, it commits itself through these concordats, this memorandum of understanding, and indeed other conventions that have been drawn up through the years, to consult with devolved Administrations and not to legislate on devolved matters without such consultation. That is the situation that existed in the past, and the same convention will, I think, be applied to all of the devolved institutions that exist at the moment.

Mr Neeson asked about timescales. As I said before, these papers have all been available since October, and parties and Members should have consulted, or at least read and digested their contents.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Given that the junior Minister has accepted that a number of points raised by my party, the Alliance party and the Women's Coalition have identified, in the last two hours, a number of flaws that are apparent in this document, will the Member not reconsider his position? Will he agree to the amendment and give us time to rectify these flaws, so that this memorandum can go forward with the full confidence of the House?

**Mr Haughey:** No. The various points that have been raised can be reconciled with the position that the Executive has taken. Many of the points are not contrary to the provisions of the memorandum of understanding, and the agreements that were made under it, but are entirely consistent with them. The memorandum of understanding, and the supplementary agreements, provide us with mechanisms for dealing



with the points and objections that have been raised by Members.

Mr Neeson raised the question of consultation on the part of the Secretary of State with the Executive and the Assembly on non-devolved matters. Under the legislation, at the moment, these matters remain in his charge. We may agree or disagree on whether that should be the case, but in law it is. We may agree about what he should do, but what he does under the law is a matter for himself. I hope that he will consult closely with the Assembly and the Executive on those matters that remain in his charge.

Mr Neeson also asked about European legislation. Whether by directive or by regulation, consultation is with the European Parliament, but member state legislatures are notified at a very early stage of proposals from the Commission and the Council. The concordat and the memorandum of understanding will provide for an input from the three regional Executives who will make provision for debate in their own Assemblies or Parliaments and, where appropriate, in the Committees of those Assemblies or Parliaments.

Dr Birnie raised the matter of Dr Paisley's speech which he said was a speech rather more in favour of Ulster Nationalism than Ulster Unionism. I think it would stand a good chance of being adopted by people in my party as a statement in favour of Irish Nationalism, but that is another matter. On the joint ministerial Committees, Dr Birnie asked whether they would be "courts of Star Chamber" to bring devolved Administrations to heel. It may well turn out to be the reverse, where highly aggressive, deeply motivated Ministers, who have to get themselves re-elected here and in the other devolved Administrations, will seek very hard to bring the UK Secretary of State to heel on matters that vitally affect them.

I think that covers all the points raised in the course of the debate. I ask Members to note the memorandum of understanding and the supplementary agreements, and to reject the amendment.

*Question put* That the amendment be made.

**Several Members:** Aye.

**Several Members:** No.

**Mr Speaker:** I think the Ayes have it. *[Interruption]*

Order. The position is clear. I call for the Ayes and the Noes. If it seems to me that the Ayes or the Noes have it, I declare that that is the case. If either side disputes my declaration, Members repeat their call, at which point the Lobbies are cleared, and the Question put. It seems to me that there is extraordinary confusion about a procedure which we have gone through on a number of occasions.

4.30 pm

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 27; Noes 53.*

#### AYES

*Fraser Agnew, Eileen Bell, Paul Berry, Norman Boyd, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Wilson Clyde, Nigel Dodds, David Ford, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, David Hilditch, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, Kieran McCarthy, William McCrea, Maurice Morrow, Sean Neeson, Ian Paisley Jnr, Ian R K Paisley, Edwin Poots, Mark Robinson, Patrick Roche, Jim Shannon, Jim Wells, Cedric Wilson, Sammy Wilson.*

#### NOES

*Ian Adamson, Billy Armstrong, Roy Beggs, Billy Bell, Tom Benson, Esmond Birnie, P J Bradley, Joe Byrne, Joan Carson, Fred Cobain, Robert Coulter, John Dallat, Duncan Shipley Dalton, Ivan Davis, Arthur Doherty, Mark Durkan, Reg Empey, David Ervine, Sean Farren, John Fee, Michelle Gildernew, John Gorman, Denis Haughey, Joe Hendron, Derek Hussey, Billy Hutchinson, John Kelly, Danny Kennedy, James Leslie, Alban Maginness, Seamus Mallon, Alex Maskey, David McClarty, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Alan McFarland, Michael McGimpsey, Eddie McGrady, Eugene McMenamin, Pat McNamee, Monica McWilliams, Francie Molloy, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Dermot Nesbitt, Danny O'Connor, Dara O'Hagan, Eamonn O'Neill, Sue Ramsey, Ken Robinson, Brid Rodgers, George Savage, Jim Wilson.*

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Main Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 52; Noes 23.*

#### AYES

*Ian Adamson, Billy Armstrong, Roy Beggs, Billy Bell, Tom Benson, Esmond Birnie, P J Bradley, Joe Byrne, Joan Carson, Fred Cobain, Robert Coulter, John Dallat, Duncan Shipley Dalton, Ivan Davis, Arthur Doherty, Mark Durkan, David Ervine, Sean Farren, John Fee, Michelle Gildernew, John Gorman, Denis Haughey, Joe Hendron, Derek Hussey, Billy Hutchinson, John Kelly, Danny Kennedy, James Leslie, Alban Maginness, Seamus Mallon, Alex Maskey, David McClarty, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Alan McFarland, Michael McGimpsey, Eddie McGrady, Eugene McMenamin, Pat McNamee, Monica McWilliams, Francie Molloy, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Dermot Nesbitt, Danny O'Connor, Dara O'Hagan, Eamonn O'Neill, Sue Ramsey, Ken Robinson, Brid Rodgers, George Savage, Jim Wilson.*

*NOES*

*Fraser Agnew, Paul Berry, Norman Boyd, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Wilson Clyde, Nigel Dodds, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, David Hilditch, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, William McCrea, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Ian R K Paisley, Edwin Poots, Mark Robinson, Patrick Roche, Jim Shannon, Jim Wells, Cedric Wilson, Sammy Wilson.*

*Main Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly takes note of the Memorandum of Understanding and Supplementary Agreements between Her Majesty's Government and the Northern Ireland Executive Committee.

## APPROPRIATION BILL

### Accelerated Passage

4.45 pm

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):**

I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 39(2), this Assembly grants accelerated passage to the Appropriation Bill.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** This motion comes at a very appropriate time. Because I and others in this House have taken a stand, we have been held up to all sorts of attack and vilification by Members of the House who oppose us in an attempt to justify their own positions. One of the arguments they have been using is that we are out to hinder ordinary people while continuing to get our money. On radio programmes I have heard people say that we do not want people to get their hospital beds or their social services and that we are doing this because we have nothing else to say. That is a colossal lie. I am glad this motion has come before us tonight, and in the circumstances, the fact that my party approves of this gives the lie to all that. As a party we welcome that, as do others in these Benches.

**Mr Dodds:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I refer the House to Standing Order 39(2), which sets out the requirements laid on a Minister who wishes to introduce a Bill and to ask leave of the House for accelerated procedure. There are three requirements: first, that the Minister give account to the Assembly of the reason or reasons for it; secondly, that he give the consequences of not so proceeding; and thirdly, that he inform the House of any steps that he has taken to minimise or avoid the future use of the accelerated passage procedure. Only then may he seek leave of the House. Are you satisfied, Mr Speaker, that the requirements of this Standing Order have been satisfied? There may have been a reference, perhaps in the Minister's earlier speech, but that speech was about the introduction of the Appropriation Bill. Nevertheless, at this stage, in terms of setting a precedent, I would have thought that it would have been more appropriate for whoever was responsible for the Bill, whoever was actually moving the motion for the accelerated procedure, to have set out the reasons for doing so, rather than simply begging that it be moved. I defer to your guidance on this matter, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** There was, as Members can imagine, a substantial amount of discussion about this with the Speaker's Office in advance. Given that the matters were on the same day, the requirements that we made of the Minister were that the reasons be set out in the statement, and that the Bill be published and available

for Members on the day. This was so that Members, before having to vote on the motion before them now, would have had sight of the Bill for which they were being requested to provide a fast-track passage. The Minister is, of course, in a position to respond and may wish to do so at the end of this short debate. However, in terms of the requirements of the Standing Orders, I have no doubt that today, and in writing, the Minister has satisfied those requirements. I am making that judgement because there were substantial discussions in advance to ensure that all of these things within the sitting were before the House. The Minister may now wish to make his winding-up speech.

**Mr Durkan:** As I said earlier, the approval of the Estimates and the passing of an Appropriation Act are among the most important responsibilities of the Assembly. I agree with points made by several Members that this is an unsatisfactory process. I explained the need for the accelerated passage, and how we aim to avoid the need for it in the future. However, the reality is that suspension has meant that it is not now feasible for the Assembly to undertake all the detailed stages that would normally be appropriate and essential.

I also acknowledged that we are, at this stage, implementing plans that were set before devolution, mainly in the 1998 comprehensive spending review. I agree strongly with the view expressed by many Members that we need to get down to the serious business of setting our own priorities through the Programme of Government. The question is of how best to do that, and my view is that it would be better to focus on the forward-looking aspects of this, even if that means proceeding with essentially inherited or hand-me-down plans for the immediate period.

Members will realise, and it was clear in Dr Paisley's comments, that schools, hospitals, and all other budget managers, are already working on the basis of the plans set out in the Main Estimates. I believe that the best way ahead is to approve these Estimates, and focus our attention and time on planning for the future through the Programme of Government.

**Mr Speaker:** Before moving to the decision, I draw attention, as Mr Dodds did, to the Standing Orders, particularly the one in question, because accelerated passage is granted by leave of the Assembly. That means that there must be no voices against. Any single voice against would negative the motion.

*Question put, and agreed to nemine contradicente.*

*Resolved:*

That, in accordance with Standing Order 39(2), this Assembly grants accelerated passage to the Appropriation Bill.

*The sitting was suspended at 4.54 pm.*





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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 6 June 2000

*The sitting begun and suspended on Monday 5 June 2000 was resumed at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).*

## ASSEMBLY BUSINESS: MOTION ON UNION FLAG (PETITION OF CONCERN)

**Mr Speaker:** I have to report that a valid Petition of Concern in respect of the motion on the Union flag was tabled last evening, before the Business Office closed. Having checked the petition, I regard it as fulfilling the requirements of Standing Order 27 to allow the vote to take place at the conclusion of the debate today. The motion will require cross-community support to be adopted.

For Members who wish to inspect this or any future Petition of Concern, copies are available in the Business Office.

## NORTHERN IRELAND SPORTSMEN

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, at the beginning of the sitting, I referred to the victory of Mr Joey Dunlop in the Isle of Man TT. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The musical interlude is unwelcome in the Chamber.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I said that we congratulated him and that he certainly was the crowned king of the road. I conveyed my personal congratulations, and the House was unanimously pleased. In the House of Commons the Member representing the area concerned would normally express congratulations. Well, I am the Member for Joey's area. I am not a prophet, or the son of a prophet, but he won the next day too. So he is indeed the crowned king of the road.

Last night it was said on television that the matter had not been raised in the House. The Minister concerned certainly did not raise it. People — especially people from Ballymoney — were ringing my home, irate that the impression had been given that the matter

had not been raised in the House. You, Mr Speaker, know otherwise.

I want just to set the record straight so that the people of Ballymoney will know. I hope soon to join Mr Dunlop as a free man of that great town.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I can confirm that the matter was raised yesterday. It is the first item in Hansard, and I am relieved that it is not on the pillion that Dr Paisley will be joining Mr Dunlop.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Dr Paisley raised the matter with me in the Lobby. It refers to my Ulster Television interview with Mike Nesbitt. When I was asked why I had not raised the matter in the House I said that it had been an oversight on my part. I understood that Mr Nesbitt was referring specifically to why I, as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, had not raised it.

Further to what Dr Paisley said — and as I said last night — there have been great achievements by our two sportsmen, and no one in this House would attempt to deny that. I was certainly not suggesting that Dr Paisley had not raised the matter yesterday; I was merely agreeing with Mike Nesbitt that I personally had not done so.

**Mr Morrow:** It says a lot that the Minister is so ill-informed about what goes on in the Assembly.

It is also appropriate to mention Darren Clarke, not just because he is a native of Dungannon but because he is an excellent ambassador with his great golfing achievements in recent years.

**Mr Speaker:** Dr Paisley asked yesterday if it would be in order to make the comments that he made. He also expressed his condolences to the family of Raymond Hanna. I am a little concerned, given the success of his point of order, that it could become popular for such matters to be raised at the start of sittings — not just congratulations but perhaps also the bestowal of good fortune for subsequent performances. I am not sure that this is within Standing Orders or something that we should make a habit of. However, the good wishes of the Assembly undoubtedly go to those who have been mentioned.

**ASSEMBLY BUSINESS:  
MOTION ON UNION FLAG  
(PETITION OF CONCERN)**

**Mr Dodds:** Mr Speaker, can you please clarify the situation with regard to Petitions of Concern. You have indicated that you received a Petition and that it has been accepted and is open to inspection. Standing Order 27(1) says

“No vote may be held on a matter which is the subject of a Petition of Concern until at least one day after the Petition of Concern has been presented.”

How do you define “one day” in this case? Is it a period of 24 hours, or can the vote be held at any time the next day? And when was this Petition of Concern tabled?

**Mr Speaker:** If you turn to the interpretation section at the back of Standing Orders you will find that “day” means a calendar day. It is not necessarily a period of 24 hours. This interpretation was not in initial Standing Orders. A petition must be lodged before the Business Office closes on the day before the business to which it relates, and that is 30 minutes after the rise of the House. Thus, the timing depends on the time of rising that day. This petition was received in due time and was checked by me. The information was then sent to all the Whips, though some may not have received it before their arrival this morning, having left promptly yesterday.

**Mr C Wilson:** Will this Petition of Concern from the unholy alliance of the SDLP and Sinn Féin — it is interesting to see all those names together — mean that Dr Paisley’s motion, even if endorsed by a majority, will fall and that the pan-Nationalist front will be able to prevent the Union flag from being flown? Please clarify this for me and for the members of the public in the Gallery, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** First, the Member must understand that such clarification is for the benefit of the House, and not for people in the Gallery. It is not appropriate for Members to respond to people in the Gallery. Secondly, I trust that the Member is fully aware of and very clear about the Standing Orders, though I am sure that he and other Members are.

**UNION FLAG  
(EXECUTIVE BUILDINGS)**

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee decided that two hours should be allocated for this debate. Given the substantial interest that has been shown and the number of Members wanting to speak, I have had to limit the times for this debate and for the debate this afternoon. There will be 15 minutes for the moving of the motion and for winding up. If a Minister wishes to respond at the end of either debate, he or she too will have 15 minutes. All other Members will have just five minutes so that as many as possible may be facilitated.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I beg to move the following motion:

That this Assembly directs that the Union flag shall be flown on Executive buildings in Northern Ireland on all designated days, in keeping with the arrangements for other parts of the United Kingdom and, additionally, on Parliament Buildings on all sitting days.

**Mr Tierney:** Mr Speaker, when you refer to a Minister who can speak for 15 minutes at the end of the debate, do you mean a Minister representing the Executive? Or is it any Minister?

**Mr Speaker:** It is only a Minister who is responding on behalf of the Executive. It would be normal practice that if the Executive wished to respond — and they do not have to do so, as all matters may not be within their remit — a Minister would make a winding-up speech immediately before that of the mover, and he or she would have 15 minutes. That would be the case on this occasion. I have no indication, at present, that a Minister will respond in this debate.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** The Member need not be worried because I understand no Ministers will be replying, as they are not in a position to speak for a united Executive on this issue.

When I took my seat for the first time in this Chamber I never thought I would be here, 30 years later, having to discuss such a motion. The fact that this motion is necessary today proves that concession after concession has been given to the pan-Nationalist front, and the names of their representatives are on the Petition of Concern. We know who they are and we know that their aim and common policy is to divest this part of the United Kingdom of all aspects of Britishness.

In the main hall of this building there are four rings just outside the entrance to the Members’ dining room. Two flags used to hang there — the flag of our nation and the standard of Northern Ireland. They were taken away. I did my best to find out who did it. No one has ever owned up to why they were taken away. Having divested the inside of the building of its flags the pan-Nationalist front are going to try and divest the

outside of the building also. This is a growing matter which will not go away.

We remember that even in the forum we had difficulty with the flag. Of course that difficulty came from Mr McGuinness. We had to battle to get the flag put up even inside the forum building.

Others on the periphery of the pan-Nationalist front are prepared to agree on this issue. We will see today who is in agreement and who is not.

The petition can prevent the motion, if it is passed, from having any power. That is the veto that has been handed to those who want to carry out the Republican agenda in this House. It will always be put into use to maintain the Executive and those who believe that the way forward for Northern Ireland is the Republican way, which is set forth in the Agreement. That veto will continue.

10.45 am

The national flag flies upon the Parliament of every democratic country in the world. It also flies on the regional Parliaments, and there is evidently no objection to that. However, in Northern Ireland we find elements who are not prepared to allow the wishes of the majority to be the guiding factor. This flag issue shows the total and absolute falsehood and hypocrisy of the SDLP, Sinn Féin and their allies. They say they believe in the principle of consent, and in the consent of the majority of the people. The majority of the people in this country want this flag to fly. The majority of the people in this country have a right to have their national flag flying. It flies by decree of the Queen, who directs that this should be done. There are people here that strike not only at the flag but also at the sovereign and anything that is British. We have an anti-British campaign that wants to ensure that the national flag will not fly.

The flag also flies, as I pointed out to the Prime Minister the last time I saw him, on all sitting days of the national Parliament. It used to fly on this Building on sitting days, but now we have the first step — it will fly only on those sitting days which coincide with the named days. So we already have a dilution of the flying of the flag. Let us return to where we should never have left. Our flag, the flag of this nation, should fly on all sitting days of this Assembly. This is a regional Government of part of the United Kingdom, and this Assembly is the regional Assembly. Therefore the flag of the United Kingdom should be flown. It is puerile to argue that another flag should be placed alongside it.

The South of Ireland did not need to have any argument about this matter. When the border was drawn, 10% of the people were Protestant and, in the majority, Unionist, but they have been almost eliminated. Today only 2.5% of the population of the South are Protestant. As a result, by the elimination of

the people, they eliminated any bother about which flag should fly. I did not hear from the parties opposite a loud cry: "Let both flags fly over Dublin castle". I did not hear that cry, because it is the right of the minority. Well, they have very little minority left. Perhaps when all the minority has gone they will consider that matter.

It is puerile for Members to say: "Oh, if you fly both flags, we will let you fly them". Mr McGuinness, who is absent today, and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety do not run Northern Ireland. He may run an office in Northern Ireland, but he will not dictate to the people of Northern Ireland what the national flag is. It is not the tricolour. The majority of the people of Northern Ireland — *[Interruption]*

Evidently, the First Minister is going to join them. The majority of the people of Northern Ireland will not have it. It is a very dangerous thing to advocate the removal of the National flag because it is an issue that goes to the very heart of people's faith and heritage. We are not in the Irish Republic yet.

**Mr R Hutchinson:** Does the Member agree that this is not only a matter of the flying of the Union flag but of our Britishness and everything in our culture that is British and Orange? The SDLP Members in particular, after the release of their internal document, seem to have gone from a paler shade of green to the darkest shade of green ever.

This has been portrayed by their Member from East Antrim who, on every occasion, has taken the opportunity to condemn the RUC and to tell us that the RUC turns a blind eye to the attacks on the minority community in Larne. I condemn any attack on anyone, but I also condemn the lies told about the RUC turning a blind eye to anyone being attacked in Larne, or anywhere else. I ask the Member to bring forward any evidence he may have. I ask him to speak up or shut up.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I fail to see the relevance of this particular attack on another Member to the motion that is before the House. If the Member wishes to respond, since he has been particularly spoken of, he will have that right. Please continue, Dr Paisley.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I am not responsible for what people say when I give way, but I think that my Friend made a fair point. When we are speaking about the Republican agenda, I welcome the fact that today in another place, where I hope to be very shortly, Her Majesty's Opposition is going to take the attitude that the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill should not get a second reading. We are glad, because things are happening in this country and someone must put the brakes on the Republican agenda and say "So far and no further".

Why are these people offended about the Union flag? When they take their pay, are they offended about the Queen's head on the coin, and do they say "No"? We

used to have an old slogan here — although it does not match with the present coinage — that they loved the half-crown but they did not like the Crown. It is absolute hypocrisy. Do they want two sorts of money?

There was a time when they did have two sorts of money. There was a hen on some coins. It was wonderful — they were loyal to a hen. They can have their choice of animals, but as far as this nation is concerned there is one coinage — and I am glad that the Euro is doing so badly — and, not only that, there is one flag. That is the flag of this United Kingdom.

I could say many other things, but I should remark on the statement by the press that the building in which the Secretary of State holds office is owned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Minister's directive, which was not even a legal directive, caused the Secretary of State not to have a flag flying on his building. He is the man that the Executive asked to be the future adjudicator on this matter. What trust could we have in the Secretary of State to fly the Union flag? None whatsoever.

He was very careful to say, in the House of Commons, that the flag will fly while he is around. However, he is not going to be around. We know that the talk in Westminster is that the Prime Minister wants him back, as quickly as he can, to prepare for the election. When he goes, who is going to hold the Government to that pledge?

It is regrettable that we have to discuss this matter. It is an insult to our flag to be told that we have to have the flag of another nation flying beside it, a nation whose Foreign Minister tells us that there is too much Britishness in Northern Ireland and that we have to remove it. He may rub out some things on documents — his colleagues are very good at that, hence all the investigations into their financial integrity — but he will not be rubbing out the loyalty of the people to the flag of this nation and the loyalty of the people to their roots.

We are British and proud of it, and we will fly the Union flag irrespective of what motions may be put down and what action may be taken by the pan-Nationalist front. We will not be bowing the knee to the pan-Nationalist front, and we are not going to be subjected to bare flagpoles just because IRA/Sinn Féin says we cannot fly the Union Jack. They have fired on the flag, they have bombed it, and they have tried to destroy it, but it will still fly in spite of them all.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I intend to give a measured response rather than a bombastic response.

This motion is about rights. It is about equality. It is about what the Human Rights Commission has to do to subscribe to international standards and practices that apply elsewhere. Indeed, I contend that it is not for the Assembly to decide whether or not a flag should fly. It

could even be reasonably well argued that it is not for the London Government to have discretion over whether or not this flag should fly. There are international standards that apply in the flying of the flag and the recognition of the constitution, and which all, I repeat all, Mr Speaker, should subscribe to. That is why I say that this motion is about rights.

Some say in this debate that this is a concession which we, as Unionists, seek. Some say that it is a demand or a want. Indeed, some say — and here I look at the DUP — that somehow this is a cultural issue, as did Conor Murphy. This is not cultural.

**A Member:** Who said that?

**Mr Nesbitt:** Who said that? I read the article in Saturday's 'News Letter' where Dr Paisley wrote about the cultural rights of the British. See Mervyn Parley for the quotation.

This is not a concession. It is not cultural. It is simply one thing: it is to do with the constitutional status of the region of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. That is what it is. In other words, when we deal with rights and equality — and this is the fundamental principle accepted by all throughout the democratic world — when we deal with parity, equality, identity, ethos, aspirations, they are all to be subscribed to in equal terms within the context of the state already being defined and the constitution already being recognised. There is nothing to say about joint sovereignty, condominium or the flying of two flags side by side, one of a nation state that is a neighbour and one that is ours. That is what this is clearly about. The Human Rights Commission — *[Interruption]*

I am trying to support what you are saying. I wish the DUP would keep quiet. Let us take the Human Rights Commission, this august body that is meant to define the rights that we all have to subscribe to.

11.00 am

The commission asks why we need a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. It goes on to say that a Bill of Rights is needed for Northern Ireland because we have communal lines with clearly identifiable majority and minority communities — that is our problem. What rights does the commission say it must address? Remember that this is the Human Rights Commission, not I. It talks of four things: equality, education, language and communal cultural rights. I agree with all of those, since they are the rights to be addressed given the definition of the state.

The commission goes on to ask where one can find such cultural rights to be identified. It says that they can be found in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities — namely, the Council of Europe, the home for all international



standards accepted by all. That is what the Human Rights Commission says. What does that framework convention say? Let us be unambiguous. It supports rights and equality as defined by international consensus — not merely by a small-scale Assembly in a region of the United Kingdom. Let me make it clear that we are subject to international consensus. It also means cultural, linguistic, educational and religious rights of equality. Article 20 of the framework convention is unambiguously clear in stating — and I end on this point — that there is a fundamental principle upon which all other rights are to be based, and it is something that is supported by every international expert in human rights. Majorities and minorities should respect national law and the constitution, which means respecting the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as demonstrated by the flag.

**Dr Farren:** The heat under Members' collars, clerical and lay, demonstrates the depth of feeling already generated on this, as we might expect, contentious issue. Fortunately, we seem to be leaving the fields of conflict which have scarred the face of our countryside and, worse, have seen immense tragedy in our communities. It seems the flags which led people onto those fields of conflict remain a cause of dissension. If we do not display the maturity and sense of responsibility necessary to remove this dissension, the very divisions that the Good Friday Agreement intended to remove will persist and fester.

I wish to reflect for a moment on the significance of flags in order to help our deliberations in as positive a way as possible. For me, one flag, the Irish tricolour, represents in its green, white and orange colours a very noble aspiration — that of peace, reconciliation and unity through agreement between the main political traditions of this island. However, it is because of what that flag represents that I deplore, and have always deplored, its staining with the blood of people from either tradition. I have deplored and condemned — and my party has done likewise — the activities of those who, in the name of the aspiration that that flag represents, have caused that blood to be spilt. I equally deplore abuses of the flag, evident when it is used to antagonise others, most especially to antagonise those with whom the peace, reconciliation, agreement and unity it represents are intended to be achieved.

As to the Union flag, I must admit that it evokes no warmth in me at all, but as the tricolour evokes in me very positive sentiments, I recognise that the Union flag must evoke positive feelings in those on the other side of the Chamber. However, I have witnessed so many incidents and have learnt of many others where it has been used to antagonise, to taunt, and to express a sense of dominance over those in the community that I and my Colleagues represent. I cannot but question the motives of those who are speaking in favour of its

display here today. Such abuses are very far from the mere expression of the status of Northern Ireland, as many protesting in favour of its display claim. Indeed, many making this claim are often to be found among those responsible for its misuse.

As a Minister I have not issued instructions regarding the display of the Union flag, or of any other flag, at my Department's buildings. Current practice will therefore persist until we arrive at an agreed common position.

As the Good Friday Agreement urges, I fully support the recommendation that we approach this issue with sensitivity and seek to develop a common understanding and code of conduct for the display of flags and emblems by our new institutions. In doing so I believe that we should strive to arrive at a situation where we have an agreed set of common emblems and flags to represent the institutions agreed to in the Good Friday Agreement. For these reasons members of my party and others have signed a Petition of Concern to have this issue addressed by the Assembly to enable us to pursue agreement on this very contentious matter. In doing so, I look forward to the assistance that the Human Rights Commission and others may want to afford us as we seek such agreement.

**Mr Speaker:** To avoid confusion, may I draw attention to the fact that in a time-limited debate, intervention times come out of the time allocated to Members.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. This motion coming from the DUP is not about flags. It is not even about respect for or allegiance to a flag. I think that the Member who moved the motion spoke about running. In fact, the motion is about a party running for its life in advance of progress and change — change that recognises that the only way forward for these six counties of this little island is, in the words of the Good Friday Agreement,

“to affirm our commitment to mutual respect, civil rights and religious liberties.”

Now, I know that it is very difficult for the majority of those elected to the Assembly to affirm respect for a party which has publicly threatened to wreck the Assembly and to make it unworkable, a party whose members have consistently used, or should I say abused, their position as elected representatives to deny everyone else their right to respect, to civil rights and even to religious liberty. *[Laughter]*

They can laugh, but the history of their party is steeped in it.

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs Nelis:** I do not propose to go into the history of the DUP or its party leader whose rise to fame we all know about. His career and the careers of his party

members were carved out by haranguing and abusing those who disagreed with them. As well as the British Queen's — *[Interruption]* Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member will resume her seat. I intervene at this point, as I have done previously, to direct that Members who stray off the motion and address the question of another Member would be advised not to do so.

**Mr McNamee:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am unable to hear my Colleague even though I am sitting beside her.

**Mr Speaker:** That is why I have called for order. Please continue, Mrs Nelis.

**Mrs Nelis:** We have seen this party haranguing church leaders. They were at it again last night, haranguing President Mary McAleese and the newly elected moderator of the Presbyterian Church, Dr Trevor Morrow. Everything they do or say is about division, whether it be about flying flags or rotating Ministers. That is all they are capable of — promoting sectarianism and fomenting civil strife. Do not let this motion fool anyone. Even if the Reverend party leader wraps himself in the Union Jack and flies it from the top of Westminster, it is not going to stop the change which the Good Friday Agreement and 84% of the people of this island, North and South, clearly spelt out. It is called equality. Do they know what that means? Well, I will tell them, for they do not know. It means that the flag I recognise and uphold, which represents my political allegiance on this island of Ireland and which, in its origins, symbolises the unity of orange and green traditions, is entitled to be flown alongside the Union Jack on all buildings. That is called parity of esteem and it means that where British symbols are used in public life, equivalent Irish symbols must be given equal prominence.

All who signed up to the Good Friday Agreement acknowledge the need for sensitivity in the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need to use symbols and emblems in a manner which promotes mutual respect and human rights, rather than division. In circumstances where it is not possible to fly both flags, none should be flown. It is the right of all of the people on this island that we create and uphold the principle of an equal or neutral working environment central to parity of esteem but also — and I remind the proposer of this motion — enshrined in law.

This issue is not about flags. This issue, and the one that we should be debating, are whether we can, through the unique formula which is the Good Friday Agreement, involve ourselves in the political process which will address the issues of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity. We are back again in this

Assembly, and we have another chance to further develop the peace process. This motion is what we have come to expect. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. If Members keep interrupting, and I have to intervene on points of order, the time does not come out of the Member's time — it merely prolongs it.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** The clock shows 5.16.

**Mr Speaker:** I am aware of what the clock shows. If the Member had been listening he would have appreciated what I was saying, which was that when Members require the Speaker to intervene on a point of order, that does not come out of the Member's time.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** The clock has stopped.

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, of course the clock has stopped. It is meant to stop. The clock has stopped because the Speaker was intervening at that point. It did not stop when the Speaker intervened at the earlier point, and he intervened because of the kerfuffle being caused in that Member's corner.

I ask Mrs Nelis to bring her remarks to a close.

**Mrs Nelis:** A Chathaoirligh, this motion is what we have come to expect from the "No, nay, never, up-the-pole" party. We have more important matters to deal with in this Assembly so let us get on with it. I oppose the motion.

11.15 am

**Mr Kennedy:** In her concluding remarks Mrs Nelis used the expression "up the pole". Is that parliamentary language?

**Mr Speaker:** It appears to be relevant to flags, which is the subject of the motion.

**Mr Ford:** Whilst I do not agree with the Republicans in their attitude to the flying of flags in Northern Ireland, my party rejects the way in which today's motion seeks to further politicise the use of the Union flag. That is why we sought to bring forward a reasoned amendment which would have removed the misuse of the Union flag on every sitting day, while leaving the current practice for Government buildings on designated flag days. That is also why we suggested and signed the Petition of Concern. It was not a pan-Nationalist front, Mr Wilson.

There are a number of reasons why people fly flags. A flag can be used as an expression of identity. In that context, if I wish to fly one flag and my neighbour wishes to fly a different flag on her property, that is the right of each of us, subject only to our keeping the peace. If one of my neighbours wishes to put up a Union flag for the Queen's birthday, another wishes to

fly St Patrick's cross on 17 March, and I want to put up a red dragon every time there is a rugby match in the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, that is our right. We should have — *[Interruption]* Was that a point of order?

**Mr Nesbitt:** Point of information, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Ford:** No. I am not giving way for anybody. I have only five minutes.

With the exception of the emblems of illegal organisations, we each should tolerate the other, and, in turn, we should have our wishes tolerated. A flag can be flown also as a symbol of sovereignty. That is the difference between a private house, an Orange hall, or a GAA club, and a Government building. A flag on a Government building can only be a statement of sovereignty. That is why I cannot see any possibility of the tricolour's being flown alongside the Union flag on any Government building, because it does not fit with the principle of consent, and it seems to me the logic of the Sinn Féin position is that the Union flag should now fly over Rathgael House in Bangor in perpetuity. If they wish the tricolour to fly alongside the Union flag as a recognition of one section of this community, then should there be any possible constitutional change, they must accept that the Union flag should fly alongside the tricolour forever as a recognition of the identity of another section of the community.

The third reason for flying flags in Northern Ireland is possibly the most important, and that is to get one over on the "other side". That is the mentality that nails flags up every available telegraph pole. That is done to stake out territory and tell people they are not welcome. The only thing that can be said in its favour is that, by and large, Republicans do not fly their flag upside down.

Today's motion represents a test of the commitment of the different parties to the mutual respect and tolerance I spoke of — the respect and tolerance which is enshrined in the agreement. I believe that the UUP and the PUP should actually oppose the provocative use of their national flag, the Union flag. While the proposal to fly the Union flag on this building on every sitting day is not quite the same as waving it in the streets, or nailing it up telegraph poles, it seems to me that the effect is the same. Possibly the intent is the same. It is to seek forcibly to remind those who are offended by it that they are in a minority. It is to tell them they are not welcome.

Many Unionists, indeed many supporters of my party, view the Union flag, not as something with which to taunt people, which seems to be the aim of many people in this Chamber, but as a dignified statement of their beliefs and values. As someone who is not a Unionist but who lost an uncle in the fight against fascism sixty years ago, I know exactly how deep those feelings run, and how sincere they can be. Those people have a right to see their symbols treated with respect by

everybody, not treated as cheap political rags and misused by some.

Of course, sovereignty in the context in which we now live is neither absolute nor indivisible. Alliance recognises that Northern Ireland is part of a decentralising British Isles. To adopt Mrs Thatcher's famous dictum, it is actually now no longer possible to be exactly as British as those in Finchley, whether you live in Fishguard, Finvoy or Fortwilliam, and, indeed, the way the European Union is now evolving into a federal Europe, it is possible that you will soon be almost as British whether you live in Frankfurt or Fuengirola.

Alliance wishes to see the development of common shared symbols which can unite, not divide, our people. In the absence of any agreement on new symbols, maintenance of the status quo is the best approach at this time. We reject the suggestions that the Union flag and the tricolour should be flown together. We see this as the route to an apartheid society, one which says that there are two sections which are equal, and they — like George Orwell's pigs — are rather more equal than every other section.

We want to build a society that is united but diverse. We need shared common symbols. The Assembly's flax plant is perhaps the first example. The European flag should also be considered since it can be seen as a focus of unity rather than division. In the absence of any agreement on a way forward, we should maintain the status quo and reject the motion.

**Mr Boyd:** I support the motion. It is scandalous that Sinn Féin/IRA Ministers refuse to fly the Union flag over Government buildings. I have here a list of days on which the Union flag must be flown under well-established practices. The Sinn Féin Ministers' actions are deliberately provocative and appalling. This is an attack on Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. These so-called Ministers have acted beyond their authority and must be condemned utterly by the House. They have insulted the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland. At a time of deep crisis for the National Health Service and education, the Sinn Féin Ministers are more interested in cheap political stunts such as preventing the flying of our country's flag than in the wellbeing of the people of Northern Ireland. Recently, someone in need of a hospital operation had to make way for another so-called kneecapping victim. The Sinn Féin Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister is strangely silent on that issue.

The fact that Sinn Féin Ministers in this fundamentally flawed Executive can refuse to fly our country's flag demonstrates that the Belfast Agreement offers nothing to Unionists, in spite of the utterances of David Trimble and some UUP Members that it copper-fastens the Union. If the prevention of the flying of the flag on Castle Buildings — a Government



building — represents copper-fastening the Union, what would the UUP see as weakening the Union? I have here a statement issued by the Ulster Unionist Party on 22 May 2000:

“Thanks to our negotiating team, only the Union flag will be flown from Government buildings, and the proud name of the RUC will be preserved ... Unlike our opponents, who talk a lot but never deliver, we actually managed to negotiate significant and tangible concessions from the Government.”

That was written by David Trimble. I ask him if the flying of the Union flag is a concession.

The SDLP says that there should be mutual respect. We have had 30 years of bombs and bullets. Where was the mutual respect for the Unionist community in that? We hear from Nationalists about Union flags and red, white and blue kerbstones. What about Republican triumphalism on the Garvaghy Road, the Ormeau Road and many other areas where we see tricolours and green, white and gold kerbstones? The Government's neutrality has created the ludicrous situation where if Nationalists object to the Union flag, under the Belfast Agreement it can no longer be flown on Government buildings.

The Alliance Party is now part of the pan-Nationalist front which today has signed a petition to prevent us from voting that the Union flag must be flown. The Union flag is flown permanently at Westminster, except during a royal visit when the royal standard is flown. It is flown permanently on the building used by the Welsh Assembly. It is also flown on occasion on the Scottish Parliament's buildings and Government offices.

The Union flag, and only the Union flag, should be flown permanently on Parliament Buildings and on all Government buildings to bring us in line with the rest of the United Kingdom. It is scandalous for a Northern Ireland Office spokesman to say that this is a matter for the parties to agree among themselves. That attitude is totally unacceptable. I call for a full investigation by the House into the comments made by faceless civil servants in the Northern Ireland Office. They must be taken to task over that unacceptable attitude.

Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom, yet our British culture and identity continue to be attacked. The list is endless: parades, the oath of allegiance, the RUC, portraits of Her Majesty. Sinn Féin/IRA even blocked the Duchess of Abercorn from visiting St Mary's Primary School in Pomeroy, County Tyrone to promote a cross-community writing competition.

The actions of Sinn Féin/IRA Ministers have been grossly offensive to all Unionists, whether they voted “Yes” or “No”. They confirm that the Belfast Agreement is fundamentally flawed. It is a charter of deceit, and those who have been deceived are the misguided pro-Agreement Unionists who foolishly

trusted the Belfast Agreement. They thought the agreement would safeguard their British identity in the face of aggressive Irish Republicanism, which is determined to impose Irishness on British people.

This debate is about more than flags. It goes to the heart of the Belfast Agreement. That agreement was sold to Unionist and Nationalist voters with entirely different arguments. For Unionists, the agreement was supposed to secure their British citizenship after thirty years of Republican terrorism. For Nationalists, it was to create a transitional arrangement in which Unionism gave ground and of which a united Ireland would be the inevitable outcome.

The removal of the Union flag from Government buildings by Sinn Féin/IRA is clear evidence of the Republican movement's hatred of all things British. Just when we are commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of Dunkirk, where many lives were lost for freedom and democracy, and when, in a few weeks, on 1 July, we will remembering those brave Ulstermen who lost their lives at the Battle of the Somme fighting under the Union flag, Sinn Féin/IRA are insulting their memories and what they died for. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Boyd:** Despite these ongoing attacks by the pan-Nationalist front on British culture and identity, I call on all Unionists to fly the Union flag on their homes as a clear statement of British identity.

**Mr Agnew:** The symbolic nature of flags can be traced back to ancient times. They have been used to lead armies to victory, and to crown man's greatest achievements — whether landing on the moon or conquering a mountain peak. They have been used to claim ownership of vast territories and, of course, they have been used in Northern Ireland, as has already been mentioned, to mark out territory.

Also, the Romans used flags to identify their legions on the battlefield. There has been much talk recently about the symbols of the RUC, but flags, particularly the Union flag, can stir up emotions that few other symbols can. Since the passage of the Act of Union in 1800, the cross of St Patrick that so many people want to remember —

**Mr McNamee** *rose*.

**Mr Speaker:** Is this a point of order?

**Mr Agnew:** I will not give way.

Since the passage of the Act of Union in 1800 the cross of St Patrick has been part of the Union flag, symbolising the unity of the kingdom. It is perhaps ironic that the current problem with the Union flag comes at a time when the flag should be flown over Government buildings to celebrate the Queen's



coronation in 1953. The Ulster flag, with its six-pointed star — one for each county in Northern Ireland — and its crown, was created in 1953 for the Queen's coronation. It was a civil flag for Northern Ireland, but its official status was abolished when the Northern Ireland Parliament was closed down in 1973. Thereafter, the Union flag was made the official flag in Northern Ireland. That is a fact.

The Flags and Emblems (Display) Act 1954 outlawed the display of a flag likely to cause a breach of the peace — clearly meaning the Irish tricolour — and made it an offence to interfere with the display of the Union flag. That Act appears to have been repealed in the United Kingdom during the 1980s.

Although the Union flag has never been officially adopted by law as the national flag of the United Kingdom, it has become so by usage — and that is acceptable in the strange system that we call the British constitution. The Government stated that it is the correct flag for use by British citizens. The situation is slightly different at sea, as the Government has reserved the Union flag for specific military purposes. In fact, it should only be called the Union Jack by the Royal Navy.

Interestingly, the Flag Institute has published the draft of a Flag Act that would confirm in law the Union flag's status as our national flag. It also lays down some specifications and a usage code that some Members would be quite happy to see, and that has already been mentioned. The institute is lobbying to have the document put before Parliament in time for the bicentenary of the United Kingdom and the current Union flag in 2001. On 26 May Peter Mandelson said that those who attacked the agreement played on the fears that it would diminish their identity and undermine their tradition. He claimed that it did no such thing, and that it cherished diversity, securing British identity while recognising and respecting Nationalists and Republicans who do not share that identity.

I suggest that one of the most potent symbols of our Britishness is the Union flag, and if any attempts are made to diminish it, to discredit it, or to take it down, then that is taking away from the consensus part of the so-called Belfast Agreement. I would have thought that the consent principle was recognising the rights of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland who wanted to retain their British citizenship.

11.30 am

But, at a stroke, when one starts pulling down the Union flag one is taking away, in a very symbolic way, the essence of that consent principle — the right of the people to determine their future under the flag of the British Crown.

The 'Belfast Telegraph' of 26 May said of the agreement:

"The reality is that it seeks to establish a new dispensation based on consensus, equality and mutual respect."

Where are the consensus, equality and mutual respect when the Union flag is not acceptable? We demand from all Members a basic civility towards the flag and symbols which reflect the fact that they are living in, and indeed some are governing, a part of the United Kingdom.

**Mr Ervine:** I am minded of those who are determined to make me respectable in a world that is not respectable. I have been listening to guffaws and hee-haws all around me on what is an extremely serious and difficult subject. Many within the Nationalist community hear those guffaws and hee-haws, and yesterday they witnessed, as one Member said, an opportunity to destroy or cause serious wounding to that "fundamentally flawed Executive" as he lifted his papers and left. It was by leave of the Assembly that they could have inflicted serious damage and refused to do so.

So when the Nationalist community interprets from guffaws and hee-haws the real truth that the huffers and the puffers have no intention of pulling the house down, they should not misunderstand that as being the view and the will and the attitude of the people in our society.

Flags, as has already been said, give rise to serious concern. People fight all over the world about them. We would have fought over them, and probably did in many ways, prior to Good Friday, April 1998. But when we look at the issue of the Union flag being flown on public buildings in our society we should be minded that this is not pre-1998 — it is post-1998.

As a politician — and some would say that I am still an amateur one — I have represented a group of people whom many here may not like, and even the Members to my left may not like them. Those people comprised the Combined Loyalist Military Command. They predicated a ceasefire on six specific principles. One of those principles was that there was to be no diminution of the Britishness of Northern Ireland, provided, of course, that such was by the will of the people. Well, the Britishness of Northern Ireland has been copper-fastened as the will of the people.

Whether we like it or not, we once heard Gerry Adams talk about embracing his Protestant brothers and sisters. I suppose the outworking of the Good Friday Agreement is that he accepted that he would have to embrace his British brothers and sisters.

Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and Dermot Nesbitt is absolutely correct when he divorces the flying of the flag on a public building from an expression of culture. It is not an expression of culture; it is a specific constitutional statement that reflects the

terms of the Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland's constitutional position.

There is in many ways a foolishness about the debate and about the Petition of Concern. There is a foolishness abroad that makes us forget that in 1966 a flag had to be removed from the offices of Sinn Féin — I might once have described it as the IRA, and then it became the Official IRA. There was a demand for that flag to be removed using the public order legislation, and, of course, those people who were responsible for that are sitting not very far away from me.

That flag, by the way, was not removed by the state. I know the identity of the person who did it, but, of course, I have to be careful as there is no statute of limitations in Northern Ireland. I know the person who broke the window and took the flag out at the behest of those who were bellicose ranters demanding that either the state do it, or they would. Then that flag was replaced by hundreds of flags.

Surely that is the lesson. It seems quite ludicrous that the flag that was taken was the flag of the Irish Republic: the tricolour. Those people who say that the tricolour is their flag are creating exactly the same difficulties when they demand that the Union flag does not fly.

They are creating a head of steam, they are creating a sense of anger and bitterness. They are reminding us of the 72 days in which we had an Executive and in which we had Carrickmore and Pomeroy. We had the circumstances of the debacle of an attempt, quite legitimate under the Good Friday Agreement, to extradite Angelo Fusco. We had all of that in-your-face pathetic politics by the Republican movement outside this Building and, indeed, some not very sensible things inside this Building. If it is to be delivered to the people of Northern Ireland — including the Combined Loyalist Military Command — and accepted by Unionists, the expression of Irishness contained in the Good Friday Agreement has to be dealt with on a proactive basis. This expression of Irishness would appear to mean, as far as the Nationalist representatives are concerned, the diminution of the Unionist position in Northern Ireland.

**Ms Morrice:** We in the Women's Coalition are very aware of the highly sensitive nature of this debate. We do not approach it lightly. On the contrary, we understand that the issue of flags, emblems and symbols of our culture, our political aspiration or our constitutional status is a fundamental question which lies at the very core of the new arrangements we are putting in place. It is exactly because this issue is important that we believe it should be the subject of serious studied debate over time and not of a simple show of hands on the floor of the Assembly or a 30-second sound bite to satisfy a media hungry for controversy. In the House of Commons last month the

Secretary of State said the issue of flags was best resolved by the Northern Ireland Executive, and we agree. In the event of a dispute the Secretary of State has the power to set the regulations if

"the issue is becoming a palpable source of division among its Members".

We believe this should provide the space necessary for us to work our way into this unique fledgling democracy and give us time to build the ground we have in common, rather than that which divides us.

The Good Friday Agreement clearly recognises the fact that, while the sovereignty of the United Kingdom is maintained through the will of the majority of the electorate in Northern Ireland, such sovereignty will be exercised in the context of the

"just and equal treatment of the identity, ethos and aspirations of both communities".

In other words, the expression of sovereignty should be managed in such a way that it is both sensitive and sympathetic to those who do not hold similar aspirations. Why, for example, do we insist that symbols automatically follow sovereignty? Do we lack the confidence to know who we are without having to rub each other's noses in it? This is not about the reduction of Britishness or Irishness; it is about learning to live together. This may not be a marriage, but it is a cohabitation of sorts. Everyone knows that when you live together in partnership, you have to make compromises. If one partner wants to paint the front of the house one colour and the other partner wants to paint the front of the house another colour, the best and only way to achieve harmony is either not to paint the house at all or to choose a colour which is neutral and which is acceptable, not just to both but to all who live in that house.

This Assembly is the new home of our Government.

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member take a point of information?

**Ms Morrice:** No.

We have got to look at all the options available to us. Should we, for example, avoid flying the official flag and make a neutral working environment in line with the fair employment legislation, or should we agree symbols that reflect a shared identity?

We managed to agree the flax flowers as the symbol of the Assembly without controversy, and they are accepted by all. Alternatively, if we truly want to reflect our status, why should we not be proud to fly the European flag on every public building?

This is just the second week of our new Government, and we have much to do. I make this point with much sincerity: our farmers, who gathered here in their thousands asking for our help, did not stop to check if

the Union flag was flying before they marched up these steps. Our textile workers and our young people are more concerned about staying out of the dole office than about whether a flag, or which one, is flying above it. We are here to make life better for them and for others in our community, and that is what we intend to do.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** The contributions today are rather interesting. I am sad that Mr Ervine is away because I noticed that he was clearly smarting from the skilful planning of the DUP in the Assembly yesterday — he could not hide his disgust and his disappointment that we allowed the finances to go on. He wanted us to hurt the ordinary people, to rob money from the farmers and to stop the operations for patients. It would have given him pleasure to have stopped the schools for the children. We intend, as a party, to make the Executive bite the dust, not the ordinary, decent, law-abiding people of this country.

What we are reaping today are the fruits of the Belfast Agreement. We are seeing concession after concession. The pan-Nationalist front has its begging bowl out more and more, and it is getting cheekier.

We heard from a Member from Londonderry. I cannot understand why she would be angry about the Union flag. Did her husband not fight under the Union flag? Was he not glad, as a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, to fight under the Union flag and be a part of the country?

Perhaps because of the embarrassment of her past, she is trying to impress her new credentials upon those whom she now wants to embrace her. It ill becomes people to try to pretend something rather than face the realities.

The sad reality is that we are having an anti-British campaign, not only from without but from within the Executive. And who put them in the Executive? Members of the Ulster Unionist Party, as part of the Belfast Agreement, voted them in — and put them back in just recently — ensuring that Martin would be the head of education and Barbara Brown would be head of health, both running Departments.

Interestingly enough, while they condemn Britishness, it was their two Departments that received more money from the British exchequer recently. It was education and health that got the injection of money from the British exchequer. Of course, who could better hold out their begging bowls than Republicans — that is how they have lived and practised all their years.

It seems to be politically correct today not to put up a photograph of Her Majesty the Queen — that is not allowed. You cannot walk freely down Her Majesty's highway; you cannot fly the flag of your country; you cannot take an oath of allegiance to the Queen. On and on the concessions go, and it is rather empty for Members of the Ulster Unionist Party to bleat empty

phrases of horror when it comes to this issue because this is a part of their agreement — they had the power to stop it.

The agreement was sold on falsehood. There were three principles. First of all we were told the consent principle had been settled, and settled forever. All those who signed up to the agreement had signed up to the principle of consent; they had accepted, acknowledged and embraced the fact that Northern Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom. What utter rubbish. The people were sold a lie, and we are reaping the harvest of that lie.

Secondly, there was the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The name and the badge were solved in the piece of paper that Mr Taylor held in his pocket. Yet in a meeting with Mr Ingram — and my party leader was there — the Minister said that the name of the gallant RUC would not appear in the long or short title of the Bill coming before Parliament today.

*11.45 am*

In fact Mr Ingram said the issue was spurious. That was his answer. That is a second principle, a second lie that was sold to the Unionist population.

The third was about the flag. We were told that the Hillsborough Agreement had settled this issue. The reality is that the IRA has tried to take down the Union flag of this country with their bombs and their bullets. Thank God the people of Ulster are made of better stuff, for they have withstood the bombs and the bullets of terrorism. If we were able to withstand all that, we certainly are not going to allow anyone to take down our country's flag.

We are faced with the harvest of the Belfast Agreement. Sadly, the only flag that the Ulster Unionists have unfurled in the negotiations is the white flag of surrender to the Republican/Nationalist agenda. The Unionist population are now reaping the harvest of such ill-informed negotiations. We the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party, believe that the flag should be flown over this Building on every day the Assembly is sitting and in every Government building.

**Mr McGimpsey:** This motion is to do with a very important issue. It can be separated into two parts. The first concerns the Union flag's being flown over Executive buildings, and the second being its flown on Parliament Buildings on all sitting days. I agree with both points but will address them separately.

We should refer to the agreement made on Good Friday, as it is quite clear on constitutional issues. Paragraph 1(i) of this section states that the British and Irish Governments will

“recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status”.



In paragraph 1(iii) the participants endorse their commitment to acknowledge that

“the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, freely exercised and legitimate, is to maintain the Union and, accordingly, that Northern Ireland’s status as part of the United Kingdom reflects and relies upon that wish.”

That is the consent principle. To reinforce this and back it up the Irish Government altered articles 2 and 3 to remove their legal claim under constitutional imperative. It is, therefore, for the people of Northern Ireland to determine the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, an issue that has separated us for 80 or 90 years. It is quite clear what that wish is; Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom because the people of Northern Ireland so determine, and for no other reason. That is where we are. Northern Ireland is part of the sovereign United Kingdom — part of the British state — and the constitutional symbol, not the cultural symbol, of that state is the Union flag.

In the United Kingdom as a whole the Union flag is flown on designated Government buildings on designated days. That is the constitutional symbol; it is a legitimate expression of the constitutional position of the United Kingdom as a whole and a legitimate expression of the constitutional position of Northern Ireland in particular.

Sinn Féin has failed to accept and recognise that and to deny the agreement that is at the root of this. If Sinn Féin and Nationalists are genuine about wanting the tricolour to fly over this building, there is only one way that could be done, and that would be to persuade the people of Northern Ireland to vote Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom and into a united Ireland. The reason they are denying the consent principle is that they now understand that that is a possibility so remote as to be politically unachievable, certainly in their lifetimes. If they thought there was any possibility of achieving that within a set period — Gerry Adams talked about 15 years — if they had some form of stepping stone, then they would be reinforcing the consent principle. The dangerous aspect is that if they do not accept the consent principle, why should Unionists? If they ever achieved a majority, are we supposed to accept that? Why should we accept it when they do not? They understand this, but they deny it, because they know that the chances of the people of Northern Ireland voting Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom and into a united Ireland are so remote as to be unlikely to occur within the lifetime of any of us here.

The Union flag is flown as a constitutional symbol. Within the agreement we have said that symbols will be used sensitively. You talk about parity of esteem. Parity of esteem means equal respect—but it does not mean recognition. There is a difference between respect and recognition.

If we are serious about the agreement, and if we are serious about this consent principle that is the fundamental cornerstone of the agreement, then there should be no problem with anyone operating what has been a custom and a practice. There is no legal basis for flying the flag, and it does not fly by royal prerogative. It is flown throughout the United Kingdom by custom and practice. If Sinn Féin and Republicans are determined to deny this, then they are denying the fundamental cornerstone of the agreement and they are denying the agreement itself.

I believe that Unionism and Unionists will take that as a serious —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Your time is up.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Thank you. I will wind up.

**Mr Speaker:** No, your time is up.

**Mr Dallat:** When Mr McCrea rose sporting his yellow tie I thought, for one lovely moment, he was half way there. However, he began to talk about begging bowls. Earlier his party leader talked about coins. Perhaps at the end of this debate we should have a silent collection. That might solve the problem.

I was most impressed by yesterday’s business in this Chamber when all parties present demonstrated that they could, if they wished deliver normality and a future that offers a stable and peaceful way ahead. I have no doubt about that.

It seems an awful pity that, only one day later, we are plunged back into a fruitless debate about flags. We should learn from past experiences that these issues are divisive and pointless until we reach agreement. Indeed, this motion can serve no purpose because the Assembly has no power to direct Ministers.

Over the past 30 years, flags have played a big part in marking out territory, denoting difference, and heightening tensions. There are people in this House who are past masters at using flags for their own narrow, sectarian motives. On no occasion can I recall flags being used as a vehicle for reconciliation. David Ervine referred to one of the most notorious incidents involving flags, which took place in Divis Street 34 years ago when the presence of a tricolour caused so much offence to Dr Paisley that the Unionist Government sent the RUC to fetch it. The rest is history, but for those who are too young to remember, shortly afterwards loyalists murdered two Catholics — John Patrick Scullion and Peter Ward. Matilda Gould, a Protestant, also died a short time later. Today 34 years later — with more than 3,500 people dead — Dr Paisley is still obsessed with flags, forgetting nothing, and learning nothing, from the horrors of the past.

In a divided society it is inevitable that flags serve no purpose other than to perpetuate division, fear and



suspicion. Whether those flags are on Government buildings, nailed to telegraph poles, or painted on kerb stones, they serve only one purpose; to further sectarianism and polarisation. They are not there out of respect.

Surely there is enough intelligence in this House — I believe that there is — to base our decisions on the experience of the past in relation to flags. We do not have to repeat Divis Street, or write another volume of ‘Lost Lives’. Surely, we must know that it is much better to discover the common ground that unites us, rather than to dwell on the issues which serve only to cause fear, mistrust, and perhaps even a return to the past.

We only live on this planet for a short time, far too short to see the bigger picture. Perhaps in the future there will be common ground that will enable progress on this issue. In such circumstances would it not be nice if the present generation was written into history as having laid the foundation stones for development? Then, a future generation could respect the flag that evolves out of the present peace process; and the work of this Assembly. The flag would be put up at dawn, and taken down at dusk. It would be respected by all, and it would be part of a heritage of which all our people could be proud.

In the meantime, it is best to concentrate on the present and continue building the foundation stones of trust and reconciliation. It would be better perhaps to leave it to future generations, when they have the experience of time and the opportunity to see the bigger picture, to decide the format of the piece of cloth that flutters from the flagpoles. As long as it causes division, a flag is only a piece of cloth.

Flags should be capable of being honoured and respected by all, and not used as floorcloths by people who carve their political existence out of division and bitterness. When we accept that fact and begin the serious business of reaching agreement based on consent, then we will be singing from the same hymn sheet and perhaps flying flags from the same flagpoles. In the meantime, the SDLP has no proposals for flying the tricolour on the Queen’s birthday. That would cause even more confusion and create even more theme parks of flags denoting difference and division.

**Mr J Kelly:** A Chathaoirligh. I have a sense of déjà vu — indeed, a sense of antediluvian déjà vu — about this morning’s motion. David Ervine and John Dallat were right. It was in 1964 that the same Ian Paisley summed up to reporters his attitude to the tricolour:

“I don’t accept that any area in Ulster is Republican, and I don’t want to see the tricolour flying here. I intend to see that the Union Jack flies everywhere and that it keeps flying.”

Those comments go to the very heart of the crisis that has bedevilled this society and this state since its inception.

The occasion for those remarks, as I am sure Dr Paisley will recall, was a flag flying in a shop window in Divis Street. The flag was so obscure that you had to stop at the shop window to see it. Yet Ian Paisley gathered a mob, Unionism succumbed to his threats, and the flag was taken from the window. Four days and four nights of bloody riots ensued in which hundreds of men, women and children were injured, some seriously. It was a shameful climbdown by the then Government in Stormont, and if Unionism wants to look to the genesis of the past 30 years, they might examine what happened in Divis Street in 1964. Indeed, the ‘Irish Times’ editorial of 5 October of that year opined

“The tricolour, however, did not appear to worry the authorities overmuch; they showed restraint and good sense. Then came a man in black, a man of God, bringing not peace, but the sword.”

It was the sword that was used metaphorically and in other ways to bedevil this society.

This issue is not about flags or the flying of flags. It is not about the flying of a flag as a symbol of cultural identity or as a symbol of Britishness. It is for Nationalists a denial of their right to their identity in the society in which they live. If 100 out of 100 people living in this society were Unionists there would be no problem about the flying of the flag. However, that is not the political reality which exists in this society where 50% of the people are Nationalists and where the majority of school-going people of this part of Ireland are Nationalist/Republican.

It is not about the flying of a flag. It is not about the flying of a flag to remind us of our Britishness. Those who view Unionism as having rights must accept that Nationalists also have rights. They must acknowledge that the rights of Unionists have responsibilities to the rights of Nationalists. Unionists have to come to terms with a number of facts contrary to their belief that the North is like any other part of the United Kingdom. The Good Friday Agreement is evidence and proof that it is not.

Consent is a two-way street. That means that our consent is of equal validity and has equal integrity. Is the Unionist position, as seen in the spirit and letter of this motion, to remain the same — that the exercise of power by anybody other than themselves is a concession and not a right? Is power-sharing to fail because DUP Unionism, allied with anti-agreement UUP Unionism, views the exercise of power by Nationalists as unacceptable? Is the price of the Good Friday Agreement for Unionists not that the democratic deficit, which excluded Nationalists from expressing their culture, religion and social identity, is to be remedied?

12.00

Power-sharing failed in the past because Unionism, and particularly Unionism as exemplified by today's DUP motion, viewed the exercise of power by Nationalists, with all the political implications that that entailed, as a concession and not a right. This motion goes further by making the exercise of power by Nationalists conditional on them emasculating the expressions of their identity.

**Mr Dodds:** First, the fact that we have to debate and argue about whether the national flag should be flown on Government buildings in Northern Ireland is an indictment of the situation into which the Belfast Agreement has brought this part of the United Kingdom.

We are told that the Belfast Agreement strengthens the Union and the position of Unionists. It is ironic that if the Ulster Unionist Council had not reinstated the Belfast Agreement a few days ago the national flag would have flown on Government buildings last Friday. The reality is that, as a direct result of that vote to proceed with the agreement, the national flag has been torn down at the behest of two Sinn Féin/IRA Ministers.

We were told, as part of the package to persuade and con people, that members of the UUC should vote in favour of the motion, and that a number of issues had been dealt with. We were told that the decommissioning issue had been dealt with. Of course, we know that IRA/Sinn Féin has been admitted back into Government positions without handing over one piece of illegal weaponry and without being required at any time in the future to hand over such weaponry. We also know that there has been no safeguard whatsoever regarding the preservation of the name of the RUC or in relation to some of the most fundamentally obnoxious parts of the Patten report. Those obnoxious parts will proceed. The RUC's name will be taken away, and the assurances given by Mr Taylor and others amount to nothing.

What assurance and resolution were we told would ensure the issue of flags was sorted out? It was that that power would be given to the Secretary of State — not in legislation to require the flying of the national flag, which is what should have happened, but to whoever he or she might be at any time.

It is ironic that one of the reasons Mr Trimble and others argued we should proceed with devolution, the Belfast Agreement, and letting IRA/Sinn Féin back into Government, was in order to take power out of the hands of the British Government — since that was joint rule, and since Mandelson could not be trusted. Yet they have handed power over the flying of the national flag to Peter Mandelson. That is some assurance and some logic.

The reality, of course, is that the national flag has been torn down. It is not a symbol of party politics, or of a particular group or section. It is the national flag. I listened with incredulity to the talk from the other side of the House about looking to the future and equality. Most of their speeches have comprised looking back to the past over 35 years and blaming people for instigating the troubles. I listened to Sinn Féin/IRA's talk of equality and respect — was that what the murder campaign for 30 years was about? Is that why they tried to murder my Colleague and I? Was that a contribution to democracy and respect? Let us address the reality here. Let us get away from semantics and rhetoric and realise that these people have not changed, otherwise they would have been prepared at least to begin the process of handing over their illegal terrorist weaponry, rather than hanging on to it.

They talk about consent and the principle of consent that we are told by Mr Trimble and his Colleagues was recognised in the Belfast Agreement. Well, here is the outworking of that principle of consent — the national flag can be torn down. Here is the great accountability that we were told that Ministers would have toward the Assembly. As we said they would, Ministers have full executive responsibility over the Departments that they control, and that is why they have handed power to McGuinness and the Minister of Health to tear down the national flag.

Mr Mandelson made it clear that the legislation made no provision for the flying of the national flag over this building. Even if Mr Mandelson issued a directive that flags should fly over all Government buildings, that would not apply to Parliament Buildings, Stormont. Members and the general public need to be aware of that. The so-called safeguard that was introduced does not actually apply to this building.

We in this House are determined to ensure that wherever possible the national flag flies on appropriate buildings on appropriate days, and we stand by that.

**Dr Adamson:** Now for something a wee bit different. Ulster has a unique position, set as it is against the face of Britain across a narrow sea and separated from the rest of Ireland by a zone of little hills, so the characteristics of our language and our people have been moulded by movements large and small between the two islands since the dawn of human history.

The difference between Ulster and the rest of Ireland is one of the most deeply rooted, ancient and, from a literary point of view, most productive facts of early Irish history. Ulster's bond with Scotland and Britain as a whole counterbalances her lax tie with the rest of Ireland. We need but think of the kingdoms of the ancient British Cruithin in both areas, and of the Ulster Scottish kingdom of Dál Riada from the last quarter of the fifth to the close of the eighth century. We can think

of Irish relations with the kingdom of the Hebrides and Argyll from the twelfth century on and, particularly, of the immigration of Hebridean soldiers, gallowglasses, from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century, which led to the Gaelic revival. There was a constant coming and going between north-eastern Ireland and western Scotland. The Glens of Antrim were in the hands of the Scottish MacDonalds by 1400, which is why we have Alasdair with us today, and for the next 200 years Gaelic-speaking Scots came in large numbers. The often-quoted seventeenth century immigration of numerous Scots need not be considered outside the preceeding series, bringing of course yourself, Mr Speaker. There has been movement of people between the two islands ever since.

Yet to me the denial by Nationalists and Republicans of the essential Britishness of Ireland in general and Ulster in particular must be considered a root cause of the conflict here in Northern Ireland. Ireland was British in the second century, and Ulster was British until at least the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era. The third and fourth centuries in Ireland, or little Britain as it was known to the Greeks and Romans, are extremely remarkable for the unusually rapid development of the Gaelic language, which was originally brought to Ireland by Spanish invaders. This is evidenced by the passage of loan words used by the native British population into Gaelic, which itself means raider or barbarian in old British. The name Ireland is pre-Celtic, but Glasgow is old British or Welsh for green hollow, and Paisley is old British or Welsh for basilica, or church of Christ.

For many ordinary Unionists today our British heritage in all its aspects, ancient, medieval and modern, is represented by the Union flag. The attempted neutralisation by some Nationalists and Republicans therefore represents for them a worrying expression of anti-British sentiment and the fundamental denial of their civil rights and liberties.

Surely it would be much better to listen to the words of Seamus Heaney when he says in the introduction to his great Irish epic 'Buile Suibhne' — 'Sweeney Astray':

"It is possible, in a more opportunistic spirit, to dwell upon Sweeney's easy sense of cultural affinity with both western Scotland and southern Ireland as exemplary for all men and women in contemporary Ulster, or to ponder the thought that this Irish invention may well have been a development of a British original."

I support the motion.

**Mr A Maginness:** Like many in the House, I have a sense of déjà vu in relation to this issue, particularly given the remarks of Assembly Member Cedric Wilson this morning in which he referred to the Petition of Concern as being "the product of the pan-Nationalist front". Of course it is not the product of the pan-Nationalist front. The Alliance Party and the

Women's Coalition are also involved. I remind Cedric Wilson that, on another occasion in the House — indeed, on 17 January — he, along with the Ulster Unionists, the DUP and Sinn Féin went into the Lobbies against the SDLP on a reasoned amendment in relation to this issue of flags. The SDLP, on that occasion, put forward an amendment that sought to put this issue where it should be — at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement. This is where this issue should be dealt with, within the Good Friday Agreement.

We as a party have not used or abused our Ministries as party political property, we have not given orders to civil servants in relation to raising or lowering flags. No order has come from SDLP Ministers in relation to this. We reject the concept of Ministries being silos that are party political property. The SDLP believes that this issue, like all other contentious issues, should be brought to the Assembly. It should be thrashed out in the Executive, and we should try to reach agreement. That is the approach of our Ministers. We did not take unilateral action, nor do we intend to. We intend to move forward, to try to reach agreement on this most contentious issue. The importance of this issue is recognising that within the Good Friday Agreement, all these contentious issues are, in fact, being addressed.

Dermot Nesbitt, in his address to the House, said that Unionists argue that the Union flag should be flown because the principle of consent means that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. That is a simplistic view of the agreement. It is a simplistic view of the flag issue. It is an incorrect reading of the agreement.

**A Member:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr A Maginness:** No, I will not because my time is short. The principle of consent is only one of the six principles on constitutional arrangements for Northern Ireland laid down in international law and in the Good Friday Agreement. There are five others, including, importantly, an affirmation that, whether Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom or not, there will be

"parity of esteem and ... just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos and aspirations of both communities."

Furthermore, the agreement recognises the right of all the people of Northern Ireland to

"identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both".

It is therefore simplistic to say that the flag should be flown because of the principle of consent. Account also has to be taken of the other principles to which I have referred.

12.15 pm

Finally, there are three ways of addressing the contentious issue of flags. First, you could do it on the



basis of equality. Secondly, you could do it on the basis of total neutrality.

Thirdly, you could do it on the basis of trying to create and achieve consensual, common symbolism. The latter approach was taken by this Assembly when it was initially set up, when it embraced the flax flower as its motif, as its logo. That was a step in the right direction, and that is the step which I and my party believe you should try to follow. Surely that is a reasonable approach; surely it is reasonable to try to unite people rather than divide them.

**Mr Shannon:** I speak in support of the proposal. I have received a lot of correspondence on this issue through my advice centre, by phone and by letter. The meaningfulness of the Union has given us the freedom to express our identity and culture without malice and within the confines of the law of the land. The truth of the matter is that pan-Nationalism does not understand the concept of the Union and has no wish to do so. Their political philosophy does not seek to include but rather to exclude. It is a profoundly elitist ideal in which those who do not fulfil their anti-British or Gaelic/Irish agenda have no part to play. It can not, therefore, be surprising that a movement which seeks to destroy the constitutional wishes of the majority should also challenge the authority of the sovereign Government as represented through the flag of the Union. This lack of democracy is no better illustrated than by IRA/Sinn Féin's actions in challenging the Crown in Northern Ireland and removing the flag of the sovereign Government from Government buildings. They have done this because it represents all that these people detest: freedom, liberty and justice for all.

Their agenda also purports to see freedom, liberty and justice for all — but only if you fit their bill. Thirty years of murder is a very real reflection of what will happen if you do not comply. They have represented a political philosophy which belongs in the Dark Ages, one that is founded on hatred, sectarianism, cultural apartheid and intimidation. Of course, it is the individual's democratic right to peacefully espouse whatever political opinion he or she desires. Unfortunately the problem for Irish Nationalism is that it has always been both associated with and wedded to armed terror and to the physical eradication of all things British, including those who remain loyal to the Crown and to the principles of the Union. Members of the SDLP, of course, will probably take exception to some of these remarks. However, the fact of life in Ulster politics is that the SDLP now exists merely to give credibility to the actions of IRA/Sinn Féin. They have always operated from a position of apparent moderation, making conciliatory noises on the back of IRA/Sinn Féin activity, safe in the knowledge that they are not preventing the progress of their common agenda; the removal of all things British, including the

right to fly the flag of the Government on Government buildings.

The SDLP preach inclusion and the need for cross-community co-operation yet practice exclusion. Their actions on Down District Council, for one example, do nothing to contradict this analysis. Eamonn O'Neill, the Member for South Down, in his capacity as a member of Down District Council successfully proposed the banning of the Union flag from Down council's buildings. In so doing he caused consternation amongst the people of that area, and consequently, members of the Unionist population there are considering their future in respect of the council.

This is the flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and represents the authority and the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament. This flag, through the rights which flow from it, gives each and every individual and every local minority and majority the right to fully express their particular cultural and religious identities, as long as they do not impinge on other civil or religious liberties. To remove this flag is not just an unprecedented insult to every Unionist citizen in the district, but it also represents a two-fingered salute to the sovereign Government which gave this institution its power. One of our SDLP Members served in the UDR. He had no problem with that; he served for a number of years. He is not here at the moment, perhaps he is having his lunch. He was able to serve under the Union flag, and that was no bother to him. Unfortunately for Unionism the pan-Nationalist front has gained a new Member in the last few weeks in the form of the Ulster Unionist Party — in the form of the leadership — represented in this House by a group of individuals too concerned about paying off the new car, or paying for the holiday to worry about the fact that they are selling this country out from under their own clumsy feet.

Their 1998 Assembly manifesto contained the question "Will a 'Yes' vote undermine our flag and culture?" and gave the answer as "No." This is another example of a manifesto commitment cast aside by those new agents of pan-Nationalism, the leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party. We had a taste of having armed terrorists in Government between November 1999 and February 2000, and witnessed their intention to undermine the integrity of the Union flag.

When he came back from Taiwan, John Taylor told us that he had assurances on the Union flag and on the RUC. What we have seen is the very opposite. People could be forgiven for thinking that Mr Taylor had an example of Montezuma's revenge, as we saw at the Waterfront Hall.

**Mr Weir:** The leader of the main party opposite often tells us that one cannot eat a flag. That is a truism, but it is also an attempt to portray his party as



post-Nationalist — one which has left Nationalism behind and embraces Europeanism. This is a very strange situation. For the first time in the two-year life of this Assembly, the SDLP has signed a Petition of Concern. Today we see the SDLP in its true green colours, a party with Nationalism at its heart.

The flags issue is crucial for Northern Ireland, and not simply because of the offence caused to many people by the failure of Sinn Féin Ministers to fly the flag, particularly in my constituency of North Down. One of the buildings affected has been the Department of Education headquarters at Rathgael House. Many of my constituents have been deeply offended by the actions of the Minister, Martin McGuinness. Flag-flying goes to the heart of such key issues as the acceptability of Sinn Féin in Government; the degree to which Nationalism has accepted the principle of consent; the degree to which our Britishness is being respected; and the degree to which the Executive works as a cohesive unit.

On the first of those issues, Sinn Féin must pass a number of tests if it is to be acceptable as part of the Government of Northern Ireland. It must show that it is committed to peaceful means: it has clearly failed to do that so far. It must show that it is committed to the rule of law: again, it has clearly failed to do that. Indeed, it has indicated that even in a post-Patten situation young Nationalists should not consider joining the police.

Secondly, the flags issue shows that Sinn Féin fails on the crucial issue of consent. We must be wary of this issue. Everyone is entitled to have aspirations. We all have aspirations. I aspire to play centre forward for Northern Ireland at Windsor Park. That is not going to happen. One of the Members opposite aspires to be Lord Mayor of Belfast, and to one day have the opportunity to drive a car that has not been provided for the disabled. There is nothing wrong with having aspirations, but I take grave exception to the placing of the aspiration for a united Ireland on a par with my British citizenship. That is unacceptable. It strikes at the heart of the consent principle.

We were told at the time of the referendum that the consent principle had been fully accepted by Nationalists. Then again, we were told many things at the referendum that have not come to pass. Mr Maginness's speech showed that Nationalist acceptance of the principle of consent is, at best, extremely limited. It is like being put on a boat and told that you are able to step off the boat, but only at the last step before you go over the waterfall. That is the attitude of Nationalists. Their acceptance of consent is only at the very final question. Anything that highlights the principle of consent, be it the name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary or the flying of flags, is clearly not accepted.

Thirdly, this process has had the effect of diminishing our Britishness. We have seen the change of the RUC name.

We have seen the changes in the Criminal Justice Review, and now we are seeing the flag coming down. It is what a Colleague of mine calls "dimmer switch Britishness". Gradually the lights are going out throughout Northern Ireland on our British status.

Finally, this issue shows that the Executive is not operating as an Executive. There has not been one coherent policy, but rather a series of fiefdoms where individual Ministers take their own decisions without any collective will. Some people tell us that this matter has been resolved to their satisfaction, because it has been placed in the hands of the Secretary of State. This is a Secretary of State whose record on the flag in relation to the Patten report was totally unacceptable. I have no great confidence in the Secretary of State, but today the Assembly has the opportunity to give voice to our views. Despite the constraints put on this motion by the petition of concern from the SDLP, Sinn Féin, Alliance and the Women's Coalition, Members should send a clear signal that they are committed to the principle of consent by supporting the motion and supporting the flying of the Union flag over Government buildings.

**Mr Durkan:** First, I want to deal with some of the points raised about the approaches of different Ministers and parties to this matter. I re-emphasise Alban Maginness' point that none of the SDLP Ministers directed that the flag was not to be flown on any of the designated days. That was not because we chose to have the flag flying, or wished the flag to be flown, but because we recognise that we have agreed in the Good Friday Agreement to deal with this sensitively. We are going to try to come to some agreement, some workable accommodation.

Which building comes under the control of which Minister is a matter of chance. It so happens that my ministerial office is in Rathgael House, Bangor. However, it is not on the premises of the Department of Finance and Personnel, but the premises of the Minister of Education. On Friday, the flag did not fly over the building in which my office is located. However, the result of such a directive is that the area surrounding Rathgael House has become a veritable theme park of all sorts of flags — not just the Union flag, but the flags of various Loyalist paramilitaries. I cannot see how that solves the problem. I cannot understand how people can be so concerned and vexed about one flag flying over a building, and then take great delight and amusement when the building and its approach roads are surrounded by much more offensive flags. Flags carrying the emblems of paramilitaries are sinister. They are not flags to which anyone could profess the respect

and esteem that I recognise that Colleagues opposite do to the Union flag.

That is what stunt politics generates. Putting flags up all over the place and pulling flags down all over the place is stunt politics. We are not going to get into that, whatever the political pressures that might be upon us.

Government Departments are not the private property of the parties to which the Ministers belong. That also applies to parties talking about rotating Ministers and Departments. We hear about DUP Departments and Sinn Féin Departments. Departments should not be identified according to the party political allegiance of their Ministers. That is completely wrong. It is unfair to the people who work in those Departments and to the people relating to those Departments and depending on their services. That is why we are behaving with sensitivity.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Has this anything to do with flags?

**Mr Speaker:** It is a great deal closer to the mark than some of the other speeches.

**Mr Durkan:** We want to be clear on that point. In case anyone tries to misinterpret or misrepresent what we are saying, I ask those who say that we should have ordered the flags down what the result would have been? It would have compounded an already difficult situation. Feelings are running high, and people are very sensitive about this issue. For us to have jumped on that bandwagon would have only compounded the difficulties. It would not have helped to solve the problem. It would have ensured that we go even more rapidly to the invocation of the directive powers that the Secretary of State has in reserve.

12.30 pm

That is something which we have said we are opposed to. We are not going to engage in a cheap stunt by saying we are opposed to the Secretary of State's powers, but are going to commit ourselves to a gimmick that actually means that those powers are more likely to be invoked and prevent us from any chance of actually dealing with and addressing this particular problem together.

We are trying to show sensitivity on this. That is why I particularly resent the suggestions and the insinuations that a pan-Nationalist front is afoot, and that we are trying to strip people of their Britishness.

Unionists want to feel that they have a place of respite under this Agreement. They want to know that the Agreement, as the package that they believe it is, and as the process about which Nationalists talk, is not an ever-growing Nationalist process and an ever-diminishing Unionist package.

That is a serious political issue, which we all have to address responsibly. It is going to take time for us to learn to respect each other and adjust. That is why we have done nothing prematurely.

Equally, it would have been unforgivable for us to allow this particular motion— which is not about sensitivity — to pass. It is about flying the flags on even more days than have already been the cause of controversy. That would hardly be sensitive, and we could not afford to have such a motion passed by this House — and which would have the standing of this House — possibly being abused in the future by the Secretary of State when it comes to his directive powers. We had no choice but to put forward the petition of concern.

**Mr Dalton:** As a Member of the Ulster Unionist Party I will be supporting the motion put forward by the DUP. However, the motion is divisive. They are again exercising themselves in simply trying to stir up division, cause trouble, whinge, moan, complain and sit in the corner and take their salaries at the end of the month.

The flags issue has divided the community in Northern Ireland for a long time, and it is going to continue to divide us. I am grateful to the SDLP for the way in which it has shown sensitivity in the Departments it controls. That is a sensible way forward and it respects the sensitive nature of this issue in both communities. It shows that the SDLP is willing, on this occasion, to actually try and listen to, and to understand and deal sensibly with, issues that are different between the Unionists and Nationalists in this community.

It is a shame that Sinn Féin has not learnt that it would be good for them to actually try on one occasion to understand Unionists a bit. It could try to understand that we have sensitivities, and that the symbols of Unionism and of our culture are important to us. I would be grateful if Sinn Féin would try and do this in order to make it easier for those of us who are trying extremely hard to deal with the baggage that we carry while trying to move this community on. Yet it continues to slap people like us in the face.

**Mr Irvine:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have to say that in another august body in Long Kesh we could hear the debates. I cannot hear what people are saying here.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The debate is coming towards its end now, and I appeal to Members to hold respect for a bit longer.

**Mr Dalton:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The flying of the Union flag is not the display of a cultural symbol for me. The Union flag does not represent my British culture. It represents the symbol of the state in which I reside. If, by Act of Parliament, the flag were changed tomorrow, then I would give my allegiance to the new

flag that was created. It just so happens that the flag that is in existence is the one that was created following the Act of Union in 1801.

If the United Kingdom, the Queen and Parliament decided to make a change to that flag, then that would be the new flag of the nation in which I reside. All that I would ask is for respect to be given to the flying of the flag that reflects the nation in which we reside. That is what is contained in the agreement. The principle of consent means that we respect the flag of the nation we reside in. We respect the fact that Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom. That is the compromise that has been given.

There is a compromise on both sides here — Unionists have compromised in accepting that, in the eventuality of the majority of people in Northern Ireland agreeing that their future was best in a United Ireland, the constitutional status of Northern Ireland would change. I would not choose to reside in that state — I simply would not wish to. However, we have compromised on that. We are prepared to accept that, even though it is against our will. As a minority we would accept the decision of the majority. We are asking, when the reverse of that is the case, that Nationalists accept that the majority of people in Northern Ireland wish to reside in the United Kingdom. In view of this, the symbols of the state of the United Kingdom should be the ones which are seen in and on public buildings in Northern Ireland.

I spoke yesterday with my partner who has just come back from England. She was struck by the fact that when she was driving through England there were far fewer flags displayed. What she also found interesting was that all the Union flags on display in England were in good order and properly maintained.

**Mr Haughey:** I can understand how, when Members are speaking, occasional remarks are passed. However, I do not think that it is acceptable in the House for there to be a fascistic conspiracy to deprive Members of their democratic right to make their points of view. I call on you, Mr Speaker, to take those measures necessary to ensure that Mr Shipley Dalton and other Members have the democratic right to make their views known.

**Dr McDonnell:** Mr Haughey has made my point. I want to hear what Mr Shipley Dalton is saying, and I am being deprived of that by the rabble down in that corner.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** We are often told that the House follows the practices of another place. There is a continual conspiracy on the part of the pan-Nationalists to keep me from speaking and to defeat me at the polls, but I beat them every time. What will these Gentlemen do if they are elected to the House of Commons? They would be on their feet all the time complaining that they

can hear nothing. I sit on a Bench where I cannot hear anything — even the Speaker cannot hear. They feel that it is not parliamentary if someone passes a comment on what is said.

**Mr Speaker:** There are two separate issues. One is the question of occasional remarks being passed — this is not unusual and occasionally even contributes to the debate. However, it is a different matter when there is a continual barrage interrupting a particular Member. I would not dream of asking Members to feel respect for each other, but I do ask that Members behave with respect for each other.

The Member who has spoken is right. That is not always apparent in another place. I do invite him to come up the corridor, where he will find it a little more apparent in the other place. He will find the Members there alert and hearing what is going on, rather than rowdy and not listening to what is going on. I appeal to Members to behave with respect to each other, even when they do not feel it all the time.

**Mr Dodds:** I appeal to Members of the House to allow the Member who is speaking to say what he is saying very clearly. What he is saying is extremely interesting and no doubt will be of extreme importance in days to come. Given his views on the national flag, the more he speaks the better.

**Mr Speaker:** I therefore appeal for the Member's assistance with his Colleagues.

**Mr S Wilson:** It might be nice to have this repeated at —

**Mr Speaker:** That is not a point of order, and the Member was not called to speak.

**Mr Dalton:** I am very pleased that Nigel Dodds, the Member for North Belfast, for once actually wants to listen to what I have to say. The point I was trying to make was that in discussions yesterday with my partner, who has just recently returned from England — and before anybody in the Front Bench of the DUP gets the host up, my female partner — pointed out to me that in her travels she saw a number of Union flags, although nowhere near the number one sees in Northern Ireland.

Every last one of them was well maintained and flown the right way up. She returned to Northern Ireland and saw raggedy flag after raggedy flag tied to lamp-posts in Dundonald.

In this community we have used and abused the Union flag for many years. Rather than showing it the proper respect it deserves as a symbol of our nation, we have used it as a battering ram and as an attempted cultural symbol for one community to do down the other with. That is why Nationalists find it difficult to accept the Union flag as the flag of our nation. How is



that going to be improved by flying yet more flags from lamp-posts around Rathgael House?

I hope that the Minister of Education will, in due course, listen to the concerns of Unionists and respect what he signed up and agreed to in the agreement. The principle of consent means that Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom, and therefore the flag of the United Kingdom, as chosen by the Parliament of the United Kingdom, should be the one that flies on public buildings.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The time is up. Many other Members wish to speak on this debate. Some of those who had the chance to speak felt rather frustrated that they were allowed only five minutes. Others, who got no chance, will have been even more frustrated, but the Business Committee decided that the time available was to be two hours, and we have come to the end of that period. I call on Dr Paisley to make the winding-up speech, and we will then move immediately to the vote before suspending for lunch.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** This debate was brought about not by the DUP but by the attitude of two Ministers who used their powers to see to it that the flag of our nation was not flown on two days when it should have been. They did not ask the Assembly if that action had universal or even majority support. They did something that was a purely political act to try and satisfy their followers that they were making headway on the Republican agenda that they have embraced.

I notice that every time a Unionist spokesman talks about the pan-Nationalist front, the SDLP gets very excited. There are people other than the SDLP and the IRA/Sinn Féin in the pan-Nationalist front, and the Ulster people have recognised that.

They can abuse me as much as they like. I will not suffer. I will go to Westminster today and cast my vote against the Police Bill. I will sleep well tonight and be back in the morning to do the task that I have to do, but they should realise that I am not speaking for myself. I am speaking for the ordinary, individual Ulsterman who wants to remain in the United Kingdom. No one in the House can deny me that right because on five occasions the people of this Province have had the opportunity to say yes or no, and they said yes.

Even at the last election, when every weapon was used, finances flowed, and newspapers would not take a statement from me, they did not succeed. When you abuse me, you abuse the majority of Ulster's men and women who have the same convictions.

Sticks and stones may break my bones. The Republicans have fired on me, beaten up my wife when she was a member of Belfast City Council — stoned her — and attempted to murder my son by loosening the wheels on his car. He was clever enough to catch it on.

The police said that if he had driven the car, he probably would have been killed. We have all been under that sort of threat, but it will not stop us. Get rid of Ian Paisley, and there will be somebody else speaking the same language and saying the same thing because this represents a large number of people.

12.45 pm

I am highly insulted by what Mr Durkan has said. I never thought he would say that Unionists were looking for some place of respite. We are not on the run. He may think we are, but we are not. We are not looking for respite care. We can take care of ourselves. The leading spokesman and Finance Minister of Northern Ireland says that the people of Northern Ireland who do not agree with what is going on, are looking for some place of respite. We are doing nothing of the sort. I want to tell Mr Durkan that we are going to keep the flag flying. We are not going to bend the knee to IRA/Sinn Féin, or any member of the pan-Nationalist front.

Some Members mentioned backgrounds and where people came from. I have no apology to make for my background. It is a pity that the lady, who is not present — oh, I see she is present although she is taking a back seat — Mrs Nelis, did not tell us about her history, about the gypsy she was when she left the SDLP. She did not tell us that her husband was a member of the UDR. We might as well have the full information. When her husband came home did she pick off the harp and the crown and say “You do not need to wear that. That offends me.”? I do not know whether she said that. The Minister herself was quick to —

**Mr McNamee:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Am I correct in saying that the Member used the word “gypsy” to describe a Member of my party? If so, I think it is inappropriate language.

**Mr Speaker:** It may not be welcome, but it is not unparliamentary.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** The Member will have to learn a bit more. I have been at this game a long time.

We have the Minister who signed the decree to keep the flag off Mr Durkan's building, so he could not fly the flag, nor could the Secretary of State, according to the press. She cannot be proud of her family tree now, as a Republican, because they were all eminent in the British Army. It is interesting that these things have arisen and that all the blame is put upon the poor Ulster Unionists.

Mr Dallat has quite a record about flags. It was very interesting that he mentioned two murders and forgot about all the IRA murders. He forgot about the tortures and the mutilation that were carried out on the bodies of the dead. I do not want to mention those in this House; they are so gruesome. He need not sit and smile. Only two Roman Catholic killings were the result of



Protestants or Unionists. Let us get this right. This is a serious matter because it strikes at the sovereignty of our country.

**Mr C Wilson:** Does Dr Paisley agree that this Assembly is moving to a position where it will be unable to issue a decree on flags? Does he agree that this is not a matter for this Assembly or for the Secretary of State or for Her Majesty's Government? It is a matter for those people who enforce the flying of the flag in line with the command of Her Majesty the Queen and, if all else fails, we should petition Her Majesty the Queen to ensure that her writ runs in Northern Ireland.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** This Assembly has the power to put the flags up on this Building. The Secretary of State has not taken that power. That power has not been devolved. Let no Unionist tell his people that the Secretary of State is responsible. The Secretary of State is not responsible for that. This Assembly is. That is why this motion is relevant to this Assembly.

What has been illustrated in the House today is the fact that this Assembly is not in charge of its own decisions because the pan-Nationalist front can bring forward its petition of concern. It has been argued by the Official Unionists that this is a breach of the right of self-determination — I already mentioned that in my opening speech — and that is right. But the right of self-determination must be the right of the majority of the population to exercise that self-determination. However, these people veto our right to do that so that we do not have that right. When we read the IRA statement of recent days we notice that it rejected the right of self-determination altogether and said self-determination would have to be eliminated before it would hand over its weapons.

I regret that Members of this House suggest, by the things that they say, that there is a conspiracy on these Benches to keep this man from speaking. If there was any such conspiracy I would have thought that you would have caught on to that long ago. But this is an act to denigrate this Assembly. One of the Members, Mr Nesbitt, said that we were only a little Assembly. I say to the Member that littleness is great. It may not be great in his eyes, but he could call with my optician and might get another pair of spectacles that would help him to appreciate it. This little Assembly can be great. I have no apology to make for the smallness of the territory of Northern Ireland. I am proud of Northern Ireland and I am proud of its people. The people of Northern Ireland are people that need to be encouraged after all they have been through.

Dr Farren came out in his true colours when he told us what he thought in his heart. When sitting at a table in another part of this Building I thought about the time when Mr Mallon told us what he thought of Carson's

monument. He said his flesh crept as he passed it every day. He is going to have terrible trouble with his flesh because he is passing it every day now — he will soon have creeping paralysis if he keeps going past that monument. The next thing will be that they will want to remove Carson's monument and go back to what the civil righters could not do. They tried to shift the monument of Lord Craigavon — and if you climb the steps you can see the marks on the marble — but old Lord Craigavon's bust shouted out "not an inch" and they could not get him down the steps.

These matters today are part of a programme — and they are all at one on those benches, and there are some people helping them on — the aim of which is that "we will get you" at the end.

As I said in my opening remarks, they did not have any trouble whatsoever with the minority in the Irish Republic — talk about toleration; the Orangemen could not even march in Dublin because they eliminated them, and that is why we have a population of only 2.5% Protestants now in the South of Ireland. In the South of Ireland there is not even a spokesman for the basic element of Protestantism or Britishness. That is because they are cowed into subjection.

Then we are told that we have to take them when they come here. When Mary McAleese comes up, the RUC are not good enough to protect her and their cars are not good enough for her to ride in. Yet she wants to be received and to sit in the Queen's chair at the General Assembly; she did not want any lesser chair than that.

I say to the pan-Nationalists that the people of Northern Ireland will not lie down or go away. They might think that the people who are opposed to the agreement are all going to disappear some day. The IRA might shoot some of us and kill us, but that will not settle the matter.

There are people who are dedicated as long as they have the majority and, of course, Mr Kelly has not got 50%. To say that the Nationalists make up 50% is nonsense. I want to tell Mr Kelly that Protestants breed as well.

We are facing an issue that will not go away. I regret that the Executive, instead of facing this, handed it away. They thought they would get it easy, but that is not the case. It is the right of the people in this House to fly the flag on the Building. When we vote today, we are voting for something that we have a right to do. As for the petition of concern, there will always be a petition of concern when there is any matter that is not going to help forward the pan-Nationalist front and its Republican agenda.

I do not have time to deal with some of the matters that were raised in the debate. Mr McGuinness was trying to tell us of the wonderful spirit of unity that was

in his heart, a wonderful spirit for his Official Unionist friends. I have never heard such hypocrisy in all my life. He was trying to tell us that, at this time, they were not prepared to fly the flag, but that that did not mean that for all time we would not have the Union flag flying from our buildings.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Your time is up.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Let the Union flag fly.

1.00 pm

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 53; Noes 41.*

#### AYES

##### Unionist

*Ian Adamson, Fraser Agnew, Pauline Armitage, Billy Armstrong, Roy Beggs, Billy Bell, Tom Benson, Paul Berry, Esmond Birnie, Norman Boyd, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Joan Carson, Wilson Clyde, Fred Cobain, Robert Coulter, Duncan Shipley Dalton, Ivan Davis, Nigel Dodds, Boyd Douglas, Reg Empey, David Ervine, Sam Foster, Oliver Gibson, John Gorman, William Hay, David Hilditch, Derek Hussey, Billy Hutchinson, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, Danny Kennedy, James Leslie, David McClarty, William McCrea, Alan McFarland, Michael McGimpsey, Maurice Morrow, Dermot Nesbitt, Ian Paisley Jnr, Ian R K Paisley, Edwin Poots, Ken Robinson, Mark Robinson, Patrick Roche, George Savage, Jim Shannon, David Trimble, Peter Weir, Jim Wells, Cedric Wilson, Jim Wilson, Sammy Wilson.*

#### NOES

##### Nationalist

*Alex Attwood, P J Bradley, Joe Byrne, John Dallat, Bairbre de Brún, Arthur Doherty, Mark Durkan, Seán Farren, John Fee, Tommy Gallagher, Michelle Gildernew, Denis Haughey, Joe Hendron, John Kelly, Patricia Lewsley, Alban Maginness, Alex Maskey, Donovan McClelland, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Martin McGuinness, Gerry McHugh, Eugene McMenamin, Pat McNamee, Francie Molloy, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Mary Nelis, Danny O'Connor, Dara O'Hagan, Éamonn O'Neill, Sue Ramsey, Brid Rodgers, John Tierney.*

##### Other

*Eileen Bell, Seamus Close, David Ford, Kieran McCarthy, Monica McWilliams, Jane Morrice, Sean Neeson.*

Total Votes 94	Total Ayes 53 (56.4%)
Nationalist Votes 34	Nationalist Ayes 0 (0%)
Unionist Votes 53	Unionist Ayes 53 (100%)

*Question accordingly negated.*

**Ms Armitage:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I had requested that a code of conduct should be drawn up and circulated to Tellers, so that they would be aware of how they should behave when acting as Tellers. This arose as I was in an unfortunate situation with a particular Teller. Has this been done, or are you working on it?

**Mr Speaker:** I did receive your request, and an advisory code of conduct for Tellers has been drawn up. Before that is issued, however, I will be consulting with the Business Committee and, in all probability, with the Procedures Committee. Having observed the vote in the last five or 10 minutes, I think it extremely timely that we have an advisory code for the Tellers.

**Mr Morrow:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As one who has acted as a Teller on a number of occasions, I am very concerned that a finger is being pointed at every Teller here today. My party and I know how to behave as Tellers. We do not interfere with anyone. That should be made quite clear. If an individual has acted in an ungentlemanly way or misconducted himself, that person should be dealt with.

**Ms Armitage:** I was not implying that that had happened.

**Mr Speaker:** I have responded to the question that has been raised. Members who were acute observers of which Lobbies particular Tellers were in, on this occasion, will understand that conduct is not necessarily a matter of being ungentlemanly or unladylike. It may sometimes be a matter of just being in the wrong Lobby at a particular time.

*The sitting was suspended at 1.12 pm*

*On resuming (Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair) —*

## EQUALITY

2.30 pm

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** This debate will last two hours. The proposer may speak for 15 minutes. Then there will be five minutes each for other contributors. The proposer will have another 15 minutes to make the winding-up speech before which there will be a further 15 minutes shared between the two junior Ministers.

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. I beg to move the following motion:

That this Assembly notes with approval the work to be completed by 30 June 2000 by public bodies in order to comply with the requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

This motion has been put on the clár to afford the Assembly an opportunity to comment on, and set down markers in relation to, conformity with equality requirements by public bodies and other bodies in receipt of public funds. This is the month in which those bodies designated by the Secretary of State are to complete their equality schemes. It is an opportune time for us, as elected representatives, to note with approval the genuine efforts being made by some to conform fully with the requirements of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and to remind those who have produced inadequate responses that we are determined to hold them fully to those requirements. We must also ask why the Secretary of State appears to have exempted certain public bodies, and many bodies in receipt of public funds, from the requirements of the Act.

The inclusion of an equality agenda in the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement was no accident. The unfortunate attitude of many public and private bodies in this state throughout its history was, perhaps, best summed up by John Taylor at the beginning of those negotiations, when he said

“Of course there can be equality of opportunity, but not equality. The Irish minority cannot be equal to the majority in Northern Ireland.”

The incorporation of the equality agenda into the agreement was a direct consequence of resistance to the systematic discrimination that was prosecuted by the institutions of this state, including public bodies, for three generations. Until that apparatus of discrimination is dismantled, the emphasis on equality must be a major focus in the Programme for Government of this Administration. The Good Friday Agreement enshrined

the equality agenda and paved the way for the creation of a new statutory duty under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act to promote equality among all public bodies. This requires such bodies to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and that means more than just facilitating equality of opportunity. It means recognising the existing need to redress inequalities and actively promoting policies that address that need. These will inevitably include affirmative action measures, which will need to be clearly identified in equality schemes.

This is not just about religious and political discrimination, which has been the hallmark of this state, important though that is. Equality schemes must actively address disability issues. The experience of inequality among disabled people in this society is evidenced by the fact that nearly one in five persons of working age in the Six Counties has a disability which significantly limits their day-to-day activities. Only 31% of people with disabilities are in employment, compared to 75% of those without.

On gender issues, the discrimination experienced by women in all aspects of the economy of the Six Counties remains an obstacle to social change and economic equality. Just over half — 50·5% — of women are economically active, compared to 69·4% of men. Female workers are concentrated in low-paid, low-status jobs and in part-time, casual or temporary work with poor terms and conditions. Overall, women's income from employment and/or benefits is only 61% of that of men.

On the issue of race, there is continuing racism on institutional and individual levels. The marginalisation of Irish travellers is reflected in their lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and poorer educational attainment.

Attacks on, and harassment of, ethnic minorities are increasingly common in Irish society, both North and South. There are other issues relating to sexual orientation, age, religious belief, political opinion, and those with and without dependants.

On the unemployment differential, the most recent labour force survey, released a fortnight ago, demonstrated that Catholics are still more than twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants. This has been the case throughout the last three decades, despite the repeated bogus claims about the efficiency of fair employment legislation in this society. The 1991 census showed that Catholic males in my constituency of Newry and Armagh were as much as three times more likely to be unemployed than Protestant males. In the Mid Ulster constituency, Catholic males were almost three times more likely to be unemployed than Protestant males, and Catholic females twice as likely as Protestant females to be unemployed. Undoubtedly this

is as much a product of the practice of discrimination in job location as the practice of discrimination in job appointments. In an article published last year in the 'European Journal of Political Economy', Prof Vani Borooah concluded that the central message, based on analysis of the 1991 census for Northern Ireland, was that there was clear evidence of discrimination against Catholics.

This systemic discrimination has been institutionalised in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The latest equal opportunities audit, published earlier this year, shows gross under-representation of women and Catholics in the senior grades of the Civil Service. Indeed, it was not long ago that we had the spectacle of a Catholic woman being subjected to the worst kind of sectarian harassment in the office of Baroness Denton. Despite the shame and adverse publicity that that case brought upon the senior Civil Service grades, the perpetrator of that sectarian abuse was subsequently promoted.

Targets must be set, as part of the Programme of Government for this Administration, to eliminate the unemployment differential and to ensure equality of representation for Nationalists and women in the senior Civil Service grades. Many of the equality schemes produced to date, particularly and disappointingly those by many of the Government Departments, fall below acceptable standards. They are deficient in affirmative action measures, transparency monitoring and research, proper use of impact assessments, and effective timetables to tackle seriously the impact of inequality in this state. Some public bodies have not even been required by the Secretary of State to comply with the equality requirements. That is contrary to the intent of the Good Friday Agreement.

The Assembly should send out a signal that less than full and proactive adherence to the principles of equality will not be tolerated from anyone in receipt of public funding. The private sector should also take note of our determination in this regard. We should note with approval the work being undertaken on this issue, but should also serve notice that adherence to equality principles will be a central theme of these institutions. We will remain vigilant until full equality across all these issues has been attained. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr O'Neill:** I am somewhat unclear about the meaning and intention of the motion. I am assuming that Members will be noting with approval the intended, or hoped for, result of the work currently being undertaken, and which has been completed by some public bodies and authorities. Rather than necessarily agreeing with Conor Murphy's introductory remarks that many bodies have successfully completed the work, I would like to concentrate on his remarks questioning the levels of completion and adherence to the requirements by slightly amending them to "some

bodies have successfully completed." In our view, an analysis of the existing draft equality schemes shows that they leave a lot to be desired, and they appear to have fallen well short of the intended aim.

I and my Colleagues, having examined draft reports from various public bodies, are particularly concerned that such bodies appear to be paying only lip-service to the scheme requirements. Many lack the appropriate levels of detail in their assessment plans. In particular, I draw the Member's attention to the Departments that are attached to the Assembly. There is, in the SDLP's view, a big flaw in many of the assessment plans. They appear to be statements of agreement with the spirit of the legislation, rather than of what arrangements are needed in order to carry out an equality impact assessment of their policies.

Recent European Commission research into equality legislation showed that the quality of the policy statement and the assumed equality-neutral character of the policy were two difficulties in promoting what it referred to as mainstreaming, that is, implementing quality legislation in the workplace. Our departmental equality schemes tend to fail on both counts, as they provide no information to support implicit assumptions or explicit statements of assumptions made.

There does not appear to be any joined-up government discussion of how one Department's policy might influence another. In the SDLP's view, Departments should provide much more detail on decisions relating to their timetable of work.

The documents appear — I am talking about the whole public body requirement — generally to support the requirements of the scheme. But, as I have said already, they do not go far enough in suggesting what is needed within the organisations to carry out an equality impact assessment on policy.

Often it is a simple matter of repeating the guidelines and agreeing with their implementation, rather than proactively illustrating how they can work. The true test is the commitment of finance and resources to achieve equality. It is a good test of a public body's commitment to see whether it will "pony up", as we might say, and make a financial commitment.

As I am trying to illustrate, there is a mixed picture surrounding the draft schemes and their various aspects. For example, how far does the draft scheme issued by any body specify that adequate consideration will be given to impact assessments? I am now talking generally and not just about the Departments, which I have dealt with specifically. Too often one sees repetition of old Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment-style formulae that are more about redressing discrimination than about actively promoting equality. Many of the schemes do not supply visible impact



analysis plans. There are several other concerns, but my time is up.

**Mr Poots:** Madam Deputy Speaker, it is good to see you back in the Chair. This is an interesting debate, and it is interesting to see who has brought the equality issue forward.

I shall touch a little on the equality schemes in the first instance. I have to concur with some of Mr O'Neill's remarks. Many of the responses have lacked clarity, particularly in relation to staff training, resourcing, timetabling and impact assessment. There is also a lack of information on the financial implications of the measures proposed, and in many cases there is no indication of how they propose to communicate the schemes to young people. Many of the schemes do not address the needs of older people.

There is much work to be done on a lot of the schemes that have been brought forward on the draft proposals. There is a need for tightening up. The policy of the DUP on equality is that no one should suffer discrimination on account of gender, disability, religion, ethnicity or creed.

2.45 pm

We believe that everyone is entitled to be in the same position in respect of getting jobs or of accessing the various options that are available to them and that no one should be discriminated against. I am thinking in particular of the new police force that is to be established and the fact that the selection of police officers is to be carried out on a fifty-fifty basis. In reality, there should be a system whereby those who are best qualified should be selected to carry out the job.

I was told today that Sinn Féin had been speaking to foreign journalists and telling them that people who had previously been engaged in paramilitarism should be entitled to join the RUC. In my view that is not equal representation. All those who adhere to the law and who are prepared to enforce it in an impartial manner should be entitled to apply to join the RUC, or the Northern Ireland Police Service, or whatever it happens to be called. Nothing else should be taken into account.

I would be interested to see how European money will be distributed under these new equality schemes. In the past there was a very unequal distribution of European money. We heard some interesting figures being quoted today — figures that go back to 1991. That is the last century, in case those people did not realise. It is time to come into the new century, into the new era, into the new millennium and leave the old century behind. On a regular basis, we hear old, irrelevant figures being quoted, but perhaps a lot of people in South Armagh, those referred to, were “doing the double” at that time. That was before the Tories had drawn up the legislation which stamped out a lot of that,

and perhaps not as many people were unemployed as the statistics created by that census showed. That census has undoubtedly been used to discriminate against members of my community when it came to getting money from the European peace funds, and that should be addressed under the new equality initiative. Ministers of this Government have made certain appointments. How does that fit in with the equality agenda? The Health Department, for example, has brought out its equality agenda, and yet the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has taken on a multiple murderer to act as her special adviser. Was that person the best qualified to do the job, or was it simply a case of employing somebody because of his past? *[Interruption]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please be very cautious about his remarks.

**Mr Poots:** I have nothing to be cautious about, Madam Deputy Speaker. I can name the person he murdered. He happened to come from my constituency, and I went to school with his son. I have no problem in doing that, if it is the wish of the Assembly. I can understand that that Minister would, perhaps, like to portray herself as being a very green Republican in spite of the fact that some of the Sunday newspapers indicated that she comes from a fine line of British Army soldiers. Her great-grandfather once joined the forces to suppress Fenians — a fact that is quite amusing. Given that that was her background, she may go out of her way — *[Interruption]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Poots:** — to be seen to be more Republican than necessary, but she should not let that affect her dealings with the workforce. She should employ everybody on an equal basis.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I am afraid your time is up, Mr Poots.

**Ms McWilliams:** There are currently a number of problems with these schemes, and from what I understand, 105 of them have been completed to date. I want to pay tribute at this point to a number of bodies that have called for consultation with others, in particular the South Eastern Education and Library Board, which wrote to Assembly Members yesterday. The letter gave details of meetings at which the Board is prepared to have consultation before it finally submits its schemes. This is a piece of good practice which the other designated bodies would have done well to follow, rather than simply preparing a scheme and forwarding it to each of us. We currently have approximately 50 of these schemes sitting on our desks, and they could have notified us about some of these consultation meetings.

That brings me to my first point. This is such a new method of designing equality in Northern Ireland that a

great deal more consultation should have taken place. There are three stages. The Equality Commission made it very clear to the designated bodies that they could have taken more time in the preparation for approval of the schemes, and then decided on what should be screened for impact assessment statements.

Having read a number of them, I am concerned that the departmental bodies — not the non-departmental ones — have decided what they are screening out. So, it seems they have taken a very negative approach to the issue of equality. In other words, they are deciding what they are not going to do, rather than what they are going to do.

Finally, there would have been a third stage, after the schemes had been forwarded to the Equality Commission, when there could have been some consultation on the impact assessment statements. I am slightly disappointed that they did not take the opportunity to engage in the kind of wide-ranging consultation that needs to happen on issues of equality, and in which the Human Rights Commission is now prepared to engage, in relation to its bill of rights.

This is a unique opportunity for Northern Ireland. Human rights and equality should not be owned by any section of the House — they belong to us all. With that in mind, I commend Mr Poots for his early comments, before he got into the disappointing party political statements. He was right in saying that Departments have lost an opportunity to speak to children in particular about the impact, and also to older people who have often been the more excluded and marginalised members of our community.

Most of the schemes comment on disability, religion, race and gender. However, this was an opportunity for us to bring in others, and link up Departments which are responsible for older people and the younger members of our community.

There is serious concern that the Secretary of State has still not designated other bodies for equality schemes. Different types of bodies have been designated, and those currently completing the schemes have been designated under two pieces of legislation — the Commissioner for Complaints (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the Ombudsman (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. The Secretary of State has the power to designate other bodies and has not done so. He should now set out a timetable by which he will designate them and let us see how comprehensive these bodies are.

Now that our new Ministers are in place, they should be committed to the schemes. In their absence, the Departments and the designated bodies had to go ahead and prepare the schemes. The Ministers may not have had much time to sign off the schemes, other than perhaps by adding their signatures. Now is the time for them, in this consultation process, to be active change

agents. If the statements do not come from the top and there is not a commitment to allocate resources — as Mr Poots has pointed out — and put the training in place, they will only be as good as words on paper. Many of us know that writing reports or making statements is worth little if they are not enforced or implemented.

I take some hope from the fact that we have now gone a long way in Northern Ireland towards not just talking about and using the rhetoric of equality, but to producing action.

**Ms Lewsley:** I thank Mr Conor Murphy for proposing the motion on equality, as it gives the House an early opportunity to examine the issue of equality schemes currently out for consultation across Government Departments.

The equality schemes set up under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 are a worthwhile first step. However, I know, from my own experience in responding to the Department of Education's scheme, that the consultation period is very short. If equality is to work for any group of people then the key to success is enforcement and accountability. I call on the Departments, and the Ministers in particular, to put equality high on their agenda. I call on them to ensure that section 75 is implemented in full and that they address some of the issues raised today and I call on them to ensure that adequate resources are allocated, suitable training is given to staff and that appropriate mechanisms are put in place for proper consultation, particularly, complaint procedures.

Questions also need to be asked about whether the internal management structures for coping with the equality duty are adequate and about whether suitable weight is given to the equality of opportunity considerations when it comes to making final decisions. These queries need to be answered and appropriate amendments made to redress the major flaws in these schemes.

I would also like to bring to the House's attention the specific issue of equality for those with a disability under the requirements of section 75 of the Act. The House will be aware that the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 is already on the statute book. However, for this law to have real teeth in the future, it is essential to establish a commission of enforcement for Northern Ireland. Without such enforcement it will not be possible to make serious inroads into the present levels of discrimination. In the rest of the UK the newly formed Disability Rights Commission has real teeth to deal with those who flout the law. In Great Britain, the commission possesses the powers not only to investigate cases of inequality in the workplace but, where necessary, to pursue action through the courts. As no such protection or redress exists for disabled people

in Northern Ireland, I look forward to early legislation emanating from the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers not only to correct this imbalance, but, more importantly, to protect disabled people against discrimination in our society.

As a result of the House's recent suspension, the powers contained in the Equality (Disability, etc) (Commencement No 1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2000 were left for others to decide. As a result, disabled people in Northern Ireland got a raw deal and did not receive the protection they rightly deserve. The House has the duty in the months and years ahead to ensure such protection. Then and only then will we be able to talk seriously about equality.

**Mr Campbell:** In recent years there has been a more pragmatic and forward-looking approach to various aspects of equality legislation, particularly when it refers to disability and gender. May I echo the comments made by Mr Poots that no one in the House would contemplate or countenance accepting or acquiescing to discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, community background or anything else. We believe in the concept of a fair and equal society.

Now, looking at the timetable for equality impact assessments, it is very clear, taking the equality agenda as a whole, that what is happening in Northern Ireland is the emerging of a concept of inequality. A revision of legislation is being undertaken as result of this concept rather than as a result of reality. That concept is total and utter nonsense. It is a fallacy that people are discriminated against in Northern Ireland because they are Roman Catholic. People may say that for party political purposes or because they need some medical or psychiatric assistance. Perhaps they should listen and learn.

3.00 pm

The tenth monitoring report of the Equality Commission is available only now; it was issued last week and gives the current up-to-date figures, in local government terms, for the Nationalist-controlled councils. In Newry and Mourne — I think one of its representatives spoke earlier — 76·8% of recruits last year were Roman Catholic. In the case of Down District Council — again, one of its representatives spoke earlier — 78·9% of recruits last year were Roman Catholic. In Londonderry — a representative has not spoken until now — 77·4% of recruits were Roman Catholic. In the case of Omagh District Council, 73·8% of recruits were Roman Catholic. Strabane came out remarkably well: only 60% were Roman Catholic. What sort of world are these people living in? I have not gone into the statistics for private sector companies, which I have mentioned from time to time over the past 20 years.

**Mr Haughey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Campbell:** No, not when I have only one and a half minutes.

The private sector is even worse. In the case of Norbrook Laboratories, the head of which sits on one of the North/South Councils, 85·9% of recruits are Roman Catholics. The figure for Glen Electric is 95·1% — we are coming close to 100%. Sean Quinn's is 91·2% Roman Catholic. Reality checks are needed big time. People want to try to dwell on a concept and an illusion of reality. In reality, our community is being discriminated against day in, day out.

Any equality impact assessment study must take account of the impact that reverse discrimination has had over the past 20 years. There is nothing that I have seen or heard from either the Equality Commission or any submissions to it that takes account of that — nothing. It has to be and it must be taken account of because these figures demonstrate a worsening position. If I were to read out the figures of 10 years ago they would have been slightly better than that. Where there are large numbers of Roman Catholics in employment, even more are being recruited. Of course there is the reverse situation where there are a large number of Protestants being employed, but it is not the case that large numbers of Protestants are also being recruited.

**Ms Gildernew:** Go raibh maith agat. Equality is central to the Good Friday Agreement and the incorporation of the equality agenda into the Good Friday Agreement was a direct result of the inequalities that have existed in this state since partition. As my Colleague, Conor Murphy, pointed out, senior Unionist politicians in the Six Counties failed to recognise the inequalities that existed then, and some still fail to recognise them.

Section 75 is a key part of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Section 73 outlines the duties of the Equality Commission. The legislation also details the equality schemes that will help to address the imbalances in our society. It should provide a framework to help ensure that equality of opportunity for all is made a reality in policy making. By 30 June, public authorities will have to comply with the requirements of section 75 by law. However, it is vital that all public authorities are included in this designation. At this point Peter Mandelson, who has authority for designating bodies in receipt of public funding, has not yet designated universities, further education colleges and UK Departments. I urge him to do so immediately.

The UK Departments include the Home Office, which is responsible for the appalling conditions to which asylum seekers here are still subjected, and the Social Security Agency, which clearly has an obligation to promote equality. Some other glaring omissions



include the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which has no equality scheme for the IDB — a body which has been criticised recently for its poor management and bad judgement, and which has a huge budget to spend as and, more importantly, where it wishes.

The Department for Social Development, in which there is no equality scheme for the Belfast Regeneration Office, has spent millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on the Laganside project; but it is doubtful how this will impact on the most deprived areas of the city in terms of employment and accessibility. While the docks area thrives with building work going on as far as the eye can see, areas like north and west Belfast remain as they were, with dereliction and deprivation being the norm.

We are in danger of creating greater divisions and disparity in this city, and across the Six Counties, unless funding is properly allocated so that all can benefit from the resources that are available. If the Belfast Regeneration Office does not have to comply with equality legislation, there will be a danger that Nationalist areas will suffer neglect. What I find hardest to understand is the reticence of the Office of the Centre, under the First and Deputy First Ministers, on addressing religious and political discrimination. They are listed in the screening process as matters for consideration in five years from now. The same scheme has listed community relations for impact appraisal in the first year of work.

The promotion of equality in employment, goods and services should be the primary duty and the promotion of good relations a secondary consideration. If the former is achieved, it should surely underpin the latter. As for the equality schemes themselves, it is essential to have clear and unambiguous timetables specified for achieving the tasks and goals. Equality schemes must include timetables for training, for screening and for the production of impact assessments and annual reports. They must clearly specify how the body concerned intends to secure equality and not merely repeat the guidelines. We have to ensure that overlaps that may exist are properly dealt with and do not result in gaps in the provision for equality. Schemes must indicate the extent of their responsibilities for impact assessment and show how this relates to the next level up or down to ensure adequate protection.

None of the equality schemes that I have seen to date has addressed one of the most important aspects of this work — is the effective monitoring of employment practices by public authorities. We all know about disparities in employment practices which were only addressed in part by the old fair employment legislation. For example, senior ranks of the Civil Service and

Government Departments discriminated wholesale against Catholics.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. There are conversations going on which I am able to hear from the Chair. Let us keep quiet while the Member continues.

**Ms Gildernew:** Go raibh maith agat. We all know about disparities in employment practices which were addressed only in part by the old fair employment legislation. We must use this opportunity to get it right and to ensure that future generations are not discriminated against because of religious belief, political opinion, age, sexual orientation, race, gender, dependence or disability. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mrs E Bell:** I am sure we will get order.

Equality, as Mr Campbell has confirmed, is a term like reconciliation, agreement and even peace that has many definitions, depending on your background and perceptions. It is therefore difficult for us to ascertain how the statutory duty in section 75 will affect the need for equality of opportunity for all and how it will be implemented by designated public authorities in terms of good value, equal treatment, and best practice. This must be done within the specified criteria. I recommend a means used by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. It has circulated to all other bodies, and to their staff, an Equality Commitment Statement. If any member of staff feels that he is being discriminated against in any way he can call that up to have it dealt with.

Something like that is clear. As other Members have said, sometimes it is great to put something on paper, but it can be hard to implement it. The submissions that I have read from many different public authorities and bodies make very similar reading. It looks as if they all used the same template, which seems to be this guide to the statutory duties. I got the definite impression that many, if not all, seem to have been completed simply because they were obligatory rather than from an informed viewpoint, and clearly that gives concern.

The Equality Commission has worked tirelessly on advising and informing authorities on the implementation of the statutory duty, but it is early days for all of us. We will need to support the Equality Commission's examination of policies for promoting equality of opportunity. This must be done within appendix 1 of the Act, which I do not have time to read out.

Equality-impact assessment must also be clearly and effectively conducted so that everyone feels they have been treated exactly the same. The consultation process, as others have mentioned, must be thorough and comprehensive; it does not seem to have been in some submissions I have seen in different areas which I know. There has not been as wide a consultation to complete their submission as there should have been. Members have already mentioned shortcomings regarding



disability and gender, therefore, rather than follow my notes, I shall merely say that I share their concerns.

One of the main problems to date is the complete absence of information for the public, who seem unaware of the statutory duty's implications. Procedures must be publicised for the public so that equality requirements can be properly maintained. As has been said, in due course equality schemes must be produced by other bodies and authorities that have not been designated, and I hope the Secretary of State will examine that. Organisations such as the Assembly must look at it to ensure that we lead the way in promoting equality at all levels. Our Departments have had to make submissions on issues like employment and recruitment practice, and procedures of general good practice and we must do likewise.

We are in the early days of real equality that we all understand. However, I will, as a Member of the Committee of the Centre, along with my Colleagues, be looking at the role of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy Minister in the area of equality. We shall be looking carefully at implementation so that all the gaps are stopped. Like others, I welcome this. When I first looked at this motion, I thought it was perhaps too early. But I now believe, on the basis of comments made by others, that it has been timely, ensuring that we all know what we are in for in the coming months, and hope that we can all look each other in the face equally.

**Mr Morrow:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I listened with interest to what Mr Campbell said about the Equality Commission's annual report. As most Members know, Assembly Members get most reports that go out, but it is significant that we do not get a copy of that particular one. Would it be in order for the Assembly to take that point up with the Equality Commission and ask it why it does not circulate this report annually to Members?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** That is not a point of order, but the matter could be taken up with the Printed Paper Office.

**Mr Weir:** I agree with the closing remark of my North Down Colleague Eileen Bell that this debate on the issue of equality is timely. However — and I shall come to the reasons presently — I take exception to the wording of the motion, which I feel is perhaps not quite so appropriate or timely. As the Member remarked the importance of equality, like many of these words, lies perhaps as much in perception as in reality. Unfortunately, for many within the Unionist community, the terms “equality” and “Equality Commission” conjure up other images. Indeed, their memories are very much drawn to the Fair Employment Commission, which for many in the Unionist community was heavily discredited. For many of them, it is difficult to approach this issue in the context of trying to create a situation

where there is equality of opportunity, which should be our aim for everyone. Many Unionists will view the word “equality” in the same way many people viewed Eastern European states calling themselves “democratic” in the former Soviet era. A concern among many Unionists is whether the Equality Commission will simply be another exercise in discrimination against Unionists.

I do not think that should be the case, and I hope we shall all strive for a situation in which we have full equality of opportunity, not simply in religion, but, as has been mentioned, in gender, ethnic background and disability. All those things should be tackled.

This brings me to the nature of the motion itself. It is rather clumsily worded, for two conclusions could be drawn from it as to what is intended. Either we are congratulating the fact that work is going on in the area of equality, although to be congratulating people on the fact that the matter is being looked at without any examination as to the quality of the work itself seems to be a rather facile notion, or secondly, we are congratulating the output that has been achieved. Given that there was a deadline of 30 June, it seems premature to be making a judgement on whether it is achieving, at this stage, its objectives. Indeed, we have heard a wide range of criticism from various Members. It may well be that, given time, those criticisms can be accepted and dealt with, but there is great concern that many of the responses which have been put forward are fairly inadequate and do not cover all the issues. In particular, given the concentration on religious discrimination, other issues such as gender discrimination and giving teeth to disability legislation have tended, in the past, to be pushed to one side. Before we make a judgement on whether the matter is being dealt with properly by the equality review, we need to look at the end product, rather than simply welcoming it at this stage.

3.15 pm

I question the methodology that has been used. The sheer number of Departments and statutory bodies producing reports led to a period when all of us were deluged more or less every day with another report from another group. I wonder whether the idea of simply getting every Department or every group to produce its own report was the right approach.

I also wonder whether the issue of equality could be better tackled by a more holistic approach which actually looked at the wider issues, and also whether Government resources have been wisely spent on these dozens of reports, rather than having been used to look at the issue in a broader frame. There is then a tendency to ignore a lot of the bigger issues.

For example, I have severe concerns, from a legal point of view, about some of the powers that the fair employment body had. We had a situation — I do not

know whether it has been addressed yet — which particularly discriminated against employers. If an employer lost a case, he could not appeal in terms of quantum; he could appeal only in terms of law. There are a number of similar issues which I do not think —

**Mr Roche:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Weir:** I do not have time to give way.

There have been a number of issues of that nature. There are issues, in terms of taking a look at the wider approach, as to whether the whole area of disability discrimination has been properly dealt with. I am not sure that simply pigeon-holing it into a wide range of Departments and minor Government bodies is the right way of dealing with it. It should have been dealt with centrally using a bigger approach.

I also question, for example, discrimination in my own constituency. Much has been made of discrimination in a number of areas. North Down, which is supposed to be the “gold coast” of Northern Ireland — *[Interruption]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Weir:** North Down, at one stage, had the lowest rate of unemployment in Northern Ireland, but it now has above-average unemployment. I believe that that is due to Government policy. I do not think that this is the right motion for today. I am glad to see it is being debated, but I do not think the wording is correct.

**Mr Attwood:** First, I want to make an observation about this debate, which I hope will be heard by the bureaucracies inside and outside Government. There is a very high degree of consensus in the Chamber on this issue. There may be some difference of opinion — and there is some profound difference of opinion on the outworking of equality practice — but it is quite clear that, that aside, all those who have spoken today from all the parties now accept that there is an equality duty; that equality has been mainstreamed and that a culture of equality has to prevail inside government and beyond in the North. I have observed, not just for our own benefit but more to ensure that those who are in and close to government and those who are in public authorities in the North understand, that there is a high degree of political consensus on the issue of equality in the North, unlike at any other time in our history. Public authorities in particular need to acknowledge and accept that there is a growing consensus and cohesion and that whatever the past might have been, the political establishment in the North will increasingly make demands from public authorities to ensure that they fulfil their equality functions and equality duties.

While the Chamber understands that public authorities have taken time to come to terms with their

new duty under the Northern Ireland Act and acknowledges that the outworking of that, at public authority level, is difficult and requires many changes, nevertheless it is appropriate to put on record what is expected of them. Other Members have referred to that already, so I will only mention two crucial requirements on public authorities which, to date, have not been reflected adequately or at all in the draft equality schemes that they have submitted to the Government.

The first requirement is essential. Section 75 lays two responsibilities on public authorities. There is concern that public authorities will concentrate on one to the absence of the other. That will not be accepted by politicians or by the Equality Commission in the North. The two duties are to pay due regard to the need to promote equality and opportunity and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations. We can easily imagine situations where, while fulfilling their equality of opportunity duty, they will respect community relations but fail to promote equality of opportunity as required by the legislation.

Public authorities need to appreciate that the higher duty upon them is the need to fulfil equality of opportunity. While it is desirable to promote community relations, that is a lesser duty, even though it is a high duty that they owe to the local community. Public authorities need to be aware of the difference and of the primacy of the need to promote equality of opportunity rather than the desirability of promoting community relations.

The second point I want to make to the public authorities is that there is a lack of definition and detail in the draft equality schemes that they have submitted to the Government. They need to demonstrate much more conclusively that they are prepared to invest in the equality duty, the resources and all the other requirements necessary to see that it works in practice. In particular, they need to demonstrate more fully the requirement for training to be undertaken by public officials to ensure that the duty is fulfilled. They need to outline more clearly how resources are going to be invested to ensure that the duty is fulfilled, and how they are going to apply the principles of their equality schemes generally. They need to outline clarity in screening to ensure that we understand why public authorities select some of their functions rather than others when it comes to applying the public authority duty.

Finally, and most centrally, the public authorities need to outline how each equality duty and equality scheme fulfils the Targeting Social Need requirement of Government. A former Secretary of State said Targeting Social Need was one of three compelling requirements of government in the North. Public authorities need to demonstrate that in practice in each area.

**Mr Shannon:** A “rough draft” of the American Declaration of Independence states

"We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable; that all men are created equal and independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

That puts the proposer of the motion in perspective. It talks about equality, but the person who brought forward the motion is talking about a different type of equality which ignores the community that I come from and represent. They are here only because for 30 years they have tried to kill the Unionist community and put them under pressure.

I want to dwell upon some of the equality issues. They are issues that affect each and every one of us, are important to us all and affect many different parts of our community. When we talk about equality in relation to maternity services being moved from Jubilee to west Belfast, where is the equality for the community in east Belfast? Where is the equality when over £50 million is put into Irish language schools to the detriment of other schools and other education?

We now have two Ministers responsible for issues such as these. Perhaps they could start by looking at equality in their Departments and making sure that equality in every facet of life is looked at and dealt with. Unfortunately, many of us in the Unionist community feel that this equality legislation has failed to assure us that we are entitled to equality of treatment first, as every other part of the community is. Many Unionists look at it today and say "No, we are not part of this equality agenda and we are going to lose out."

Those of us who are elected representatives, including councillors, will be snowed under by this mountain of paperwork that we have on equality issues from every Department looking for our opinions. I am concerned that what will result is legislation that the councils will not be able to operate fully because of the workload. Officers in my council have said that this will be a very difficult issue for them, taking so much time and manpower. Everything that happens in council and Government life will be affected by equality issues.

One item that I am glad will be included relates to planning, a matter of concern in the area I represent. Even though they make their representations to the Planning Service, many people feel that their opposition to planning developments that will directly affect the area they live in are not really considered. So I am glad to see that they will be able to request a hearing and have direct input into planning matters. This will allow them to feel that they are part of the process.

I am also concerned about senior citizens and those with disabilities. Those with disabilities have not had the full support of the law of the land over the last few years. Some people with disabilities are only being recognised now, and that is something that we want to see happening more at every level by councils, the

Assembly and MPs. Our disabled people, senior citizens and those who deserve extra consideration must feel that this equality agenda involves them.

We also have a problem with equality of funding. Many parts of the Unionist community feel that they have not received as much funding from Europe as they should have. They wish to see the balance addressed so that all those who have not received the proper funding will feel part of the process.

We are also looking for equality for Ulster-Scots. When it comes to handing out funding, there is no equality for that either. We want to see equality for the Ulster-Scots language, equality and parity of funding, full representation and the opportunity to express that language at every level of society.

In conclusion, we must have every possible opportunity for everyone, and everybody in the community must feel part of it.

**Mr A Maginness:** Inequality was, and still is, a potent issue in our divided society — indeed, it was historic inequality which gave rise to the Civil Rights Movement. The equality issues that we are debating today, and which form a central part of the Good Friday Agreement, are really the unfinished business of the Civil Rights Movement — a campaign which was prematurely interrupted by the divisive and bloody campaign of violence by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries. Happily, there now is a widespread, though belated, recognition that these issues of inequality and equality are much more productive in terms of bringing about a beneficial effect on our society than concentrating on what was called the national question.

3.30 pm

The SDLP welcomes the Good Friday Agreement's emphasis on equality issues. I would particularly like to discuss the Secretary of State's role under Section 75. First, it is vital that he designate UK authorities and public bodies involved in policing and other key areas so that the equality duty under section 75 applies to them. We are concerned that the Secretary of State has not said which bodies will be so designated. That has yet to be done. It is important that as many UK bodies as possible be designated. For example, the Department of Social Security should be designated, since its policies have a huge effect on parity issues in Northern Ireland. We have also publicly called for the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Office to be designated. This would ensure fairness and equality in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State has other important roles. Where the Equality Commission does not believe that a public authority's draft equality scheme is adequate that scheme can be referred to the Secretary of State. The



Secretary of State then has the choice of accepting the scheme, directing that it be revised, or making a new scheme for that body. This is a very important power. Where the Equality Commission receives a complaint that a public authority is not fulfilling its equality duty in practice it can investigate and, if it finds the complaint to be justified, refer it to the Secretary of State. In the case of Northern Ireland bodies, the Secretary of State can ultimately direct the body to take the necessary steps to remedy the problem. That is also a crucial power. It is important that the Secretary of State has a dedicated equality unit supporting him to ensure that section 75 is fully and effectively implemented.

In our view, the Secretary of State has a key role in the implementation of section 75 and in ensuring that the promise of the individual equality schemes is realised in practice. We hope that he will rise to this challenge.

**Mr S Wilson:** At the outset, I wish to say — and I am sure that my Colleagues will have pointed this out, in my absence, on behalf of the DUP — that we have absolutely no problem with the mainstreaming of the equality issue for Government Departments in Northern Ireland. Many people in the Unionist community are now experiencing the effects of unequal treatment and discrimination. It is essential that equality issues be brought to the fore. However, it is ironic — though perhaps not unexpected — that this issue has been brought before us by a party which, by its actions, shows that it has total contempt for equality on an almost daily basis. It really does not give two hoots about ensuring that people are treated equally. I have no doubt that at the end of this debate members of Sinn Féin will troop into this Assembly and through the voting lobby to vote for the motion.

I could mention them one by one, but I do not have time. I will just mention one. Maybe it should be indicated to Barry “the bantam bully” McElduff, that when we talk about not discriminating against people, or about promoting equality of opportunity between persons of different political opinions, that means not intimidating pensioners who happen to think that it is appropriate to sit on a police liaison committee.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Member should be cautious about his remarks.

**Mr S Wilson:** Maybe he will also be informed that equality of opportunity means that if someone speaks to you in a language other than Irish, you do not pounce on him and abuse him. I have no doubt that Mr McElduff will raise his hand in support of this motion, but it is quite clear that he has not got a clue about what it means in practice.

I will deal with some of the issues on the equality scheme. As I said at the outset, I have no difficulty in supporting a sensible equality scheme for Northern

Ireland and for Departments in Northern Ireland. However, I will not make myself part of Sinn Féin’s abuse of this House. They pretend to support equality while in practice they ignore the issues of equality.

I will outline where a lot of this equality legislation falls down. I have listened to Alban Maginness, who tells us that this is the culmination of the unfinished business of the Civil Rights Association. Over the last 30 years we have had legislation by the book load from Westminster. We have had Fair Employment legislation, Equal Opportunity legislation and all the rest, and we still hear the same old story from Nationalists that there is inequality.

Perhaps this illustrates the danger in thinking that the issue can be sorted out simply by providing a lot of legislation. First this equality legislation must not do away with individual responsibility. We have a list of rights for people in this society, but people tend to ignore their responsibilities in society. That should not be submerged in any discussion on individual rights.

Secondly, we run into danger when we elevate individual rights above the needs of society. It is important that this legislation should not go in that direction. I will draw my remarks to a close. There are many other points that I wish to make, but there is a very real danger that this legislation ... *[Interruption]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Member’s time is up.

With regard to the remarks concerning the possibility of the Speaker, or the Deputy Speaker, allowing the House to be abused I will look closely at Hansard.

**Mr Roche:** It will not take five minutes to make my simple point. I want to use the opportunity of this debate on equality to make the point that there is absolutely no evidence available to sustain the proposition that there ever was systematic discrimination against the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. If someone wants to dispute that, I had the pleasure of editing a book, that was published a few months ago, in which there is a chapter by Graham Gudgin dealing with the two fundamental claims made about the issue of equality — inequality in housing and inequality in jobs.

Dr Gudgin has put forward arguments absolutely impossible for anyone familiar with the statistics to refute, and no one has ever even attempted it. No one from the Nationalist side of the House — or from among those who are committed to the idea that there was a long period of systematic inequality against Catholics in Northern Ireland — has ever even attempted it, because they know they could not sustain their arguments.

The argument about Catholic unemployment was something they discovered in 1971. Interestingly



enough, it never formed a significant part of the civil rights programme. But in 1971 the census showed that two and a half times more Catholics than Protestants were unemployed, and that figure has largely been sustained over a thirty-year period, despite the fair-employment legislation we have. Dr Gudgin and Prof Breen, who now holds a chair in Oxford and who was one of the top researchers in the Economic and Social Research Institute, published a paper a few years ago. This paper demonstrated that a high proportion of long-term unemployment among the Catholic population was simply due to the abnormally high rate of population increase in that section of the community. There were certain other factors, but that was a key one. Nobody has ever refuted those statistics from two of the top researchers in Northern Ireland.

Statistics for employment since 1990 demonstrate that the relative number of Protestants in employment has declined, while the number of Catholics has increased. Therefore, over a period, I and a number of other people carried on a public debate against the so-called Fair Employment Commission with the argument that fair-employment legislation massively discriminated against the Protestant community. It was so discriminatory that the commission's own employment practices were way out of line with what they should have been. They were employing more Catholics than Protestants. I am sorry to have to use the terminology of Catholic and Protestant, but that is what other people have brought into the public domain.

This debate on equality is about two fundamental things. First it is an attempt, among other things, to undermine the legitimacy of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. The other side of the coin is that, given the absolute poverty of Irish Nationalism, a child — and I challenge anyone on the Nationalist side ever to meet me on a public platform to sustain their position — could demolish the Irish Nationalist case. In order to fortify it, they have developed the idea that there was massive discrimination against the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, which could only be rectified by 30 years of unqualified barbarity and terrorism. Its purpose is not only to de-legitimise the status of Northern Ireland within the Union, but to legitimise 30 years of terrorism. That is what the argument is about. Having got this so-called equality agenda inserted into the Belfast Agreement, with the connivance of the Ulster Unionist Party, they are now systematically — *[Interruption]*

And you too, Mr Irvine. You were among the suckers. In fact, you were one of the biggest of them.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I must have order in the House.

**Mr Roche:** They have now given instruction to the Nationalist community to use a so-called equality

agenda — and we had an example of this this morning — to systematically divest Northern Ireland of its identity within the United Kingdom.

**Dr O'Hagan:** Go raibh maith agat, Madam Deputy Speaker. First, some of the comments —

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order, please.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it going to be the rule that only one side of the House is to be called to order? Is it that persons on the other side can act however they like and with a blind eye turned, or is there a need for —

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order.

3.45 pm

**Dr O'Hagan:** Listening to this debate and to some of the comments from the other side of the House in particular, is like being with Alice in Wonderland, where the world is topsy-turvy. Some of the comments that have been made are indicative of what has been the problem all along: Unionist denial that there has been institutionalised discrimination in this state since its inception, and that equality was placed at the centre of the Good Friday Agreement as a recognition of that.

People need to get to grips with the reality of all this. There was a reference to Graham Gudgin and the work that he did. In the academic world a lot of his work has not been recognised or received very well. A large body of academic work lays down the proof of the inequalities that existed. One of the things that is very significant in this debate is that the DUP in particular, and Unionism in general, is arguing against equality. The question needs to be asked: who fears equality? Go raibh maith agat.

**Junior Minister (Office of First and Deputy First Ministers (Mr Haughey):** I welcome the motion, and I agree with the Member who moved it that existing fair employment and equality legislation has not produced the degree or speed of change that I would have wished to see. This is shown by the persistence of the differentials between, for instance, men and women in terms of the income they derive from employment, in terms of unemployment rates between the two sections of our community and in a number of other ways.

The section 75 statutory obligations are an integral part of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and they put the mainstreaming of equality onto a statutory basis for the first time ever. The mainstreaming of equality means ensuring that due regard is given to equality considerations in the decision-making processes of all public authorities. The benefits of this are very obvious — better decision making, since we will examine how different policy options could impact on different sections of the community; greater equality, since we will endeavour to ensure that equality of opportunity is

promoted; and greater openness, since consultation with the wider members of civic society lies at the very core of section 75.

The statutory obligations arose out of the earlier administrative initiative — policy appraisal and fair treatment (PAFT). The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights found that PAFT was not being implemented as it should have been and recommended that it be placed on a statutory footing to ensure better implementation. A commitment, therefore, to put PAFT on a statutory basis was subsequently included in the Good Friday Agreement. The statutory obligations are, therefore, not just legally binding, they are also among the key initiatives promised by the Good Friday Agreement. Implementing section 75 correctly and effectively must be a key priority for the Administration and for all of us. It is as simple as that.

The obligation relates to a wide spectrum of equality of opportunity and not just to areas of religion, political opinion, gender, race and disability, where there are already laws against discrimination. Age, marital status, sexual orientation and whether one has dependants or not must also be taken into account. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in all of these categories. They should also have regard to the need to promote good relations between people of different religions, political opinions and racial groups. I am not aware of any country that has created such a sophisticated framework for the mainstreaming of equality as we have here in Northern Ireland. We can rightly consider ourselves to be at the cutting edge and to be setting an example to the world in the promotion of best practice.

The obligations are to be implemented through equality schemes, which public authorities should submit to the Equality Commission by 30 June 2000. A very wide process of consultation has been going on recently. This has included the 11 Northern Ireland Departments, and their consultations are coming to an end. The Executive Committee is committed to the effective implementation of the section 75 obligations, which is a legal requirement.

In the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, we see section 75 as an important part of the equality agenda and of promoting better community relations — both of which are our responsibility. Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act is a reserved matter under which the Secretary of State has specific responsibilities in relation to agreed guidelines from the Equality Commission, designating additional public authorities and dealing with equality schemes referred to him by the Commission.

I cannot answer for the Secretary of State in the discharge of these functions. However, we can state our commitment that the Northern Ireland Departments will submit comprehensive and effective equality schemes to the Equality Commission, it is to be hoped by the end of the month. However, given the difficulties of recent months, there may be some slippage — something we hope to keep to an absolute minimum.

The schemes, which are currently out for consultation, were approved for publication during suspension by Northern Ireland Office Ministers. Much work remains to be done to improve the draft equality schemes over coming weeks. I agree with the criticisms made of some of those we have seen. The equality schemes are a new initiative, and consultation is raising a number of interesting points, as many Members have pointed out. I am also taking my own view of the schemes, and the Equality Unit is currently considering how best to ensure that the devolved Administration takes forward that work over the coming weeks.

Ministers in the Executive Committee will also pay attention to how consultation responses have been taken into account in the finalised equality schemes.

The Equality Unit in the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister has assisted Departments with guidance and training on these statutory obligations. That will continue in coming months as Departments implement their equality schemes. In particular, equality impact assessments on new and existing policies will introduce a new element to the administrative culture of Northern Ireland. It will place emphasis on analysis, openness, consultation and consideration of alternatives. This is an important element in our new institutional arrangements, and I hope it will contribute to the effective promotion of equality of opportunity.

We are happy to support this motion and we fully welcome section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act.

During the debate a considerable number of points have been made by Members. Many of them have been extremely constructive and require positive answers from the Executive Committee. It is not possible in the time I have left to deal with all of them. Junior Minister Nesbitt will deal with as many as possible in seven and a half minutes, and we will undertake to reply in writing to those Members who do not have an answer to the questions they have raised today.

**Junior Minister (Office of First and Deputy First Ministers) (Mr Nesbitt):** First, I reply to Mr Poots with respect to the European Union funding. Yes, that is an equality aspect; yes, it is being dealt with in cross-cutting measures; yes, a need has been identified for an outreach approach, since the Protestant community has not been as active as it should have been

in applying for European Union funds. Equality is being dealt with in that manner.

I refer to points made by Mr Poots, Mr Weir — with respect to another form of discrimination against Unionists, if that is what Unionists see as equality — and Mr Shannon, who said that Unionists see equality as just not including them. That may, but should not, be the case.

Equality is for all, and for the benefit of all if it is properly applied. I agree with Mr S Wilson's first comment that the Unionist community, or any community, has nothing to fear in dealing appropriately with equality. That is why I am happy to reflect those views.

With regard to Prof McWilliams's point about the timescale, she may be right. However, there is a legislative limit which states that it must take place by 30 June, and therefore consultation is taking place over eight weeks. When the consultation comes back the Executive will make sure that that aspect is fully dealt with. The Ministers will be committed to those schemes.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

With reference to Mr Shannon's point about the Ulster-Scots language, he is correct in a sense. However, there is no scope in section 75 to deal with language. It is a reserved matter, the responsibility of Westminster, and when it, dealt with it Parliament did not accept the language balance of Ulster-Scots versus Irish or English. However, I draw the attention of all Members who raised that question to the commitment in the Good Friday Agreement to minority languages, and to Ulster-Scots. There is also a commitment given regarding the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and that has been implemented.

I regret that Mr Roche is not here, and I trust that he will read avidly what I am about to say. *[Interruption]* I sometimes wonder which side of the House some Members are on, from the point of view of Unionism. That is why I used those precise words.

Mr Roche talked about the connivance of the Ulster Unionist Party on the equality agenda. I refute that out of hand. I personally wrote the minority report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. I am actually doing something about equality for Unionists. Mr Roche and others would not even have an Assembly here, and they would have the affairs of Northern Ireland dealt with by the Government at Westminster whom they all say they cannot trust.

My last point is an important and sensitive one. Mr C Murphy mentioned that Catholics are still more than twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants. Let me say something very clearly, and not out of a sense of bravado as some others might. I am very conscious of

where I stand and that what I say is recorded; therefore I measure my words very carefully. There are two statistics and this is confusing. I note what Mr Campbell said about the percentage of recruitment. When one talks about Catholics being twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants, one is dealing with the actual stock of unemployment, which has absolutely nothing to do with recruitment. While I accept that the proportion of Catholic unemployed is higher than Protestant unemployed, it has nothing to do with discrimination.

4.00 pm

Let me make it clear that there is no automatic link whatsoever between unemployment rates and whether or not there is equality of opportunity. There are many things that have an impact, such as immigration, retirement patterns and the likelihood of people wishing to work.

Finally, let me make it very clear — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I am happy to wait for order.

It is perfectly possible to have both fair employment and equality of opportunity, and to have the differential in unemployment statistics unchanged. There is no a priori link between unemployment differentials and discrimination. The sad point about unemployment differentials and equality of opportunity — and it is something that I put into print several years ago, and I repeat it now as this is a very sensitive issue — is that it has both communities in Northern Ireland feeling ill at ease with one another. In simple terms, the Catholic community in Northern Ireland feels it is discriminated against, and, at the same time, the Protestant community feels that it is being told that it is a discriminating group. Both communities are incorrect in their perceptions. Therefore, this aspect of unemployment differential must be very carefully stated in measured tones on all occasions.

**Mr Speaker:** Your time is up.

**Mr Haughey:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. An important point has been raised by Members opposite — whether Mr Nesbitt speaks for me, or, indeed, I for him. We are both responding in a general sense on behalf of the Administration. Obviously we have different views, otherwise there would be no need for the Good Friday Agreement, and we cannot, and do not, presume to speak for each other in that particular sense.

**Mr Speaker:** I will take a point of order from Mr Dodds before responding to Mr Haughey's point of order.

**Mr Dodds:** It is helpful that the junior Minister has clarified that he was speaking not on behalf of the Executive as a whole but for himself and his party, and



that the same applied to Mr Nesbitt. It shows the nature of collective responsibility we have under this scheme.

Mr Haughey referred to section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act, and I would be interested to know what he meant by that.

**Mr Speaker:** This is not an opportunity for you to ask further questions of the junior Minister. It was a point of order that you raised, and this is a matter for the Chair to respond to, along with the previous point of order from the junior Minister, Mr Haughey. My understanding about the way in which a Minister responds by way of a winding-up speech is that he is speaking on behalf of the Executive, whereas junior Ministers are speaking on behalf of their principals.

I call upon the Member who moved the motion to respond if he so wishes.

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. This has been a very useful and informative debate. There were a number of relevant points, and I thank all of the Members for their contributions. I also thank the two junior Ministers from the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers for attending and giving a view from that Office and from the Executive.

Mr Éamonn ÓNeill queried the intention of the motion. As I said at the outset, the purpose of the motion was to give the Assembly an opportunity to discuss this matter and to comment on the production of equality schemes at a time when they are out for consultation and before the deadline is reached, so that the views of the elected representatives could be given. People felt that during the period of suspension — and it has been reflected in many of the contributions today — proper adherence to the equality requirements seemed to have slipped. I thought that it was an opportune time for public representatives to give their views on this matter.

The motion is positive, and it was not by my design but was the result of the method by which it was agreed by the Business Committee. If I had had proper time to draft the motion and get it in front of the Business Committee, I imagine that it would have reflected the great degree of scepticism expressed by many. That was my view on the issue.

In order to get the debate aired I undertook to submit a take-note motion which mentioned equality schemes and allowed Members to make their contributions.

I am glad to hear, from Mr Poots's contribution, that the DUP shares many of the concerns of everyone else on equality. I am glad that many of its Members expressed their commitment to equality, but they need to recognise that where inequalities exist — some of them do recognise this and some of them do not — they

need to be properly addressed to make sure that we are all starting from a level playing field.

With regard to the use of the 1991 census figures, if Mr Poots could provide us with the 2001 census figures, he should be elevated to the Front Bench. The 1991 figures are the only ones we have to work from.

I welcome the remarks of Prof McWilliams and agree that while some of the public bodies that responded appear to be making genuine efforts, that was the case with too few. I share particular concerns about the equality schemes produced by the Departments under our jurisdiction. I hope that the junior Ministers present will note the concerns that were expressed across the House today and that we will find them reflected in the work of the Executive and, in turn, of the Departments.

Similar concerns were expressed by Patricia Lewsley over disability discrimination. I share her view that the full use of section 75 would give proper effect to the Disability Discrimination Act.

It was interesting to hear Gregory Campbell's commitment to equality, particularly where it concerns disability and gender. It has been a noted trait of the DUP in general and of himself in particular that they display particular vehemence or disdain towards female Members of the House. Yet they allege commitment to gender equality. They seem to reserve particular vitriol for women Members speaking from this side of the House, from whatever party they happen to belong to. I would like to see their commitment to gender equality put into practice when people are speaking.

His figures remind me of King Canute, or Paddy Roche, or, indeed, David Irving. Not our David Ervine but the Holocaust historian. It reminds me somewhat of the stand King Canute took, in the face of all historical research and evidence, in an attempt to argue his case.

Michelle Gildernew paid particular attention to some of the public bodies and bodies in receipt of public funding that have not yet been designated by Peter Mandelson. Other Members also drew attention to that.

On Peter Weir's contribution, I am sorry — and other Unionists reflect this — that many Unionists see the equality agenda as threatening to their perspective. Dermot Nesbitt quite rightly said that this is not the case and should not be the case. Leaders from within the Unionist community must stress to them that equality is something which threatens nobody here. It is of benefit to everyone. He was quite detailed in his criticisms of my motion and of the many efforts that have been made to address equality, although he was vague on alternative solutions.

Alex Attwood's contributions reflected the intention of the motion, which was to air this issue in the



Chamber. I am glad that it appears to have worked out that way, and I hope that the views from the Chamber will be reflected in the work of public bodies and the Departments. People here are dissatisfied with the standard of the equality schemes produced so far. They are dissatisfied that the bodies all appear to be working off one template, and that leads to great concern about the intent behind them. This is a serious issue, and Alex Attwood —

**Mr Weir:** Since the Member has said on a number of occasions that he is dissatisfied with the work being done, why did he move a motion to note it with approval? Surely there is a contradiction in this.

**Mr C Murphy:** Perhaps the Member was not listening when I explained the way in which the motion was put to the Business Committee in my absence. Perhaps he likes to pose questions but not listen to the answers. This was the way of airing the matter that was agreed through the Business Committee — a take-note motion to get the issue of equality schemes on the agenda. I do note with approval some of the work that is being carried out.

As Monica McWilliams noted, some public bodies have been making genuine efforts to address what is required by way of equality schemes. Many have not, and this is an opportunity for people to —

**Mr Weir:** If this was merely a take-note motion, why did it not simply say “take note” rather than “take note with approval”? If one is not satisfied, why are the words “with approval” there? Surely it should simply be “take note” — something which I am sure everyone could agree on.

**Dr McDonnell:** Would it be in order for me to thank Mr Weir for his enlightenment? We all deeply appreciate it and wish we saw and heard more of him.

**Mr Speaker:** I am not sure that that is either in order or a point of order, but the Member made his point in any case.

**Mr C Murphy:** It is quite obvious that Mr Weir has no one to represent him at the Business Committee, something which speaks for his current position of somewhat splendid isolation on the Unionist Benches. He has no one to represent him, otherwise the Chief Whip of the Unionist Party would have been able to inform him that, in his absence from the Business Committee, an undertaking was given that a generally positive motion on this issue would be presented to the Assembly. The other members of the Business Committee, to their credit, accepted that without prejudice to other motions that might be put, and that was the manner in which the motion was put on the agenda. I am sorry that Mr Weir does not have anyone from the Business Committee to speak to him, but if he

engaged with some of the other parties they might fill him in. *[Interruption]*

I was represented there, and that is how the motion got on the agenda — with the agreement of the party of the Minister for Social Development.

With regard to Mr Shannon’s contribution, I should like to inform him that Jubilee Hospital is, in fact, in south Belfast and not in the east, as he referred to.

I am glad to hear that Ards Borough Council, of which he is a member, is beginning to address this issue and appreciate the seriousness of its responsibilities under section 75 of the equality requirements, and is beginning to prepare for this, however begrudgingly his portrayal of what the council is doing appears to be.

I agree with Alban Maginness that the Secretary of State has a huge responsibility in this, with much more to do by way of designation, and that we may well be looking to him to use his authority in enforcing adherence to equality requirements. That is something we need to bear in mind.

As for Sammy Wilson’s contribution, it is somewhat amusing to receive a lecture about equality from someone who revelled over many years in being an arch-bigot of the city hall. He is somewhat confused, telling us on the one hand that members of the Nationalist community had plenty of legislation to deal with employment discrimination over the years with which they should have been satisfied, yet we are in danger of creating too much legislation now. On the one hand we should be satisfied with loads of it, but we should not desire any more.

I am pleased that the junior Ministers representing the office in which the equality unit is located, particularly Mr Haughey, are in agreement with many of the points I made in my opening remarks concerning dissatisfaction with the equality schemes. I am also pleased and encouraged to hear that implementing section 75 is a key priority for the Executive. I undertake to hold the Departments to his commitment to adequate equality schemes, and I agree that much work needs to be done in ensuring that these are adequate and not the shadow ones we have had so many of to date.

As for Dermot Nesbitt’s analysis of the unemployment differentials, I shall merely say that many noted academics, and indeed many of his own ministerial Colleagues, would disagree with his analysis. I beg to differ.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Let me make it very clear. I am not quoting Colleagues. I refer to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, the Statistical and Research Agency and others who have made it abundantly clear. I made it clear I was not making a comment about discrimination, but rather about

unemployment differential as an indication of discrimination. There is not necessarily any a priori link between the two.

**Mr C Murphy:** Doctors differ and patients die. With no disrespect to any of the doctors present, I contest some of the analysis, and I believe that many other people in that field would do likewise.

I am disappointed by the lack of participation from the Ulster Unionist Party. Mr Nesbitt is here representing the Executive, not his own party, and I am disappointed that, apart from one unauthorised Member, nobody else spoke on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party.

The absence of many Members from the Benches opposite is somewhat disappointing for those of us who believe that all who signed up to the Good Friday Agreement felt that equality was a central aspect of it. I am glad to hear that reaffirmed by Mr Nesbitt but, again, he is speaking on behalf of the Executive and not on behalf of his party. I would have preferred it if Members from the Ulster Unionist Party had taken part in the debate and had given their views on equality schemes, section 75, and the full implementation of all of that.

4.15 pm

The purpose of the debate was to allow Members' views to be aired on this issue. This is our first opportunity to put motions down since we came back. It is a very important time. Equality schemes are out there at the moment, they are doing the rounds, and they are out for consultation. As Monica McWilliams pointed out, very few of them have come to Assembly Members for any detailed consultation, other than a quick response and a very limited consultation period. This was a good opportunity for Members to air their feelings, and there was a broad degree of dissatisfaction. I hope that is reflected through the junior Minister to the Executive and into the Departments — those were some of the most disappointing equality schemes — and also into all the public bodies. I hope that the views, the general sense of this debate and the contributions made today are reflected back. That was the purpose of putting this motion on the agenda; there was no other purpose. If that is reflected back and comes back out in a much improved sense of intent and commitment to the proper implementation of equality, as required under section 75 of the Act, this will have been a beneficial debate.

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 37; Noes 23.*

#### AYES

*Ian Adamson, Alex Attwood, Eileen Bell, P J Bradley, John Dallat, Bairbre de Brún, Arthur Doherty, Mark Durkan, David Ervine, Seán Farren, David Ford, Michelle Gildernew, Denis Haughey, Joe Hendron, John Kelly, Patricia Lewsley, Alban Maginness, Alex Maskey, Kieran McCarthy, Donovan McClelland, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Alan McFarland, Gerry McHugh, Pat McNamee, Monica McWilliams, Francie Molloy, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Sean Neeson, Mary Nelis, Dermot Nesbitt, Danny O'Connor, Dara O'Hagan, Éamonn O'Neill, Sue Ramsey, John Tierney.*

#### NOES

*Fraser Agnew, Paul Berry, Norman Boyd, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Wilson Clyde, Nigel Dodds, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, David Hilditch, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, William McCrea, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Edwin Poots, Mark Robinson, Patrick Roche, Jim Shannon, Peter Weir, Jim Wells, Cedric Wilson, Sammy Wilson.*

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly notes with approval the work to be completed by 30 June 2000 by public bodies in order to comply with the requirements of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR POLITICAL PARTIES BILL

### Royal Assent

**Mr Speaker:** I wish to inform Members that Royal Assent to the Financial Assistance for Political Parties Bill has been signified. The measure became law on 10 February 2000.

*Adjourned at 4.27 pm.*

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## NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 12 June 2000

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker  
[Sir John Gorman] in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

### ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** There is a matter that greatly concerns many people in the Province today, and that is the cancellation of the visit of Prince Charles to Londonderry and the bringing in of the President of the Irish Republic to that city. This is very serious. How can Members have an immediate debate on this matter of grave public concern? I do not need to remind the House that the refusal of the President of the Irish Republic to drive under protection of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, bringing her own guards from the South of Ireland, is also repugnant to the majority of people in the Province.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Such a motion would have to have the leave of the Assembly. I understand the Member's views very well, but, to have any effectiveness, a motion would have to have the backing of the Assembly.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Thank you.

### POINT OF ORDER

**Mr Poots:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Two weeks ago, on Sunday night, Mr Ed McCoy was murdered in Dunmurry, which is in my constituency. BBC security sources are now indicating that the IRA was responsible. Given the commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means in the pledge of office, I would like a ruling on how certain Ministers can continue to hold their positions while the IRA keeps murdering people.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** We have to be careful with regard to press suggestions about who or what has been involved in matters such as this. The proper body to make such pronouncements is the Royal Ulster Constabulary. As I said to your party leader earlier, matters of this kind are for the Assembly as a whole.

## FOOD SAFETY AND HEALTH: NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL SECTORAL MEETING

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** A Cheann Comhairle, is mian liom tuairisc a thabhairt don Tionól ar chruinniú den Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas a tionóladh i gcruth earnála i mBéal Feirste, Dé hAoine, 4 Feabhra. Thug an cruinniú faoi mheas sábháilteacht an bhia, agus an comhoibriú ar chúrsaí sláinte.

Ó d'ainmnigh an Chéad-Aire agus an LeasChéad-Aire sinn, d'fhreastail an Ridire Reg Empey agus mé féin cruinniú earnála na Comhairle. Bhí Micheál Ó Máirtín, an tAire atá freagrach as an Roinn Sláinte agus Páistí (RSP) ann thar ceann Rialtas na hÉireann.

Fuair an Chomhairle tuairisc bhéil ó Mhartin Higgins, Príomhfheidhmeannach eatramhach Bhord Cothú Shábháilteacht an Bhia. Chuir an tUas Higgins baill na Comhairle ar an eolas is déanaí faoina chuid oibre i mbunú an bhoird, agus ar fhorbairt imlíne chorparáideach an bhoird, arbh iad a aidhmeanna cur chun cinn shábháilteacht an bhia, taighde ar shábháilteacht an bhia, scéala ar airdill faoin bhia, faire galar a iompraítear ag an bhia, cur chun cinn comhoibriú eolaíoch agus ceangail idir saotharlanna agus forbairt chostas-éifeachtach áiseanna do thástáil shainfheidhmithe saotharlainne.

D'áirigh an Chomhairle an staid fá láthair, agus go dtabharfadh an tUas Higgins tuairisc shonraithe don chéad chruinniú eile, ina mbeadh dréachtphlean corparáideach agus struchtúr foirne le moladh. Tuigim nach mbeidh dréacht-phlean corparáideach agus mionchuntas ar struchtúr na foirne ar fáil don chéad chruinnú earnála eile ar an 4 Iúil. D'áirigh an Chomhairle fosta go mbeadh a chruinnú bunaithe ag an Bhord Comhairle san iarnóin sin agus bhí siad ag dúil le bheith ag obair go dlúth le Bord Cothú Shábháilteacht an Bhia.

Mheas an Chomhairle ceisteanna in achar na Sláinte, a shíl cruinniú iomlán na Comhairle in Ard Mhacha ar 13 Nollaig 1999 ba chóir a phlé. Is iad na ceisteanna, Pleanáil don Timpiste agus don Éigeandáil, Móreigeandálaí, Comhoibriú ar Threalamh Ardteichneolaíochta, Taighde ar Ailse agus Cothú na Sláinte.

D'áirigh gach Aire samplaí den chomhoibriú éifeachtach atá ann cheana sna hachair sin ach, ag cuimhneamh ar staid na sláinte ar fud na hÉireann, d'aontaigh siad go bhfuil mórán eile le cur i gcrích. Tugadh suntas go háirithe do mhinicíocht tinneas croí agus ailse bheith doghlactha ard sa dá chuid den oileán agus aontaíodh go bhféadfaí a lán a dhéanamh i gcomhar le stíl bheatha ba shláintiúla a chothú.

D'aontaigh an Chomhairle gur chóir feidhmeannaigh an RSSSSP agus an RSP sna cúig cheantar a choimisiúnú le páipéir a ullmhú don chéad chruinniú eile, a leagfadh amach conas a thiocfadh oibriú i gcomhar i ngach ceantar.

D'aontaigh an Chomhairle go dtionólfai an chéad chruinniú eile go luath i mí Bealtaine agus go n-ullmhódh an Rúnaíocht sceideal cruinnithe don chuid eile den bhliain.

D'aontaigh an Chomhairle ar théacs scéala oifigiúil a eisíodh i ndiaidh an chruinnithe. Cuireadh cóip den scéala oifigiúil i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to report to the Assembly on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council held in sectoral format in Belfast on Friday 4 February. The meeting considered — *[Interruption]*

**Mr McClelland:** Is it appropriate for Mr McCrea to carry on a very loud conversation with his Back-Benchers while the Minister is making a speech?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** My problem — this happened at the Forum too — is that I sometimes have a hearing problem. I am afraid that I did not hear anything which seemed to me to constitute a great disturbance.

**Mr Molloy:** Did you not see anything even though another Member was standing?

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Minister to speak in a language that not even the SDLP understands?

**Mr Dodds:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. For a Minister to speak in a language that most people even on that side of the House do not understand is a waste of the Assembly's time and is the most gross type of discourtesy. People have complained about Members turning their backs and not being interested. But how can people be interested in listening when the vast majority of Members do not understand the language? It is simply wasting Members' and the House's time.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Dodds, what is wasting Members' time is the making of speeches of a repetitive character in place of a point of order. I have made comments about points of order before, and Members should be aware of them. First, they should relate to Standing Orders. Secondly, they should be points and not little bristles, and thirdly they should not be occasions for speeches.

**Mr Maskey:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to remind Members that Standing Order 71 permits Members to speak the language of their choice. Also, in relation to the last point from Minister Nigel Dodds, it is inappropriate that he and Peter Robinson — two

Ministers who may well be treating all of the electorate with contempt — should be treating people here with contempt. They were both speaking while the Minister was making her statement.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. Mr Maskey, I have already said that points of order should be points and not a series of points. However, you did make an extremely good point that I commend. You had taken the trouble to attach your point of order to Standing Orders.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a point of order, which I trust you will rule on. Is it in order for any Member to say that another Member should be treated with contempt? The hon Member has said that two Ministers in our Government should be treated with contempt. Surely that should be ruled out of order.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** You have made a point. I will look at Hansard and check whether that was so.

**Mrs Nelis:** On a point of order, a Chathaoirleach. Would an Cathaoirleach agree with me that empty vessels make the most sound in this Chamber?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That is a very wise and grandmotherly saw, but it is not a point of order, Mrs Nelis.

**Ms de Brún:** The meeting considered food safety and co-operation on health matters. Following nomination by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, Sir Reg Empey and I attended the sectoral meeting of the Council. Micheál Martin, the Minister with responsibility for the Department of Health and Children, represented the Irish Government.

The Council received a verbal report from Martin Higgins, interim Chief Executive of the Food Safety Promotion Board. Mr Higgins updated the Council members on his work to date in establishing the board and on the development of an outline corporate plan for the board. Its functions are the promotion of and research into food safety; communication of food alerts; surveillance of food-borne diseases; promotion of scientific co-operation and linkages between laboratories; and developing of cost-effective facilities for specialised laboratory testing.

The Council noted the current position and that Mr Higgins would be bringing a detailed report to the next meeting which would include a draft corporate plan and a proposed staffing structure. I understand that a draft corporate plan and detailed staffing structure will not now be available for the next sectoral meeting scheduled for 4 July. The Council also noted that the advisory board would have its inaugural meeting that afternoon and looked forward to working closely with the Food Safety Promotion Board.



The Council considered issues in the area of health, which the plenary meeting of the Council in Armagh on 13 December 1999 had agreed should be discussed. The issues are accident and emergency planning, major emergencies, co-operation on high technology equipment, cancer research and health promotion.

10.45 am

All Ministers noted the examples of effective co-operation already taking place in these areas but, given the health status in the whole of Ireland, agreed that much more could be achieved. Incidences of heart disease and cancer in both parts of the island were particularly identified as being unacceptably high, and it was agreed that much could be done jointly to promote healthier lifestyles.

The Council agreed that the leading Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Department of Health and Children officials for each of the five areas should be commissioned to prepare papers for the next meeting, setting out for each area how common work might be taken forward.

The Council agreed that the next meeting would take place in early May and that the secretariat should prepare a schedule of meetings for the remainder of the year.

The Council also agreed the text of a communiqué which was issued after the meeting. A copy of the communiqué has been placed in the Assembly Library.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Any questions must be relevant to the meeting of 4 February, and I hope to conclude this debate in one hour. Members will please try to make their points pertinent.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We cannot hear you.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I will speak more loudly in future.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Can you tell us when the debate will end? That was the point that we could not hear.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** We will try to keep the debate within an hour because there is an important debate afterwards.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Perhaps the Minister will tell us what advice she got from her personal adviser, one Louis Green, who, after being charged with and found guilty of the murder of a police inspector, went on hunger strike. Did he give her any advice about food safety promotion? After all, he may have had some personal experience in the matter.

Knowing that the Minister has a deep interest in employment, and especially in the employment of Protestants in her Department, will she ensure the House that this advisory board will be set up in such a

way that fair employment will be taken into consideration? Will she assure us that there will be no breach on that? Protestants can also be employed under the fair employment legislation and the largest sum of money ever paid out by the authorities was paid to a Protestant who was treated shabbily by the Arts Council, and that led to the resignation of the officers of that council.

**Ms de Brún:** Fuair mé comhairle ó chuid mhaith daoine sa Roinn sula ndeachaigh mé chuig an chruinniú sin ar an 4ú lá de mhí Feabhra. I dtaca leis an duine a luaíodh, tá ardmheas agam air. Tá sé de cheart ag an Aire a rogha féin a cheapadh don phost áirithe sin.

**Mr Irvine:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. While understanding Sinn Féin's need to make statements in Irish, answering questions in Irish and in English uses up more time and ensures that the Minister takes fewer questions.

**Ms de Brún:** I sought and received advice from several people in my Department before going to the meeting on 4 February. With reference to the person named, it is for the Minister to appoint special advisers, and I am absolutely, totally and utterly content with the person I have appointed. I have every confidence in him.

I presume that the question about the setting up of the advisory board refers to staffing. The board has already been established. Indeed, it had its first meeting on 4 February. Unlike the other North/South bodies, the Food Safety Promotion Board inherits no existing staff. An interim chief executive is currently employed in the Food Safety Agency Authority of Ireland, and he has been appointed by the North/South Ministerial Council. He will draw up a proposed staffing structure which we had hoped would be available for consideration at the meeting on 4 July. However, it is clear that the staffing requirements will be based on the future workload of the Food Safety Promotion Board. Open competitions will be held for posts and advertised in the European Union. Terms and conditions will comply with fair employment and other legislation, as directed by the European Commission, and I anticipate a staff of about 30, which will include some scientific and promotion expertise.

Although it does not specifically refer to my statement on the meeting in February, I have heard reference, several times, to my interest in the employment of Protestants in the Department. I wish to state that I have absolute faith in all those working in my Department to carry out their duties; I have never shown, nor do I intend to show, any interest in whether or not they are of one religion or another.

**The Chairman of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee (Dr Hendron):** I welcome

**the Minister's statement and the ongoing co-operation between the Northern and Southern Administrations.** I am not sure from her report on the Food Safety Promotion Board whether the Minister is aware of the increase in salmonella food poisoning in Northern Ireland. I am not sure of the reasons for that, but hope that the matter will be examined.

The Minister also referred to the accident and emergency planning co-operation and to the high technology equipment that is needed for cancer research and health promotion. Co-operation in high technology, and especially for cancer, is extremely important. One in four people will contract cancer, and one in three of those will die from it. The technological investigation of cancer is done by means of computerised axial tomography (CAT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans. Further down the line is what is known as PET, positron emission tomography, which is high powered technology that can be used in the diagnosis of cancer. It is extremely expensive equipment, and I know that major hospitals in Northern Ireland and the Republic would dearly like to have it. I imagine that the Administrations here and in the Republic are looking at that. It is very important for the people on the island of Ireland.

**Ms deBrún:** Fáiltím roimh an cheist sin, ó tá baint aici leis an sábháilteacht bia. Is cinnte nach dtig linn glacadh leis go bhfanfadh ceisteanna den saghas sin ar aon taobh amháin den teorainn.

I welcome the Member's question. It is precisely because diseases such as salmonella and BSE do not respect borders that it is so vital that we work on an all-Ireland basis. People will be aware of the new Food Standards Agency and Food Safety Agency that have been set up. Clearly since most food safety regulation now flows from Europe, standards are becoming increasingly similar in both jurisdictions. It is absolutely key that we work on an all-Ireland basis precisely, as the Member said, because such diseases do not respect borders.

Ó thaobh comhoibriú ar threalamh ardteicneolaíochta, comhoibriú ar sholáthar, maoiniú agus úsáid trealamh ardteicneolaíochta de.

I particularly welcome the points that he made about co-operation on high technology equipment such as positron emission tomography.

Co-operation on high technology equipment, whilst clearly a smaller and more discrete area than the other four areas of co-operation which have been mentioned, is, nevertheless, extremely important. It has two main elements: first, co-operation on the purchase of expensive leading-edge equipment, and secondly, sharing its use when perhaps only one machine is needed to serve the whole population. A good example of buying expensive equipment together was the purchase of MRI equipment in 1992. An example of the

second element of sharing a machine is the photophoresis machine in haematology located in the Belfast City Hospital. I expect a scoping paper for future North/South Ministerial Council meetings to identify the kinds of equipment for which joint purchasing arrangements could be developed, but certainly, fertile areas for exploration include new imaging modalities such as positron emission tomography and new types of laboratory equipment. Clearly, that is an important point. This is, of course, a highly technical area, and it will be important to bring together the right expertise.

**Ms Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat. First of all, I welcome the statement by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the North/South Ministerial meeting. In the statement — *[Interruption]* Never mind the comments. In the Minister's statement she pointed out that Mr Higgins would be providing the draft corporate plan and proposed staffing structures. From the report I understand that this is now not to happen. Why will this not be happening, and when will it happen? Also, the Education Minister identified last week to the Assembly the need for greater co-operation on the monitoring of known paedophiles on an all-island level. Can the Minister instruct her officials to work with her counterparts in the Department of Health and Children to address the need for greater co-operation in the field of protecting children from all forms of abuse?

**Ms de Brún:** Tuigim anois nach mbeidh an dréacht-phlean corporáideach agus an mionchuntas ar struchtúr na foirne ar fáil, mar ní rabhamar in ann na cruinnithe uilig a eagrú ó tháinig an bord le chéile don chéad uair i mí Feabhra.

While some of the functional meetings have taken place, it has not been possible to conclude the process within the timetable originally envisaged, and, in addition, it has not proved feasible to convene further meetings of the advisory board since the initial meeting in February. The completion of a corporate plan and detailed staffing structure have, therefore, been delayed.

I welcome the question regarding child protection, and I think it is very important. It is important that we work closely together on the island of Ireland and with colleagues in Britain in terms of this. The Member will be aware that the pre-employment consultancy service was established as far back as 1981 and it is operated by my Department. The service enables statutory, voluntary and private organisations working with children or, indeed, with adults with a learning disability to check the suitability of those applying for such work. In all of this, the safety of children is of paramount importance.

**Mr Hussey:** I notice that the report came to us in two formats. Did the discussions at the meeting take place in

both languages? I presume the minutes would have reflected that if that had been the case.

The major question that I want to address is to do with the issues to be discussed, action and emergency planning, and major emergencies. I imagine that the two major bodies, North and South, that are concerned with this are the *Gárda Síochána* and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Can the Minister outline what input the policing services, North and South, will have in these two major areas?

11.00 am

**Ms de Brún:** I dtaca leis an chéad cheist de, labhramar i mBéarla amháin le linn an chruinnithe ach sa dá theaga sa phreasagallamh ina dhiaidh sin agus ag an lón a bhí ann roimh theacht le chéile an bhoird.

The answer to the first part of the question is that, as there are several very different parts, the discussion was conducted only in English. The press conference that followed, and the lunch which was arranged between the members of the council and the members of the board who were meeting in the afternoon, were conducted in both languages.

It must be understood that accident and emergency is a very wide area that takes in a vast number of people working in both services throughout the island of Ireland. In fact, a series of meetings recently took place between the two Departments to identify the potential for closer collaborative working, and a familiarisation visit was recently made to Dublin. If we look at this issue even in terms of the possible future fruitful areas of co-operation, we can see how wide the range is, and the number of people that would be involved: closer co-operation in terms of accident and emergency services in border areas; shared training of specialist staff, such as paediatric intensive care nurses; developing complementary services in local acute hospitals in border areas; establishing combined regional and super-regional services; agreeing protocols and inter-hospital support at times of peak demand in response to, for example, winter pressure; and promoting mutual support through the development of tele-medicine and tele-radiology.

In this area of work the planning for accident and emergency services is of that nature. To give you an idea of the work being carried forward at the moment, Co-operation And Working Together (CAWT), a cause with which the Member will be familiar, has been asked to conduct an exercise covering local, sub-regional acute services to scope the potential for development.

Another small combined team has been established to scope the potential for developing regional and super-regional services. There are statisticians in both departments meeting to establish compatibility of our respective information systems, to support acute service

comparison and shared development. As regards winter pressures, a workshop will be arranged over the summer period to exchange good practice. There will be scope for developing shared training modules for paediatric intensive care nurses. I hope that gives the Member a very clear idea of the actions that we hope to take in relation of that area of work.

**Mr Hussey:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you rule as to whether my question has been answered?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I have limited hearing, and I did not hear the Minister refer to that point. Would she like to add anything?

**Ms de Brún:** No.

**Mr O'Neill:** I also welcome the report from the Minister, and I agree that issues such as disease and health promotion know no borders or boundaries — they affect us all. My question concerns the consequences to one natural area—that of water control.

Why is the Department taking so long to report on its enquiry into the serious health-related questions arising from the Silent Valley water supply, and the equally serious impact this is having on the sheep farmers in that area who are now, it appears, still banned from grazing their flocks on a huge area in the Mourne? Would the Minister agree to an urgent meeting with me to discuss the many consequences of this serious situation?

**Ms de Brún:** I am sure that this subject is one in which the Member has shown great interest, and I do not want to diminish that interest by pointing out that I am not sure where it would have come into the meeting on 4 February that brought forward North/South co-operation. If the Member is content I will write to him shortly on this question.

**Mr O'Neill:** I asked for an urgent meeting with the Minister. I know that her timetable will be very restricted, but this is an unusual and serious situation.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Would you like to reply to that, Minister?

**Ms de Brún:** Yes, I will certainly deal with that in the letter, and I will deal with all other points at the same time if the Member is content.

**Mr J Kelly:** A LeasChathaoirleach. I welcome the Minister's statement. I also welcome Dr Hendron's remarks about capital equipment. Indeed, I brought that up with the Minister's officials at last Wednesday's Health Committee meeting. In her report to the Assembly the Minister stated that all Ministers noted the examples of effective co-operation already taking place, but, given the health status of the whole of Ireland, more needs to be done. Instances of cancer on



both parts of this island were identified as being unacceptably high, and I agree that more could be done. Has any future action and strategic planning been proposed to try to combat the unacceptably high levels of cancer in the whole island of Ireland?

**Ms de Brún:** Ó thaobh taighde agus seirbhísí aille de, tá cuid mhór oibre ag dul ar aghaidh faoi latháir agus beidh tuilleadh oibre ag teacht faoi bhráid na Comhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas. In terms of cancer research and cancer services, a considerable amount of work has already been carried out, and a further report will be brought before the North/South Ministerial Council. In terms of existing co-operation there is the Memorandum of Understanding, signed on 3 October by the Health Ministers from here, the South of Ireland and the United States, which established the cancer consortium between the National Cancer Institute and the whole of Ireland.

An initial project there, which will be carried forward in the future, will include the enhancement and co-operation of tumour registries in Ireland, the enhancement of the information infrastructure to support co-ordinated clinical trials throughout Ireland, and the development of education and training in scholar exchange programmes. As I have indicated, officials from the Departments were to meet and have been meeting to discuss each of the five areas outlined, and I will report further following the meeting on 4 July.

**Mr McCarthy:** I very much welcome the report on very important health matters. People's health must be a number-one priority.

I would like to raise two questions with the Minister. The first is to do with accident and emergency and major emergency planning. The fact that Northern Ireland needs an air ambulance has been raised on many occasions. Perhaps an air ambulance for the whole of the island would be more appropriate. That would certainly be a venture involving cross-border co-operation. Will the Minister consider raising this matter at the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council?

My second question relates to cancer research and health promotion, topics which a number of people mentioned this morning. We very much welcome the ongoing co-operation on cancer research between north and south, and, indeed, our American colleagues. However, the figures for cancer patients keep rising at an alarming rate. One in four people will be affected, particularly those along the entire east coast of the island. Many people have been pointing the finger at activities at Sellafield, a few miles across the Irish Sea, as possibly being responsible for these alarming figures. Will the Minister join the Southern authorities, as my party leader has since 1984, and indeed the leaders of other political parties in Northern Ireland, and call for

the closure of Sellafield as soon as possible? Let us bear in mind the saying "Prevention is better than cure."

**Ms de Brún:** The importance of planning for major emergencies lies in the scale of major incidents whose effects cannot be dealt with by the emergency services and public-service providers as part of their day-to-day activities. The area is particularly suited to North/South links because of geographical proximity and convenience of communication. The specific question of the air ambulance service is addressed in the report of the strategic review of the ambulance service on which my Department will hold consultations until 30 June 2000. I shall carefully consider responses to the consultation before taking decisions on how ambulance services can be improved. I understand also that Ards Borough Council, along with others, is taking steps to establish a charitable trust to fund the provision of such a service. I should be happy to raise this on a North/South basis.

People will be aware that I am committed to the improvement and development of cancer services. This year an additional recurrent £8 million has been allocated, which will enable further progress to be made in the way cancer services are organised and delivered. I am aware of the considerable concern about Sellafield, but to date the specific question of how to develop co-operation on that has not been taken up. Members will understand that we have had only one meeting of the council. The officials were given a specific brief to look at co-operation in developing services and research, so the question has not arisen to date.

**Mr Poots:** A large part of this document concerns food safety. I should like to make it clear to the House today that the importance of food safety will be recognised in Northern Ireland. In that respect, will the growing incidence of BSE in the Irish Republic, which now far exceeds that in Northern Ireland, be raised with the food advisory body? Will the over-30-month cattle be banned from Northern Ireland food produce, as is currently the case with home-produced beef? Is food to be imported from the Irish Republic which is not up to required United Kingdom standards, the standards to which United Kingdom farmers must produce?

**Ms de Brún:** Regarding the report from the Food Safety Promotion Board and the meeting on food safety, Members will be aware that there are three agencies with responsibility for food safety standards. As well as those three agencies, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the district councils and the Department of Health and Children still retain certain responsibilities. It is clear that in many cases those will also be the agencies which will be taking and carrying forward decisions on these matters.

The Food Standards Agency will give policy advice to Ministers on food safety, food standards and aspects



of nutrition, prepare draft subordinate legislation, make representations in EU negotiations, set standards for the enforcement of legislation, and issue, refuse, revoke and suspend licences, approvals and authorisations in accordance with the relevant legislation.

The Food Safety Promotion Board has a leading role in public information and education, and its main functions are promoting and conducting research into food safety, communicating food alerts, carrying out the surveillance of food-borne diseases, and promoting scientific co-operation and links between laboratories and the development of cost-effective facilities for specialised laboratory testing. The body has no enforcement function. Its main role is to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to respond effectively to emergencies as they arise. In this respect, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will retain policy and legislative responsibility in this area, as will district councils. The specific question of what will be allowed in the future is not a question for myself alone. If the Member wishes, I can write to him on this.

11.15 am

**Ms McWilliams:** The Minister has already responded to a number of issues to do with cancer research in particular, and there may indeed be a working paper on it. My question is related not specifically but indirectly to the research. The Minister may be aware that recently in the City Hospital we attended the launch of an extensive survey which was carried out in the Republic of Ireland of women who had experienced cancer. The survey questions related to their knowledge of services and to whether the response of those services was satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Two issues in particular arose from that. First, the way in which the news that she had cancer was communicated to an individual was seen as a major problem, and a great deal of work still needs to be done on how a doctor breaks the news. Secondly, many women did not know the side effects of the drugs that they had been prescribed. I do not believe that we need to replicate that survey in Northern Ireland, because I imagine that the findings would be very similar. The sample size was sufficiently large and, given the similar backgrounds of the women, we now know where the problems lie.

In the working paper that is to be produced, will the Minister pay some attention to the fact that many of these women have started up their own support groups because they felt that the service that was provided for them was basically resourced on the research end rather than on the support side? A great deal more attention needs to be given to supporting those women in particular who are suffering from cancer. Secondly, the Minister may be aware that the permanent secretary reported to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee last week. His intention and no doubt

it is also the Minister's intention as well, is to have a public health strategy review. Is it possible that this could link with the public health strategy in the Republic of Ireland, given that we now have an Institute of Public Health that straddles both sides of the border?

Finally, I refer to a question that I put to the Minister of Education last week. In his report of the sectoral meeting, the child protection register was listed as one of the issues for attention. Will the lead Department in Northern Ireland, which is Health, Social Services and Public Safety, be included in discussions on the register? Does the Minister believe that it could be discussed in a British-Irish Council meeting as well?

**Ms de Brún:** Go raibh maith agat. Tá mé ag tabhairt tuairisce inniu ar chruinniú a tharla i mí Feabhra. De thairbhe sin, tá cuid mhaith den obair ag dul ar aghaidh ó shin gan faill ag na baill ionchur nó moltaí a dhéanamh faoin obair sin ag an phointe seo. Tá súil agam nach mbeidh rudaí amhlaidh uaidh seo amach.

I am in the somewhat strange position of making a report today to the Assembly on a meeting which took place in February. I know that this will not be the case, or I sincerely hope that it will not be the case, in the future. Members continued to bring forward suggestions of what could be included in the working paper in my absence. The timetable for this working paper may not allow that much input. However, this does not mean that the points are not extremely important or that it will not be possible to look at them. I welcome suggestions, and I have no doubt that it should be possible to look at them in the future, because this area of work will be carried forward. A report on public health which was recently given to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee showed that this issue can be taken forward on an all-Ireland basis.

The Member referred to the Institute of Public Health in Ireland. The institute was established specifically in recognition of public health needs that could best be addressed by joint efforts throughout the island of Ireland. Although the institute was not established under the terms of the agreement, it is wholly appropriate that its work programme should now be taken forward under the direction of the North/South Ministerial Council. The institute's strategic plan for 2000-03 sets out the following objectives: tackling health inequalities, strengthening partnerships for improving the health of the population, maximising the potential of international collaboration, contributing to public health information and surveillance, and strengthening the capacity of those working in public health. I am quite confident that the work that will be carried out in public health, and the work of the institute, will be extremely helpful. The whole idea of working on public health strategy is one that can be taken forward on an all-Ireland basis.

On the question of the register, I indicated in answer to a previous question that it is important that we all work closely, in my Department, in the island of Ireland, and with colleagues in Britain. The matter will be part and parcel of discussions that take place with colleagues in both of those arenas. It is very clear that the issue of the protection and safety of children has to be uppermost in our minds.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** We hoped to finish by 11.30 am. Perhaps the last four Members will keep their remarks as succinct as possible.

**Mr Beggs:** I should like to return to the issue of accident and emergency planning, because the Minister failed to answer my Colleague's question. Was co-operation between the RUC and the *gárdaí* discussed at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting, as it is an important part of accident and emergency planning? There is a practical need for co-operation on major flooding or a major air accident, which could happen in the border region. Does the Minister agree that police co-operation between the RUC and the *gárdaí* is an essential requirement of effective major accident and emergency policy?

**Ms de Brún:** Mar dúirt mé cheana, ba é an rud a beartaíodh ag an chruinniú ná go mbeadh feidhmeannaigh an dá Roinn ag obair ar pháipéar ar na h-achair uilig, achar na móréigeandála ina measc. Bheadh an páipéar sin faoi bhráid an chéad chruinnithe eile den Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas.

On the issues that were discussed at the last meeting, whether major emergencies, planning for major emergencies or other areas, officials were asked to bring forward a working paper and to have such a paper ready for the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting. What the Member asked did not arise specifically at the last meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council.

Obviously, there will be co-operation on emergency planning across a wide range of areas, one of which will be co-operation on training. Accident and emergency consultants are already operating on cross-border courses. Recently a major incident exercise was carried out on the Cooley mountains that involved all the emergency services, including those that have been mentioned.

**Mr Campbell:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order that the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, on being asked to tell the House whether she believes that there should be co-operation on emergency planning between the police force of this country and the police force of its neighbour, the Irish Republic, declined to answer? That happened twice.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** She did mention the police forces, and she mentioned the bodies that she would expect to co-operate. I noticed that the magic three

letters did not appear, but no doubt that was an oversight that will be corrected in due course.

**Mr Gallagher:** The Minister's statement identified a number of important areas where co-operation would benefit all the people of Ireland. North/South arrangements have a particular significance for those who live in border areas. I am concerned about the unsatisfactory arrangements for after-hours GP cover. Many people in the west of the Province have to travel 30 miles or more to find a GP. In some cases it can be more than 40 miles. Members can imagine the trauma and difficulties for elderly people and the parents of very young children in particular. Currently there appear to be regulations preventing cross-border co-operation on after-hours GP cover. Will the Minister table this issue at the next North/South meeting and begin work on removing the barriers to what would be very useful co-operation between GPs?

**Ms de Brún:** Tuigim tábhacht na ceiste sin do dhaoine atá ina gcónaí ar dhá thaobh na teorann agus fáiltí roimpi.

I understand the importance of this issue to those living close to the border, on both sides. I welcome this question and acknowledge the progress made by GPs here on developing out-of-hours services in recent years. However, I understand that patients in some isolated rural areas still have to travel considerable distances to out-of-hours centres. There are already cross-border arrangements, under EU legislation, which allow patients from the North to receive emergency care when visiting the South, and vice versa. The relevant health boards are proposing a feasibility study to examine all the legal, professional, administrative and financial issues of allowing patients to have access to the nearest out-of-hours services, whether in the North or the South.

It has been suggested that future meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council be able to consider specific topics within the areas of co-operation, and this would certainly be a useful area of discussion. It is an area in which the relevant health boards are proposing to move forward, and we will see what comes out of that.

**Mr Benson:** Will the Minister assure the House that Ards Hospital, which no longer provides acute services, will not be sold for any use other than hospital provision? This hospital must be retained —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I do not think this question is strictly relevant to a report of the North/South Ministerial Council meeting on 4 February.

**Mr Benson:** The Health Minister —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** We are looking for questions on the statement.

**Mr Benson:** I thought my question was relevant, but I can put it down for later.

**Ms Gildernew:** Go raibh maith agat.

I welcome the Minister's report. Will she elaborate on the health issues discussed, particularly the provision of accident and emergency and other services in rural hospitals such as Erne and South Tyrone? Will the Department add to the five areas of co-operation the urgent need for an agreed plan of acute care provision across the Six Counties and the border counties?

Go raibh maith agat.

11.30 am

**Ms de Brún:** Ó thaobh pleanáil don timpiste agus don éigeandáil de, tá cuid mhaith cruinnithe ag dul ar aghaidh faoi latháir. In response to a previous question on accident and emergency services, I referred to the possible fruitful areas of co-operation and partnership on the provision of accident and emergency services. As I said, a series of meetings have taken place between the two Departments to identify the potential for closer collaborative working, covering accident, emergency, and acute services. A familiarisation visit was made to Dublin in February, and a return visit is planned for the coming month. I expect to have a scoping paper identifying areas in which co-operation in accident and emergency services can be strengthened for the North/South Ministerial Council health sector meeting in the autumn. At the meeting on 4 February it was also agreed that the Co-operation And Working Together (CAWT) group — which consists of senior managers from the health authorities adjacent to the border, and which has already done some good work in this area — will have a key role in developing areas of strengthened co-operation.

The areas that I expect to be examined include closer co-operation on ambulance services; sharing of emergency admissions when beds are under pressure; agreeing referral protocols, so that GPs and ambulance staff on both sides of the border know where to send or bring patients; agreeing arrangements for transferring patients needing more specialised services; developing proposals for cost sharing; and clarifying the legal framework for staff treating patients. The potential benefits to patients from the pooling of resources North and South in this way are enormous, and they should go some way to address the Member's concerns. That is particularly so when one looks at the distribution of the population in border areas. Small numbers of people are living in widely dispersed small communities, often some distance from the nearest hospital. Obviously we must do all we can to reduce this isolation and to ensure that accident and emergency services, North and South, work together to optimise response times and to share hospital bed capacity.

**Mr Shannon:** Can the Minister comment on the amount of money set aside for cancer research and health promotion for men? Up to now, the amount of money for the cancer care aspect of men's health has been small, yet the incidence has been increasing, with high figures for prostate cancer in particular. It looks as though prostate cancer could be a bigger killer than lung cancer.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I cannot rule that that is strictly relevant. Could the Member rephrase his question?

**Mr Shannon:** It is relevant to cancer research and health promotion, which was discussed at the Council.

**Ms de Brún:** As I have indicated, I am committed to the development and improvement of cancer services. This year, an additional £8 million of recurrent money has been allocated. It will enable further progress to be made in how cancer services are organised and delivered. On bringing forward this work on an all-Ireland basis, the officials who have been asked to have papers for the forthcoming meeting will be presenting the work that they have been doing during the last number of months. Obviously, because we have not been here during the last number of months, it has not been possible for Members to have had an update. I will report following the meeting on 4 July.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. I welcome the Minister's report this morning. It was very clear and flagged up a number of cross-border co-operation issues that I am sure all Members will welcome. I am sure that the Minister will have seen the report from the Chief Medical Officer that shows that more children from disadvantaged areas end up in accident and emergency units than from any other areas. Are there any proposals to deal with this issue and, more importantly, to address the issue of obvious social disadvantage and its relevance to children being admitted to accident and emergency units throughout the island?

**Ms de Brún:** Is cinnte gur léirigh an tuairisc sin ceist an chomhionannais, chan amháin ó thaobh an phointe atá déanta ag an Teachta Tionóil, ach ó thaobh cuid mhaith pointí eile. Bí cinnte go mbeimid ag tabhairt faoi sin. On the Chief Medical Officer's report, and wider planning, the issue referred to by the Member is one of many indicators showing the differential between areas of social need and other areas in terms of health.

I will do everything possible to reduce health inequalities through closer co-operation, either on an east/west or an all-Ireland basis.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The time is up.

## NATIONAL FLAG

**Mr Dodds:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Has the Speaker's Office received any notice, under Standing Order 18, of the intention of a Minister of any description, shape or form to make a statement this morning in relation to the flying of the national flag on Government buildings? As you know, Saturday was a designated flag day, when flags were flown from Government buildings in Northern Ireland, with the exception of those under the control of Sinn Féin/IRA. Have you received notice from the Sinn Féin Ministers or from the First Minister? Is he prepared to call to account the Sinn Féin Ministers for their failure to fly the national flag or has he chosen to remain silent on this issue?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The information I get from the Clerks is that no such notice or communication has come from any party.

**Mr Dodds:** Shame. So there is no calling to account.

## SUPPLY (NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENTS)

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members that today's motion on Supply, standing in the name of Mr Durkan, must be carried with cross-community support. We dealt with this matter last week, and there is urgency about it. Standing Order 25 states that a vote, resolution or act which appropriates a sum out of the Consolidated Fund for Northern Ireland, or increases a sum to be appropriated — which this motion clearly does — shall not be passed without cross-community support.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):**  
I beg to move

That a sum not exceeding £4,296,588,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund to complete the sum necessary to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending 31 March 2001 for expenditure by Northern Ireland Departments

In my statements on 5 June I advised the Assembly about the process that we would be following for the scrutiny and consideration of the 2000-01 Main Estimates. This process formally begins today with consideration of this Supply Resolution, which is the vehicle through which the Main Estimates can be examined directly by the Assembly. Approval of the Supply Resolution signifies the approval of the Estimates. If the resolution is approved, the second stage of the Appropriation Bill 2000, which was introduced on Monday 5 June, will follow.

Although the Estimates may be approved by the Assembly, legislation is still required in order to give Departments statutory authority to incur expenditure and to appropriate sums for specific purposes. The Supply Resolution before us is the first opportunity the Assembly has had to examine the spending plans of Departments in any detail. This is an important moment. We are now getting down to the real business of governing, which is what the people have sent us here to do. I wish to make some brief general points about how spending controls operate and the relationship between the Department of Finance and Personnel and the other Departments.

Members may find this helpful in understanding what they are being asked to approve today.

The total amount sought in the 2000-01 Main Estimates is £7·8 billion. This is the amount of voted money that Departments need to implement the budget proposals which I introduced to the Assembly on 15 December last, increased by the extra allocations for health and education announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his budget on 21 March.

This is a substantial sum that the Estimates booklet breaks down to a much finer level of detail across



Departments. Although my Department scrutinises and approves these Estimates, in most instances the underlying allocations reflect decisions taken by Departments and approved by their Ministers within delegated financial authority given by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Thus, while I will endeavour to respond to any question of detail on a Department's Estimate, any concerns raised by Members will also be brought to the attention of the appropriate Minister.

I also wish to reassure Members that in matters of public finance, Departments operate within a framework of controls and safeguards to help ensure that money is spent appropriately and properly. Most of these controls and safeguards are set by my Department and are kept under continual review. They include clear accounting rules, the need for specific statutory authority for most spending and defined delegated limits that determine whether specific approval from my Department is required. The operation of these safeguards will also be now subject to scrutiny by the Assembly.

Spending proposals are subject to tests to determine economic viability, where that is appropriate, and that they meet the requirements for fairness and equal treatment under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and are in line with the new targeting social need policy.

One of the most important safeguards is that the spending by Departments is scrutinised by the Northern Ireland Audit Office — a body wholly independent of the Executive and headed by the Comptroller and Auditor General, who is a servant of the Assembly. Through the Public Accounts Committee, the Assembly will be able to scrutinise how Departments and public bodies perform in meeting their objectives and in how they use the resources allocated to them. These safeguards are important, and I am fully committed to supporting them.

I turn now to the Main Estimates themselves. The full details are set out in the Main Estimates Booklets that have been made available to Members. A few minor printing errors were discovered in the document, but correction sheets have been distributed. I will highlight only some of the main features of what is contained in the Estimates to give Members maximum time for debate. All the figures that I quote are, by convention, generally rounded to the nearest million pounds.

I will start with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. In Vote A there is a net provision of £17 million to fund the EU and agriculture support measures which apply throughout the United Kingdom. However, this is net of the various market support measures administered under the Common Agricultural Policy, totalling some £149 million. These are fully funded by the European Union receipt and, therefore, cancel within the Vote.

In Vote B, £151 million is for ongoing regional services and support measures. This includes £67 million for development of agriculture and the agricultural products industries and for scientific and veterinary services. Some £21 million is for farm support, enhancement of the countryside and fisheries and forestry services; £18 million is for central administration, including information technology and specialist accommodation services; and £8 million is for the rural development programme. Some £20 million is for the Rivers Agency, and £12 million is in respect of processing and marketing, fishing projects and structural funds that are fully funded by the European Union.

11.45 am

This Vote also contains provision of £4 million for the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme, which incorporates agriculture, rural and water based projects.

Turning to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, a net total of £64 million is sought in Vote A. This includes £22 million for expenditure by education and library boards on public libraries. Some £9 million is for the National Museums and Galleries in Northern Ireland, £7.5 million is for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and other miscellaneous support for the arts, with some £5 million for the Odyssey Landmark project.

In the Department of Education a net total of £1,268 million is sought in Vote A, an increase of 8.7% on last year's provision. Vote A includes £916 million for recurrent expenditure by education and library boards. This comprises £880 million for schools and £36 million for youth services and administration. Vote A also provides £55 million for boards' capital projects, £79 million for capital projects in voluntary and grant-maintained integrated schools and £174 million for recurrent expenditure in voluntary and grant-maintained integrated schools. This amount includes £32 million recurrent expenditure for grant-maintained integrated schools. The provision for boards' and other schools' capital amounts to £124 million. A further £7 million under the Government's New Deal has been allocated to schools capital. Some £5 million has also been made available in Vote A under the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme.

In the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Vote A includes £140 million is for the Industrial Development Board (IDB). This major commitment of resources will enable the IDB to offer very competitive packages of assistance to both new and existing firms. A profitable and competitive business sector is crucial to the development of a vibrant Northern Ireland economy. In 1999/00 the IDB supported 52 investment projects with the prospect of some 7,145 new jobs.

In Vote B £148 million is required. This includes £16 million to enable the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to assist with the development of tourism. Also in this vote, £28 million is required to enable the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU) to assist in developing competitiveness, enterprise and innovation in the important small firms sector. A further £21.5 million is sought to enable the Industrial Research and Technology Unit to improve the competitiveness of businesses in world markets by raising the level of research and development.

Moving to Department of the Environment Vote A, £86 million is sought. Of this, nearly £26 million is for the protection of the natural and built environment, while a further £7 million is to fund planning functions. Also being sought in this vote is provision of nearly £44 million to support local government services, while £4 million is required for road safety and related services.

I now turn to the Department for Regional Development, where there are two votes. Vote A seeks £240 million for roads, transport and other services, including services to other Departments. This includes £159 million for the development, operation and maintenance of Northern Ireland's public road system. £20 million is for road passenger services and £16 million for continued support for the railways.

Vote B seeks the provision of £188 million for water and sewerage services. Capital expenditure on these services is estimated at almost £100 million, while £123 million is allowed for operational, maintenance and administration costs, with receipts of about £38 million appropriated in aid.

With regard to the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, a net total of £414 million is being sought in Vote A and £224 million in Vote B. Vote A includes over £124 million to provide for colleges of further education, £135 million for local universities and £132 million for student support, including grants and student loans.

Vote B includes £63 million under the welfare-to-work initiative to provide 25,000 places in a range of employment and training measures mainly within the New Deal for 18- to 24-year-olds and for the long-term unemployed. Almost £60 million is to provide in excess of 12,000 places under the job skills training programme. A further £17 million is for other training and temporary employment programmes providing some 3,100 places for long-term unemployed adults who are not eligible for the New Deal.

I now turn to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where in Vote A £1,913 million is sought for expenditure on hospitals, community health and personal social services, health

and social services trusts, family health services and some other services. This amount represents an increase of 7.7% on last year's final net provision. In Vote B £51.5 million is sought to cover expenditure on fire and related services. This represents an increase of 3.8% on last year's final net provision.

In the Department for Social Development Vote A, £133 million is sought to meet the Department's administration and other miscellaneous service costs, which includes £105 million for the Social Security Agency.

Vote B relates to housing services, where £256 million will be provided, mainly to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the voluntary housing movement. When net borrowing and the Housing Executive's rents and capital receipts from house sales are taken into account, the total resources available for housing will be approximately £600 million. Gross resources for the voluntary housing sector will be around £120 million, which takes into account some £49 million of private funding.

In Vote C, £61 million is sought for urban regeneration and community development, £29 million of which will be provided to promote and implement a comprehensive approach to tackling social, economic and physical regeneration, and £6 million for grants to voluntary bodies. £18 million will be made available under the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme, of which £13 million will be funded from EU receipts.

In Vote D, £1,778 million is sought for social security benefit expenditure, which is administered by the Social Security Agency. This represents an increase of 2.3% compared to the forecast out-turn for last year. It covers not only the general uprating of benefits from April 2000 but also an increasing number of beneficiaries.

In Vote E, £405 million is being sought to cover expenditure on the independent living funds, motability, housing benefits, the social fund and payments into the Northern Ireland national insurance fund. The payment into the social fund includes provision for the extension of the winter fuel payment scheme to men over 60 years of age and the increase in payments to £150 from this winter.

I now turn to the Department of Finance and Personnel. A net total of £100 million is required in Vote A. This includes £18 million for the financial administration and central management of the Civil Service, £39 million for the management of the Government estate and £17 million for the provision of some important central services for all Departments, such as the Construction Service, the Business Development Service and the Government Purchasing Agency. Some £20 million is also provided for the Valuation and Lands Agency, the Rate Collection

Agency and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, and it includes £3 million towards the preparations currently under way for the census of Northern Ireland which will be carried out in 2001.

I come now to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. Vote A seeks provision of £27 million to meet administration costs in support of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. This includes £6 million to promote community relations programmes and £6 million for a grant-in-aid to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Finally, I turn to the Northern Ireland Assembly Vote, where £31.5 million is sought to meet the running costs of the Assembly itself for the remainder of the financial year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I will try to answer as many of the points as I can in my winding-up at the end of the debate. As I have already indicated, where I am unable to reply, or I feel that it would be more appropriate for another Minister to respond, I will ensure that the matter is drawn to the attention of the Minister responsible.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Before proceeding with the debate I would like to report that a very large number of Members — more than 34 — have asked to be called to speak. It might be a good idea to limit the speeches to 10 minutes this morning and consider moving to a shorter period in the afternoon. Would everyone be content with that?

**Several Members:** Yes.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** In that case, I call Mr Molloy, Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

**The Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy):** A Chathaoirligh. As Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on behalf of that Committee. Last December, when the Minister of Finance and Personnel laid the expenditure plans before the Assembly, departmental Committees started to consider the spending plans for their respective Departments. The Executive Committee had agreed proposals for public expenditure of £8.9 million, with the Assembly having full discretion over departmental expenditure totalling £5.1 million.

Unfortunately, the suspension of the Assembly by Mr Mandelson interrupted the examination of this substantial allocation before it could be completed. At that time, the Finance and Personnel Committee was co-ordinating a formal report on the budget on behalf of the Departments and the Committees. In view of the lack of time that the Committees have had to consider the Main Estimates upon which this Supply motion is based, I want to give the Assembly a flavour of the general response to the overall allocation. I am sure the

Chairpersons of the Committees will deal with this in more detail.

The Finance and Personnel Committee expressed concern that it had not been possible to tie the budget for the programme of government being developed by the Executive into the Estimates. We recognise, however, that the Executive had inherited expenditure plans for 2000-01 from the previous Administration, and that it was a very late stage in the financial year to develop this.

The Committee questioned departmental officials about the allocation of £104 million. This excluded the annual managed expenditure on civil servants' pensions of £11 million. Members recognised that at this late stage of the financial year, it was not possible to properly scrutinise expenditure plans, and they did not propose to make any changes to the level of provision across the various areas of expenditure.

The Regional Development Committee considered that there were a number of shortcomings in the level of provision across many areas for that Department and that the budget was insufficient to allow the Department to meet all its responsibilities. While the Committee welcomed the initial provision for capital projects, it considered that the amounts fell short of what was required for essential future investment in infrastructure and economic development.

12.00

The Committee of Agriculture and Rural Development expressed concern that departmental running costs continued to rise when programme expenditure had fallen in many areas. The Committee also sought assurances that the opportunity would be put in place to provide match funding, needed when drawing down grants and assistance from European sources. Members were concerned to ensure that the Committee would be consulted in the assessment and easements of bids during the incoming monitoring rounds and in the preparation of future expenditure plans.

The Committee of Health, Social Services and Public Safety felt that some of the written information provided by the Department was not sufficiently detailed to allow proper scrutiny of the budget. The Committee sought further detail on a number of different points.

The Committee of Culture, Arts and Leisure considered that there were shortcomings in the level of provision across all areas of the Department, and that the budget would not enable the Department to meet many of its needs. With the lifting of suspension the Committee of Environment and the Committee of Enterprise, Trade and Investment have been able to consider the budget for their Departments. The Committee of Environment raised concerns on a number of issues and particularly raised the matter of



the inadequate level of provision in the budget. However, I am pleased to see that the Department of Finance and Personnel was able to agree the spending of £2.1 million for receipts on staff to reduce the backlog of work in these key areas. The Committee of Enterprise, Trade and Investment also recorded the need to increase the departmental allocation if future challenges are to be met.

It is my view — and this point has also arisen in the Committee — that one of the drawbacks in not having a Committee stage within the accelerated passage is that the Committee scrutiny of all the Departments in relation to budgets, and how they are related to the full implementation of the very important policy of new TSN, will not take place. All Departments will have to examine how their budgets actually relate to the targeting of social need within their areas.

I would also like to see budgeting for the reallocation and decentralisation of Departments so as to re-balance the east/west divide. This is something that, in future, the Departments will have to look at. I believe that I speak for all Departments when I say that more resources should be made available to ensure we are able to take up the challenges, and to make the changes necessary so that we actually improve the quality of life for people in different areas. These resources are necessary so that we do not simply continue the programme that existed before we came into operation. This matter concerns broad issues across all Departments — health, education, infrastructure and agriculture. I hope that these issues will be dealt with in more detail within the new spending review.

I also believe that I speak for all of the departmental Committees when I say that they must be fully consulted on future spending plans, as well as related financial matters, such as the respond and review, the regional rate and European structural funds. This must be done at the earliest possible stage. We are already running late on that if it is actually to be effective.

In addition, each Department has a duty to ensure that the respective Committees have the information they need to perform the statutory role of scrutinising, considering and advising on departmental Estimates. Before I draw my remarks to a close I want to impress upon the Minister the overriding need to set in place an agreed procedure for handling the annual financial cycle in future years. I know we have discussed this with the Minister many times and I believe he is in agreement.

As we are becoming acutely aware, this is a never-ending cycle. As soon as one year's Appropriation Bill has been put in place, the work begins on preparing the Estimates for the following year. We want the Committees to be involved as much as possible and as early as possible. Will the Minister ensure that he brings forward proposals so that a process of consultation can

begin at a very early stage in the Assembly? It will be totally unacceptable if the Assembly and its Committees are denied the proper opportunity to contribute to the annual public expenditure round for a second year in succession.

Since the Minister's announcement of the budget proposals in December, a number of changes in funding have occurred. The most significant was the welcome addition of £68 million for health and education following the Chancellor's budget in March. I understand that, owing to the manner in which the Estimates for 2000-01 are presented, some of the other figures look significantly different to those in the original budget proposal. However, I am assured that, with one or two exceptions as outlined above, there is little change in the actual amount of provision given.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I take it that the Minister will wait until his winding-up speech to deal with the details.

I call the Chairman of the Audit Committee, Mr John Dallat.

**The Chairman of the Audit Committee (Mr Dallat):**

In my capacity as Chairman of the Audit Committee I advise the House that the Committee, as required under section 66 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, has laid before the Assembly the Estimate of the expenses for the Northern Ireland Audit Office for the year 2000-01. That Estimate has been scrutinised by the Department of Finance and Personnel, as required by the Act. It has also been examined under direct-rule arrangements by the Public Accounts Commission at Westminster, which approved a net Estimate of £4.298 million.

Furthermore, the Audit Committee has consulted the Public Accounts Committee of this Assembly and has had regard to its views. I can therefore confirm to the House that the Audit Committee has fully discharged its functions in relation to the expenses of the Northern Ireland Audit Office. The Audit Committee has invited the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland to appear before it shortly, and after the summer recess we will review with him the detailed strategic and business plans for his office. In this way the Audit Committee will be well prepared to undertake a full scrutiny of the proposed expenses of the Comptroller and Auditor General in advance of laying before this House his Estimate for 2001-02.

In presenting this report, I thank the Deputy Chairman of the Audit Committee, Mr Billy Hutchinson, the other members of the Audit Committee and the Clerks for their help. I also wish to acknowledge the excellent work already done by the Public Accounts Committee to ensure that this House gets value for money, both from the Audit Office and from the various Departments and public bodies audited by the Audit Office.



**The Chairman of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee (Dr Birnie):**

Because of the timing of the initial period of devolution, and then the suspension, my Committee did not have the opportunity to scrutinise an agreed budget linked to policies and programmes. We certainly need to continue to seek clarity and certainty as to the role of Committees in the budgeting process. The Belfast Agreement states that Committees shall

“consider and advise on Departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation.”

Over and above the specific concern as to the scrutiny of the Estimates that have just been summarised by the Minister, I have a wider concern which is shared by members of my Committee and other Committees. We need to be involved in the consideration of the so-called spending review, which informs spending decisions across Departments for a forward three-year period, and we strongly desire that that should not slip through the net of departmental scrutiny. My own Committee has written to the Minister for details of his strategic plan and early notice of his Department's proposals for expenditure over the next three years.

I also ask the Minister for Finance and Personnel to provide to Committees for consideration a timetable for the spending review 2000, which clarifies how in an annual cycle, all the relevant parties can play their full role in a process of consultation for planning public expenditure on the three-year forward programme. With regard to the content of these Estimates, an area of concern to my Committee and others is the issue of research and development.

I want to make three points. First, research and development is inherently important. It is public expenditure that represents investment, as opposed to consumption. Therefore, to the extent that moneys are contained in these Estimates to boost the level of research and development in Northern Ireland, we are actually expanding the total amount of resources which will be available in future years. In other words, to use an analogy beloved of a previous Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, with research and development we are not so much dealing with dividing up the cake of public expenditure — important though that is, and much of the debate this morning will be about that — as attempting to bake a bigger cake in the future. My first point is that research and development is inherently important.

Secondly, it is certainly the case that public moneys allocated to some aspects of supporting research and development, notably the core funding for research in the two universities, have decreased markedly, especially in relation to what has happened in Great Britain and given, over the last decade, what has happened in the Republic of Ireland. There is no

indication from these Estimates that the shortfall is to be made good.

Thirdly, taking the Estimates as a whole, total publicly supported research and development is somewhat scattered and indeed disguised within them. It is not possible by looking at the lines within the various Votes to identify in every case how much money is being devoted to research and development. How we identify spending on research and development is a broader issue for the future. I refer to points made at the end of last year in an excellent report by the Northern Ireland Economic Council.

**Mr S Wilson:** I should like to make some observations and ask questions about two aspects of the Appropriation Account. The first one concerns housing. There will be great disappointment at the reduction of 3.5% in the housing budget which, as a result of the comprehensive spending review, has been imposed this year in Northern Ireland. That reduction is already having repercussions right across the Province, leading to the freezing of improvements to properties. Some of these properties have had no major works carried out on them for over 30 years, yet, as a result of the decisions made under the comprehensive spending review, which — and I accept this from the Minister — we have inherited, we shall find that these difficulties will roll on from one year to another.

No consideration appears to have been given to the fact that there are additional pressures on the housing budget. For example, as we found out at the Social Development Committee last week, the amount of money that the Housing Executive is having to spend on purchasing properties from people who have been intimidated from their homes has more than doubled since the signing of the agreement, yet no provision has been made for that. The number of adaptations because of the age profile of the population has been increasing. It appears that the housing budget is required to take on a security function and a health function, and while both those burdens are increasing, the amount of money available for housing has been reduced.

I trust that during the review of spending this year the Minister will take into consideration the pressures on the housing budget and the fact that cuts in it are having a real effect on the living conditions in, and the long-term sustainability of, many Housing Executive properties.

*12.15 pm*

I now want to deal with the education budget. I welcome the fact that it has been increased by 9.6% this year. I am a bit concerned, though, at the cavalier way in which spending has been conducted in the Education Department to date and at the ways in which that 9.6% increase may be used. I know that the Minister of

Finance and Personnel will not be able to give me a reply to some specific questions, and I appreciate his offer to pass on questions to absent Ministers. It is a great pity that the Minister of Education is not here since the first thing that I would like to know is how much of this budget will be used to pay for his second office. Or should I call it his “safe house”? We know that he has spent part of his life on the run from the British security forces. It appears that he is now on the run from the flag-waving Loyalists of Bangor and that the education budget is going to have to pay for that. Perhaps the Minister will pass onto the Minister of Education this request for information about the cost of his “safe house”.

Secondly, I note that the amount of money available in the education budget for capital spending on schools is in the region of £126 million.

There was great anger and dismay at the way in which the last round of capital expenditure was handled by the Minister of Education. There is an increase in the amount of money available for capital spending on schools for the next year, and I hope that we will not see the same blatant sectarian division of the money that we saw the last time when he included spending for a school that had been allowed for in previous years. He also included spending for a school in Antrim, which will not be used this year but sometime in the future. When you take that out of last year's expenditure, schools in the controlled sector, the schools that broadly cater for the Protestant population, which is half of the school population, got less than a quarter of the spending which was available in the capital budget.

I trust that we are not going to see the same kind of blatant discrimination this year, especially now that extra money has been made available to the Department of Education for capital expenditure. Another thing was sneaked in before the Assembly was suspended. In the very last hour before suspension the Minister sneaked in another piece of discriminatory policy: he now considers as viable Irish-language schools that have only 12 pupils. Controlled schools are being closed down because they have fewer than 100 pupils, yet this policy was got in by the Minister through the back door and without discussion in the dying hours of the Assembly before its suspension in February, a policy which is going to put a very real burden on the resources of his Department. There is no indication in this document of how much of the increase which has been made available to the Department of Education is going to be spent on that.

Finally, the Assembly and its Committees have an important job to do to ensure that the allocation of funding for next year reflects the wishes of Assembly Members more than it does this year. It also has the important job of ensuring that the money which has been voted through this year is spent fairly so that this

does not become a “misappropriation account” instead of an Appropriation Account or a means by which particular Ministers — and I think of the Minister of Education — can follow a political agenda of plundering the budget for narrow, sectarian ends rather than ensuring that the budget is divided out evenly and fairly across the services which are required by the people of Northern Ireland.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Members have been very good about holding to their time.

**Mr Neeson:** I welcome this debate. For far too long the people of Northern Ireland suffered the injustices of direct rule, where we slavishly had to follow Government policy. We now have devolution. I welcome that fact, as do the people of Northern Ireland. We no longer have to go cap-in-hand to Northern Ireland Office Ministers, as so often in the past. We are now in control of our own affairs, and that will make the difference to government here in Northern Ireland. In the context of the global economy and the developing European Union, the importance of regional government cannot be over-stressed. We are now basically in a Europe of the regions, and Northern Ireland must take every opportunity that that development provides.

It is vital for this Assembly to set out its own priorities that are appropriate to and for the people of Northern Ireland. The Alliance Party has always believed in putting people first, and the opportunity is now here to make a real difference to the lives of ordinary people in Northern Ireland. It is important that we do not seek to replicate the government policy that has already been established at Westminster. This Assembly not only has its administrative responsibilities but also legislative responsibilities, and we must make full use of them.

Considering the events that have taken place over the last two years, this Assembly now has a real opportunity to establish its credibility with the people of Northern Ireland. I am very confident that if we work together we can provide that credibility. The Assembly must think strategically about what public expenditure priorities should be. While the so-called peace process has presented economic opportunities, there are many socio-economic problems in our society. Unemployment persists at one of the highest rates in the United Kingdom. There is a vicious circle of deprivation, social exclusion and ghettoization in which many individuals in Northern Ireland remain trapped. This is reinforced by the consequences of sectarianism and segregation within our society.

More broadly, it is important that, as a society, we begin to realise the social and economic costs that arise from maintaining separate community structures in many areas. The Alliance Party appreciates that the

nature of government is changing around the world. Government is no longer seen as the automatic solution to every problem. However, many problems can be addressed through the appropriate application of public expenditure. There is an urgent need for this Assembly to develop its priorities. One only has to consider the crisis on the railways. Large lengths of track remain under threat. Two years ago I highlighted the problems that the railways faced with obsolete rolling stock and a track in poor condition. This is down to many years of underfunding. That is what this Assembly is all about.

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Peter Robinson, should accept the importance of addressing rolling stock rather than rolling Ministers. The Assembly needs to seriously consider the whole question of public transport.

On education, we have the opportunity to follow the Scottish Parliament in abolishing tuition fees for students. These fees are a major barrier to many young people in Northern Ireland entering third-level education. If Scotland can do it, so can we.

Our Health Service is in crisis. There is uncertainty about the future. What is going to happen to our acute hospitals? Waiting lists are still unacceptable. There is uncertainty among the hospital staff. These issues need to be clarified.

I have a special interest in the economy. The Assembly has already addressed the extension of the natural gas pipeline to the north-west. A decision is urgently needed. We must create a level playing field of economic opportunity throughout Northern Ireland. The Coolkeeragh proposal, in particular, needs to be addressed by the Department. I hope that that will happen sooner rather than later.

We have also debated the problem in the textile industry. We need to look at creating replacement jobs for the heavy losses that have been sustained in that industry. All Members will be pleased by the recently announced orders for Harland & Wolff. It is important that the necessary finances be made available for the shipyard this year.

We now live in a Europe of the regions. The Assembly must recognise how Europe impacts on it and on the people of Northern Ireland. It is important that we have input into the new proposals for the transitional programme, now that we have lost Objective 1 status. Those funds must be strategically led for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland, not departmentally-led as has happened so often in the past.

There is also the question of Northern Ireland's representation in Europe. The other regions of the United Kingdom, as well as the Republic of Ireland, already have their own offices up and running in Brussels. The Assembly should also be represented

there as a matter of urgency. We should acknowledge the vital role played by the Northern Ireland Centre in Europe over the years.

There are many issues that I would like to address. I have outlined some of the priorities. I hope that now, after the ups and downs of the last couple of years, the Assembly is for real and will deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

**Ms McWilliams:** I share some of the sentiments that have been expressed by other Members. I look forward to the review of future spending. It is difficult for us to comment or, indeed, to ask the Minister to comment on percentage increases and decreases about which we can do little. Nonetheless, I have a number of questions for the Minister.

The first question relates to an issue raised earlier in connection with another Department. Mr Sammy Wilson made the point that the Department for Social Development will be picking up some of the security and health costs of rehousing those who have been intimidated out of their homes, and that a budget has not been allocated for that.

*12.30 pm*

I make a similar point in relation to the departmental Committee that I serve on — Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Members may be aware that there has been a huge change in the way that juvenile justice has been dealt with in the past number of years. Clearly the Northern Ireland Office was picking up that bill where juveniles were kept in secure units. This is no longer the case, and health and social services now pick up the costs for the care of those young people. It represents a huge and substantial part of the budget. Since the increase in that Department's budget is minimal, that money has clearly to be found from elsewhere. Therefore cuts are being made in other parts of that Department's budget to accommodate this legislative change. It is a devolved power having to contest with a reserved power. How are Members to deal with that? There is a certain budget set aside for reserved powers, yet we are picking up the pieces for the devolved part of that administration.

Having spoken to the boards, I am aware that we are in crisis in Northern Ireland. The position in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board reflects, I am sure, the crisis in health and social services that the boards are facing. It has calculated that it has approximately only one third of what it needs to maintain services at their current rate, and it probably cannot make the developments required, even on a statutory basis. The Audit Committee needs to address that matter.

In the Eastern Board area, an extra £2 million per annum is needed to accommodate demographic changes for the elderly; the board does not have that presently.



The stark reality is that in the Eastern Board area — and no doubt Members could say the same about other board areas — there are currently 270 people over the age of 65 waiting for care packages because of the lack of funding. I know that this is not something that the Minister himself will be able to address, but clearly it is extremely serious.

We also need to draw attention to the past, disastrous, policy of GP fundholding. It is good that it will now be stood down, but the board is currently picking up a £2.7 million deficit as a result of the GPs with fundholding practices overspending. What a disgraceful policy. They spent money very liberally and now we have to pick up this deficit for years, knowing that old people are waiting for care packages and cannot get them. A huge amount was spent, probably on doing up buildings and putting in modern-looking equipment, that had not been budgeted for in the first place.

I share Dr Birnie's point about research and development, and I welcome the £3 million set aside for Springvale, but I am concerned that £14 million of student loans is irrecoverable, either through default or deferment. Again, this is a substantial amount that we cannot pick up and for which we will have to find the money from elsewhere. The Minister did not address, although he may come to it later, the matter of the huge 54% increase in the superannuation budget in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that I raised with him last week. It is under Vote C and was not mentioned this morning.

I am concerned that urban regeneration and community development expenditure is down by 21% or £16 million. I would like to pay tribute to those people who, throughout the 30 years of the troubles, and with minimal budgets, had to pay for the community development of their areas. More recently, their excellent work has been resourced through departmental funds, but they may now be facing redundancies or, indeed, closure of one of the most important areas. Many communities need to go through the community development of their areas before they can get to the stage of economic development, and Mr Neeson spoke about resources for that. I would like the Minister and, indeed, those responsible for this Department to acknowledge that we may be picking up the pieces for many years to come if we do not continue to resource these areas.

Finally, I realise that the Minister has difficulties. As he said last week, he is complimented when there is money for increases although we are always disappointed when we see decreases. In spite of the fact that we did not have much of an input into these estimates the Minister generally has my support. I will most certainly look forward to all the Committees'

being able to examine the Estimates much more closely in the future.

**Mr Savage:** I welcome the news from the Minister about the new allocation of money. I am pleased that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has got a share of the funding. We may not be getting what we would have liked, but I hope that this new input of money will help to take away the uncertainty that exists in the Department. I hope that, in the days to come, this money will mean that all payments will be made on time and that we will not have to go through a similar situation to the one that we have been through recently.

The uncertainty which existed meant that Departments could not make plans and that the plans that they had were put on hold. I hope that in the very near future they can get on with what they had planned to do.

I hope that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development recognises the difficulties that agriculture has had and the need, as my Colleague, Esmond Birnie, and Ms McWilliams mentioned for marketing, research and development and public relations. Our industry has come through a difficult patch over the past two or three years, and we must eliminate the uncertainty to do with BSE.

Within Europe, Northern Ireland is trying to promote its low incidence of BSE. We have the smallest incidence of BSE in Europe, and research and development and public relations must ensure that everything is done to promote agriculture. Northern Ireland is a very small country, and the agriculture industry is its backbone, and people are starting to realise that.

Allegations have been made about the Housing Executive.

I am very much involved in the housing associations, and I would not like this to be a case of housing associations versus Housing Executive. There is room for both of them. They have had a good working relationship over the years, and I hope that that will continue to flourish.

Another matter that has been touched on is our textile industry which needs encouragement and assistance to find new markets in a very competitive Europe. In Northern Ireland we have expertise in the textile industry — in the same way as we have expertise in the agriculture industry — and it would be a great disaster if that expertise were lost. The extra money that is available will be a major boost to Northern Ireland. It will get people into work, and, very importantly, sustain the jobs of those in work. Their future very much depends on it. We have a wealth of knowledge in the textile and agriculture industries, and it would be a disaster if that know-how were allowed to fall by the wayside.



**Ms Lewsley:** The points I wish to make relate to the education budget. I would like to bring the House's attention to the issue of prioritisation of expenditure within education, and ask whether we are satisfied that money is being spent in the right areas within that Department.

In particular I would like to focus on the logic in having, and the bureaucracy involved in maintaining, five education boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Curriculum Council for Examination Assessment, the Transferers Representative Council, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Irish medium. I believe that there is a need for better coherence between all these boards, and, while it will be costly in the start-up, in the long term it should save money.

The question is simple: is such bureaucracy the most efficient use of precious resources? Should we not be asking the Minister of Education to undertake, as a matter of urgency, a review of the need to sustain all 10 boards, in order for him to be satisfied that resources are being spent effectively in his Department.

One example is the local management of schools (LMS), where funding is going directly to schools and not being eaten up by administration costs in these boards. I welcome an early consultation on the issue of LMS to ensure that schools are properly funded, particularly with regard to areas dealing with deprivation and to this Government's commitment to the new targeting social need.

It would be a far more efficient use of resources to slash this bureaucracy and instead redirect some of these moneys into areas such as ensuring that children with special needs are able to take their full and rightful part in mainstream education. It would be advantageous to increase special needs funding at primary level, rather than secondary level, in order to address the issue of special needs education at an earlier stage. Literacy, numeracy and disruptive behaviour are harder to deal with at secondary level than at primary level. It would also be advisable to put in place better accountability with regard to how special needs budgets are spent.

Another example of how prioritisation in the education budget could bring benefits is in the education of children with disabilities. Prioritisation would help children with disabilities gain access into mainstream education. I know from the experience of a family in my constituency that the excuse of lack of resources is too often held up as a barrier to allowing children with disabilities to attend mainstream schools.

It is simply not good enough that a society that rightly attaches so much importance to the equality agenda falters on the very first hurdle in the life of our children — education. I ask the House to consider

carefully the signals we are giving out if we fail to deliver on this crucial test of equality. If we cannot deliver on this, what can we deliver on?

With regard to selection at age 11, consultation is due to start in September and to come to fruition in January/February 2001. A decision is to be made by the Executive by March next year.

*12.45 pm*

In order for consultation to work properly it will be important to have a detailed study of the post-primary sector and to take into account and plan for that evaluation. We would need to go back and look at similarities to the Cowan Report in 1977 and to take into consideration the proposals acted upon on a post-selective basis, to ensure that adequate provision for funding be put in place to implement these changes.

With regard to the most precious resource we have in education, which I believe is our teachers, we need to support wholly the teachers union in the second phase of pay negotiations. It is important to realise the professional development of teachers' needs and that Northern Ireland solutions need to be brought forward for Northern Ireland concerns. British solutions are not appropriate for Northern Ireland.

There is a very high level of quality and excellence of teachers in Northern Ireland. Students who wish to enter teacher training college here must have two grade As and a grade B in comparison to those in the rest of the United Kingdom who have to get two grade Ds and a grade E only. I am sure Members will agree that this is a very big qualitative difference.

Finally, I would like to comment on the remarks of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the ETI Committee last Thursday when he suggested that the Executive should direct more finances towards economic development, and he implied that somehow health and education were well catered for under present funding arrangements. As a member of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee I am fully conversant as to the importance of economic development to Northern Ireland's future. However, I must depart from the Minister's assertion that finances be taken from health and education and given to enterprise, trade and investment. Whilst economic development may be an important factor in our future prosperity, a decent education is its bedrock. Let us not lose sight of the fact that investment in an educated and skilled workforce is, in reality, also an investment in the future.

A redirection of funds from education would be not just counter-productive; it would be contradictory to the very purpose of successful economic development in the future. This is something, I believe, that the House could not readily support.

**Mr Campbell:** I wish to direct my remarks in two particular directions. The first one is with regard to the Department of Regional Development (DRD), and the second to the Department of Social Development. I note that, under DRD, there is provision — and it has been referred to previously — for the railway services. There was some mention, I think from Mr Neeson — albeit sarcastically — regarding the promotion of railway stock. Indeed, that is accurate. I hope that there is support across this House for the build up and promotion of transportation links in Northern Ireland, and obviously, public transportation is an essential part of that. I would like to see a greater degree of funding going in that direction.

Just as we would support, I hope, the building up of infrastructure in transportation links in Northern Ireland, we would support links between Northern Ireland and other countries such as the Republic of Ireland. As long as this is kept on a purely infrastructural basis, there should be no difficulties. When there are political elements to that, that is when the difficulties will occur. I saw that even today with the commencement of an air link between Londonderry and Dublin. Obviously we support all international flights from Northern Ireland to other countries, but the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic had to — I was going to say hijack the plane, but unfortunately that was not the case. However, the incident was politically hijacked in order to make some overtly political comments. Nevertheless, it would be advantageous if we were to promote greater infrastructural links both within our own country and with others.

As the working party gets to grips over the next few months considering the £183 million which is required for safety reasons, I hope that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will, over the next 18 months to two years, provide the Department of Regional Development with the wherewithal not only to provide that safety provision but also to increase the rolling stock.

In terms of public transportation we have been told by those involved that there is an increase in private vehicle ownership of 4% per year. Over the next 10 to 12 years this will result in an additional 50% of private car ownership in Northern Ireland. One has only to consider what the main arterial routes such as the Westlink and Sandyknowes will be like with such an increase in private car usage.

**Mr A Maginness:** As Chairman of the Regional Development Committee, I welcome the Member's words. Does he agree that rotation of the post of Minister for Regional Development with other Members from the DUP will not help to ease congestion on our roads or to provide additional capital funding for rolling stock, roads and other infrastructure projects?

**Mr Campbell:** No. I do not agree with the hon Member — either in English or in French.

With regard to the Department of Social Development, I note that under the sub-heading detail there is provision for European Social Fund grants to community groups. Members will be aware of the excellent work done by many of these community groups and of the continuance of such work. I hope that funding will be made available in order that that programme can be built upon. It is somewhat disingenuous for some groups who obtain grants like that — as happened in my constituency of East Londonderry last week — to invite the President of the Irish Republic to a community group announcement. This tends to politicise that which ought not to be political and that should entail the support of both sections of the community. It is with mixed feelings that I speak in similar vein to those who address the curate's egg when they say it is very good, but only in parts.

I hope that there will be additional funding for these important Departments, which are both headed up by able Ministers. Irrespective of who occupies those ministerial positions — whether the present incumbents or others — they will continue to be directed by very able people.

**Mr P Doherty:** A LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the urgency that is required to deal with these estimates, we support the Appropriation Bill. The fundamental problem is that this budget is not big enough. Although our society is emerging from conflict, it continues to suffer the social and economic consequences of that conflict. This is not reflected in the Appropriation Bill. The economic legacy of discrimination, inequality, conflict and injustice needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The negative effects of partition have had a massive effect on the border regions, and the particular problems faced in rural economies also need to be addressed.

The transformation of an economy emerging from conflict requires fundamental change in the social and economic experience of people living across the Six Counties. That process must empower, and be led by local economies and local communities. We must promote the new concept of economic democracy. This means that local communities should have an integral role in the planning and running of their own local economies. Economic policy must and should be formulated from the bottom-up, not, as is the case now, from the top-down. We have to recognise that everyone has a right to a decent standard of living with proper housing and access to adequate health care and education services. We believe the aim of that economic activity is to make this a reality for all.

Of course, there is a great danger that if we do not find ways and means to increase the overall budget, the existing 10 Departments — or at least the eight Ministers that attend — will tend to vie with each other within that very limited budget. We have had some indications already of a very dangerous trend — other Ministries targeting the budgets allocated to health and education. That is not the way to go. The way to go is by finding ways of increasing the overall budget.

At the core of any budget is the creation of wealth. How do we create a more wealthy society? How do we develop right across the board the demands and the needs of local communities to access that wealth? One of the key agencies given the task of doing that is the IDB. The Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee which I chair, examined the overall budget and identified the need for a bigger slice of the cake. However, the IDB, within that Department, must be made accountable for targeting areas of social need. It must create jobs, and not get into creative accountancy, which projects the image that jobs have been created. We must bring equality to bear effectively in many areas.

I have read IDB reports in which district councils like Moyle and Strabane come bottom of the league. In terms of investment I have often seen the figure zero. Jobs created — zero. Opportunities created — zero. All of that must change, and the way to change it is to take on board the political point made earlier that we are a society coming out of conflict — and to use that argument to increase the overall budget so that all of the Departments can, instead of targeting the two big Departments of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Education, actually get an increase in their budget.

Within the 10 Departments there are many areas which require expansion. There are some details that we were not given the opportunity to properly scrutinise, and I look forward to future budgets when we will have the time to do that. I urge the Minister responsible to seek ways of bringing to bear the core argument — that what we need is an overall increase in the budget to allow all the Departments to be adequately funded.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** We have done very well — 10 Members in 90 minutes. That shows the frugal use of time made by Members, and I congratulate you on that.

*The sitting was suspended at 1.00 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair) —*

2.00 pm

**Mr Dodds:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The previous occupant of the Chair indicated that, by leave of the House, we could proceed to a debate on the fact that Prince Charles is not visiting the city of Londonderry today and tomorrow. I would be grateful if you could put that to the House.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It would be possible to discuss that matter by leave of the House. However, the issue would have to follow the completion of this business.

**Mr Close:** In many respects the exercise we are involved in today is like being the executors of the last will and testimony of a previous unaccountable regime. It is an educational exercise for all of us, as we must learn from the Estimates before us, by way of the Supply motion, and scrutinising them, how to prioritise matters in the interests of the people who have sent us here. That will be the challenge for us, not just today, but in future years when the exercise will become more meaningful. It is with those comments in mind that I turn to the Estimates for 2000-01 and go through some of the votes.

I do not have a tremendously deep knowledge of agriculture matters and the Department of Agriculture. As a layman, I am rather surprised and somewhat horrified that when I read about the difficult times agriculture has been going through in Northern Ireland over the past number of years—I read the very sad stories about farmers, the fits of depression, and the state in which they find themselves—to see, at vote A and vote B, that the amount of money being provided for agriculture is lower than that in previous years. In fact vote A is 38·4% lower. Again, as a layman, I must say that I find this amazing. One would have thought that when one of the largest employers in Northern Ireland, namely the agriculture industry, is in such difficulties that more money would be allocated to try to improve the lot of farmers and get them out of the financial difficulties in which they find themselves. Agriculture is one area where I would hope that when we come to be doing this job and are accountable to the people of Northern Ireland, the facts as they pertain and affect farmers today would be realised by the respective Minister, his Committee and within the Programme for Government.

As regards vote A of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I welcome the £2·8 million of grant and aid to the Sports Council for Northern Ireland. I do not think that we, as Members of the Assembly, can praise the excellent work that is done throughout Northern Ireland by sporting bodies too highly. Where there is so much division in Northern Ireland, sport is the one area



that brings people together. Investment and development of sport repays itself more than ten-fold each and every year.

As regards the provision of money for inland waterways, I welcome the sizeable figure given, in particular, to cross border bodies, and I hope that we in Northern Ireland can learn something from the developments that have taken place in inland waterways in the South. I have a certain vested interest, insofar as the River Lagan and its associated canals run through my constituency. Lisburn Borough Council, through the provision of its new civic centre, has been doing tremendous work opening canals in the vicinity, and our goal is to extend the Lagan navigational system to its full extent. Once again, this is an area where the expenditure of money can in future years generate income through tourism.

I note the increase in the budget of the Department of Education, an area where investment in our youth cannot be overemphasised. Northern Ireland's future depends on the education of its young people and those in further and higher education. In the primary sector, it is exceedingly important that class sizes are reduced and that teachers have the tools with which to do the job. I hope those areas are to the fore in the new Programme for Government, with which I hope the Executive is well advanced.

I cannot help but notice the increase in funding for the CCEA, and I hope and pray that the moneys afforded to that organisation will help reduce the seemingly annual incidence of cock-ups in the setting and marking of exams — and the trauma they put our young people through.

I require some explanation on Vote B. I have no particular difficulty with money being paid, but the area is that of superannuation benefits and pensions. A sizeable sum of money is provided for, and whilst I accept totally that it has been earned, I wish to ask if we can anticipate increases of 33% year on year. Has a blip in the system at this time led to this £20 million increase?

I should like to make a brief comment on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Vote A, for the IDB. I note that, while there is a reduction in this figure, there still seems to be an ongoing increase for land and buildings, and I seek an assurance that we are not adding to the bank of land or factories. We have reached the stage in Northern Ireland where we should be endeavouring to achieve a greater occupancy of land and buildings under the control of the IDB rather than extending their number. I seek clarification that no land bank has been added to.

Another aspect on which I have briefly touched in the Enterprise, Trade and Investment area is the amount of money allocated to tourism. That is an area where

investment will be recovered, and the potential for growth in tourism in Northern Ireland — if stability takes hold — far outstrips anything else. That stability can in many ways be demonstrated by the way this House is seen to be working, and how we manage the economy in all its aspects. Finance should be allocated to this area with the expectation of greater returns than in the past.

While welcoming the increased expenditure of £17 million for roads in the budget of the Department for Regional Development, Vote A, I am appalled that the railways will have the rather small increase of £1.5 million, despite the fact that we have heard so much in recent days about the need for spending over £180 million on rolling stock. In anybody's estimation, the sum is small beer in the context of the problem, and I hope that when we deal with those issues ourselves, the Minister responsible will take the necessary steps to ensure that adequate finances are available.

Moving on to the area of higher and further education, the one issue that sticks in my throat is the marked movement from student grants to student loans. The education and library board's grants for student awards, including reimbursement of EU student fees, shows that the net out-turn figure for 1998-99 was £82.5 million. That has now been reduced in the current year to a mere £13 million, which is effectively taking £70 million out of the hands of our students. None of us can be satisfied with that type of exercise. We want to see a change so that once again — and I hope that this will be in the Government's programme — students will get an education, not so much because of their ability to pay but because they are given grants to enable them to pursue tertiary education. There can be no worse thing than teaching young people to get into debt. A little aside to that, Mr Deputy Speaker, is the burden that the repayment of these loans places on small business. Once again small business will be encumbered.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I must ask you to draw your comments to a close.

**Mr Close:** In closing, I must point out this has been our only opportunity, as elected representatives, to scrutinise these Estimates. Ten minutes is totally inadequate. One change that I hope will be made next year is that we shall have proper opportunities to scrutinise these Estimates fully.

**Mr Tierney:** On that final point, Mr Deputy Speaker, your Colleague said this morning that speeches would not be 10 minutes this afternoon, but would be reduced to five minutes. What is your ruling on that, Mr Deputy Speaker?

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Further to that point of order. I understood the Deputy Speaker to suggest that it might be necessary to reduce speeches to five minutes. I hope



— as every Member does — that we shall have as much time as possible to deal with very important matters that are before the House today.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I think that you are quite right, Mr Paisley. The Deputy Speaker stated that the matter would be kept under review. I have a significant number of names at the moment, so I shall make that review in a relatively short time. I remind Members that for every extra minute they take, a minute is taken off somewhere else. I shall come back to this very soon.

**Mr Leslie:** I shall start by following the remarks that Mr Close was making, but which he was unable to complete. We need to be aware that by the time the Appropriation Bill and the Estimates are put before the House, to all intents and purposes, we are looking at a done deal. There is a risk the same thing will happen again, so it is crucial that the departmental scrutiny — especially Committee scrutiny of the departmental budgets — commences in September, as soon as the Committees resume. Otherwise, we may again be confronted with rows of figures and with very little time to amend them.

We also need to bear in mind the fact that the next spending review will roll out a three-year programme of spending. It might be the last programme in which the generosity to the devolved territories, or the devolved regions, is the same as it is now. It is very instructive for this House to consider the agitation that there has been in Westminster about spending in Scotland, particularly given that Scotland could raise some money itself, if it chose to do so. I would not advocate that course of action, but it is sensible for this House to be mindful of the possible restraints that may come in its budget in the future.

However, if we can manage the affairs of Northern Ireland so that our own economy grows as it is doing at the moment and continues to do so at levels well in excess of those in the rest of the United Kingdom, this difficulty will become very much less because the proportionate tax being contributed to the Exchequer by Northern Ireland will inevitably go up.

There is quite a lot of speculation about the tax base in Northern Ireland. I was interested to find out from questioning officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel that no precise figures were available. It was not a calculation that the Treasury or the tax office has ever been minded to do, so the numbers that are in the public domain are assessments or estimates rather than statistically provable figures. We must be mindful that we are to a large extent spending other people's money and, therefore, must be good custodians of it. Money started in taxpayers' pockets. Then it went to the Exchequer, and when the Budget goes through at Westminster, the Government are given permission to spend that money. It is not the Government's money; it is our money and other people's as well. The sanction that the people have, at least in theory, is that if they do

not like the way in which the Government spend the money, they can throw that Government out and try another one.

We must also be mindful that the money that we are spending on public services must be seen to give good value to the public because they are the people contributing to the money that is providing those services.

2.15 pm

In Northern Ireland our current public spending per capita is about 28% greater than the UK average, with the excesses particularly noticeable in health and in education. For that reason we must focus very closely on those Departments to be sure that are we getting extra results from the extra money. We do have extra problems; we have a larger number of school age children which is inevitably going to put a greater burden on the education system; and we do seem to have poorer health, a problem we share with Scotland. Perhaps it would be very useful if we could get our heads together with the people in Scotland and try to identify why that is and how we can address it.

I hope that those Departments involved in capital spending projects, particularly education, health and regional development, will be looking closely at sources of private finance in order to free up the public money that is available by way of private finance initiatives. In this, Scotland is well ahead of us. In Northern Ireland we have identified about £500m worth of projects for private finance initiatives; in Scotland, at £2billion, four times that level have been identified. We should try to be imaginative and progressive in that respect.

The Department that anyone represents is the one for which that person seeks more money. We must be mindful as we go ahead — and I am aware of the time left — that the cake may not increase very fast at all. Indeed, if inflation were to increase much over 2.5%, the size of the cake would go down. Each Department should pay a considerable amount of attention to whether the existing resources could be made to go further. In particular, some attention needs to be given to the amount of money being spent on administration. The Minister is aware of my concerns as I have already tackled him on this subject, but that was merely a skirmish. Since the Department of Finance and Personnel is responsible for the overall establishment of the Civil Service, I shall be looking to see whether he thinks any efficiencies can be made there with the view to getting the overall costs of administration down and saving money that can be spent elsewhere, and there are many demands elsewhere for greater spending on public services.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I said that I would keep the timing under review. At the moment there are 21 Members scheduled to speak. If a few do not use their full 10 minutes, we can just about take everyone by

5.30. However, if more Members indicate a wish to speak, or if Members go on longer than 10 minutes, that will have to be reviewed.

**The Chairman of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee (Dr Hendron):** I welcome the Minister's statement. I agree that the management of public spending is a fundamental responsibility of any Government. We must protect the interests of the public and ensure that their money is well spent.

I am wearing the little ribbon of the Carers National Association of Northern Ireland today, because this is the beginning of "carers' week". A document is being launched at Belfast city hall today. There are a quarter of a million carers in Northern Ireland, aged from eight to 80, looking after people with all sorts of disabilities and illnesses. These carers are the backbone of community care. There are major financial implications for childcare, so it is relevant to bring that up in this debate.

The Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee has childcare among its top priorities. The rights of children are paramount, yet the boards and trusts are not meeting their statutory obligations. The Committee will be holding hearings on this subject over the next couple of weeks. Members who read 'The Observer' yesterday will have noticed the conclusion of a major United Nations report that childhood poverty in Britain is among the worst in Western Europe. The report alternates between "Britain" and "the UK", but I think that it applies to Northern Ireland. We know that there is high childhood poverty in Northern Ireland. For some children, main meals consist of things like toast and beans. Many of them live in terrible surroundings: damp walls, inadequate heating. They cannot afford the proper clothes. Bad performance at school is almost inevitable. Childhood poverty is a very serious problem.

There is a crisis in residential care, a lack of total beds and specialist placement. Inappropriate placement due to lack of quality placement options. Staff stress leads to exhaustion and demoralisation. We need investment now. Lack of key staff time can lead to a drift in planning for children's futures. As available staff are absorbed in crisis reaction, there is insufficient time for in-depth assessment and planning such as review of court work.

We need more social workers. Early identification and intervention with children requires a multi-agency approach. We should be targeting seven-to nine-year-olds who are starting to exhibit social problems. That is a strong indicator of delinquency at a later stage. We should be supporting our young families in co-operation with the voluntary sector. Respite for children with disabilities, support for young carers, including mental health — all of these have major resource implications

and must be taken up with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

The financial resources for hospitals are truly massive. I would like to see the Royal group of hospitals coming together with the City Hospital more quickly. We have debated maternity services, but there are other aspects that need to be faced. The south-west must have an area hospital. Members who live in the area will appreciate that. Decisions must be made soon. Again, there are major resource implications.

Reference was made earlier to Ards Hospital. I visited Bangor Community Hospital recently. It is outstanding. I would be sorry to hear of anything happening to Ards Hospital because I believe it is also very good. In the future we must sort out the hospitals. There are important financial implications. Our Committee has yet to discuss the question of primary care in Northern Ireland but certainly over the next few months that must be at the top of our agenda. The 'Putting it Right' document, produced by John McFall, is a new approach in which he has strongly suggested that co-operatives be formed with primary care groups taking in the various health care professionals. That is very important, and I hope that it will come about.

On cost implications alone there are far too many trusts, and major reductions can take place. Each part of the health and social care system impacts on every other part. On 29 March the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, having referred to £2 billion extra for the health service, which included tobacco duty of £300 million, mentioned five challenges for the health service. The first was the partnership challenge to end bed blocking. That is very relevant here in Northern Ireland, but it is not the time to go into the recent winter crisis, of which we are all well aware. The second was a performance challenge for good clinical practice that applies to doctors, nurses and so forth. The third, the patient care challenge, is to treat patients with serious conditions quickly. In Northern Ireland there are terrible waiting lists for people who are seriously ill, and operations have to be cancelled.

The fourth is to do with prevention. In terms of the healthy lifestyle to which the Prime Minister referred and of targeting social need, the health action zones along with the Health Promotion Agency have a big part to play. The financial allocations going towards health prevention are minimal. This is something else for further discussion. I appreciate that this is not the Minister's direct responsibility. It is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services, but targeting social need, which was emphasised in the Good Friday Agreement, is cross-departmental. I believe that it is by way of health action zones, which are also cross-departmental, that we should proceed.

The fifth was to do with mental health care. One in seven visits their GP each year with a potentially significant mental health problem. Anyone can have a mental health illness, but with the establishment of primary care groups there will be fundamental challenges to the dominance of secondary care in this area. We must also focus on child and adolescent mental health. The subject of suicide may not be relevant here, but there were 1,027 deaths by suicide between 1990 and 1997. Of those, 793 were males and 234 females — frightening figures.

Reference was made to cancer today by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Ms de Brún. We have had a memorandum signed by the former Health Minister, George Howarth, the Minister in the South, and the Americans on doing major research. The Americans are prepared to put millions of pounds into research, but only if it is reciprocated here. That is very important, bearing in mind the number of people who die of cancer on this island.

**Mr Hay:** I will speak on a subject which has already been touched on this morning by the leader of the Alliance Party, and that is the provision of natural gas to the rest of the Province, and especially to the north and north-west. Someone talked earlier about having a level playing field. It is very difficult to know which Department would have the responsibility for looking after a natural gas pipeline if such a project were to go ahead, but I know that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is au fait with the situation. It is something that he has talked about on many occasions.

2.30 pm

Members are well aware that natural gas came to Northern Ireland in 1997, and we all welcomed that. EU funding for the Scotland pipeline was £45 million, and £14 million was for the extension from Larne to Belfast. I recognise the very good work that Group 22 has done in spearheading the project and making a very good case for taking natural gas to the rest of the Province, with its social, economic and inward investment benefits. I must remind the House that if natural gas does not come to the rest of the Province, then one fifth of the population of Northern Ireland will be without the resource of natural gas. That would be sad.

I do not know what resources the various Departments have to try to move this project along. If the political will to move this project along is not there, then I believe that we will lose out on natural gas coming to the north and north-west of the Province. I do not need to remind Members that Coolkeeragh power station is to close in 2004. That is definite: the contract for electricity supply runs out then.

Political decisions must be made in the next few months if the project is to become a reality. Coolkeeragh

power station is currently being run down. Members need to know if a decision will be taken in the next few months concerning the project. There has to be a lead-in time for the entire project, so it is vital that the political will is there to make the political decision that is needed. I must remind the House that a private consortium is very much on board and has bid for the licence to construct that gas pipeline. It is talking about investing over £200 million up front in the project. I have always seen the project as a private one, in partnership with Government. My information is that the project falls into line with EU structures, and that there has been no specific priority outlined in relation to the money. I understand that £40 million is needed from the European fund to try to get this project up and running.

What have former Ministers done about this project? Everything has been done by Group 22. The private consortium is very much on board, and some other interests have been taken on board. I understand that the regulator in Northern Ireland is very anxious that this project be moved forward very quickly. My fear is that the political will may not be there to do so. I understand that no political or financial case has been put to Europe regarding future EU structural funds.

This is a project that needs to happen. Decisions must be made in the next few months if the project is to be viable.

We know that Coolkeeragh power station is the main anchor tenant; that is already secured. It will take 75% of the entire supply, which is also important. Let us be clear, too, that if Coolkeeragh power station closes, it will not be economically viable to have a natural gas pipeline to the rest of the Province, which should have the choice of a new source of clean energy. I do not know which Department has responsibility for the project; it may be the responsibility of two or three Departments, but I want a Department to deal with the project, so that it can move forward. Let us hope that there is money available for the project to proceed as soon as possible and to show that the political will is there to do the job.

**Dr O'Hagan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. We are all aware that this debate has to go through an accelerated process, and because of the time constraints Sinn Féin will vote in favour of this Appropriation Bill. However, we have concerns. First, the suspension of the political institutions left little or no time for the Bill to be properly scrutinised by the different Committees. That is a shame, because the details of the Bill will affect everyone in the North of Ireland. It is all the more important because we are a society emerging from 30 years of conflict. During that time, a vast amount of money was spent on military and security budgets while there was a serious underspend in other areas,



particularly health, education and infrastructure. There are serious social and economic issues to be tackled as a consequence. There is a legacy of discrimination which has existed for generations and needs to be redressed and which has left areas of the North severely disadvantaged.

For example, the Derry City Council area has the highest level of long-term unemployment since 1938. An economic development report published by the Council two years ago stated that Derry would need 12,000 jobs in five years just to bring it up to the Six County average. That is an example of the scale of the problems that face us all. The transformation of the war economy of the Six Counties into a productive and developed peace-time economy is vital. The Assembly can lead the way and initiate the fundamental social and economic changes that are required.

In order to bring about fundamental change, social justice and equality need to be placed at the heart of government. Targeting social need and policy appraisal and fair treatment must be placed centrally in all Departments, to ensure parity of esteem and equality of treatment. In this society, we should be providing well-paid, skilled and sustainable employment, education and training for all, and we must eradicate discrimination. There should be openness and accountability in all Departments, and we need comprehensive monitoring and evaluation processes. We also need effective planning, management and monitoring of economic resources and a more cohesive and integrated approach to the development of indigenous industry.

The Assembly should be to the fore in supporting the role of the community and voluntary sectors. We should support the participation of communities in local economic development, and on that point, I ask the Minister how much money has been set aside for the Civic Forum.

I now turn to the issue of EU funding. Again, in all of this we need absolute guarantees on the honouring of the additionality principle, and, by extension, we need full commitment, social inclusion, local development and conflict resolution in Peace II. Does the Minister and his Department intend to enshrine North/South co-operation as a horizontal principle in the context of the joint chapter?

In relation to delivery mechanisms — and again my party would argue the need to be capable of working in partnership with the local communities — they need to be representative, competent, committed to the ethos of the funding programmes and wholly transparent in their operations. In this context, would the Minister agree that to place the financing of this solely with district councils and take it out of the hands of the partnership boards would be a retrograde step?

Sinn Féin is an all-Ireland party. It argues that only by the creation of an all-Ireland economy, by the elimination of the economic distortions created by partition, by the attraction of foreign investment on an all-Ireland basis and by the harmonisation of financial incentives for industrial development will we go into a new society. My party wants to promote — and this Assembly should be promoting — a new concept of economic democracy which places people at the heart of the new social and economic system. Go raibh maith agat.

**The Chairman of the Regional Development Committee (Mr A Maginness):** Today we are faced with public expenditure plans inherited from the previous Administration. If we look carefully at what is being presented to us and reflect back on the way in which Government expenditure was, distributed during the sustained period of direct rule, we can see an historic neglect. There was a neglect of investment in our infrastructure, public services and in many areas of human activity. That is something that one should regret, for we are faced now with a situation where many of our public services have been starved of funding over a prolonged period.

It is for us as a new Assembly and a new Administration to address that historic underfunding. I illustrate that by reference to the Department of Regional Development — whose Statutory Committee I chair — and I refer in particular to three areas there where, I believe, underinvestment is emphasised.

The first concerns roads. Although the expenditure plans show that there are plans to spend £166 million, on looking carefully at the detail of those plans, one can see that roads maintenance is receiving 50% of what it needs.

If we do not invest in road maintenance — I am not talking about capital projects or infrastructural projects — then the whole fabric of the road network will deteriorate, so it would not be a saving to limit the amount of money spent on road maintenance. In fact, it would create a situation where we would have to pay for that in the long term by greater capital expenditure. We must address that, although obviously not in this budget. However, looking forward one year — indeed, three, four or five years — we should be addressing that type of issue.

2.45 pm

Take water, for example. Those of us on the Regional Development Committee were horrified by the Water Service's account of the state of the infrastructure which is needed for the collection and transportation of water throughout the system. The same problems apply to sewerage.



Massive works have to be undertaken to bring our public Water Service up to universally acceptable standards. Standards have been laid down by the EU, and we will have to adhere to them. We must not be found wanting. We simply have to invest more money in the Water Service. If we fail to do this, not only do we fall foul of the European Union, but we are also putting the whole population at risk. Besides creating potential health problems, a situation would exist in which development of housing and industrial projects would be restricted, because we would not have the necessary infrastructure to support their development.

Again, there can be no savings there, and although the amount of money being spent — £188 million — seems a lot, representing an increase of 8%, it is still insufficient to tackle the continuing need in the Water Service.

Let us look at public transportation. The amount of money earmarked for expenditure this year is £32.9 million. Last year it was £33.2 million. That represents a decrease. I understand that there will be fairly substantial receipts which should compensate for that real reduction in expenditure on public transportation. However, public transportation is an essential feature of any modern transportation policy. If you do not have a quality public transportation service for the community then you will be unable to end traffic congestion, and the road system will further deteriorate. If you do not invest in public transportation you are, in effect, creating greater transportation problems right across the community.

There are also very serious safety implications. I refer in particular to the railways — an issue which has been referred to by several Members. In March, the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company produced a strategic safety review of Northern Ireland Railways. This review indicated that, although the safety standards were adequate, they were just adequate and nothing more. There is not just a long-term problem, but certainly a medium-term problem, and perhaps even a short-term problem with regard to safety. We need to invest sufficient funds in order to address the fundamental issue of safety on the railways. If we do not address that, the inevitable will occur, and we will suffer line closures.

The amount of money that the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company indicated was necessary for upgrading and bringing our railways up to a safe standard, for providing new railway stock, and for carrying out capital programmes, was £183 million. That is a massive amount of money, which will be required over the next 10 years.

Members will have to apply their minds to dealing with the problem of public transport and the railway system. We ignore these issues at our peril. One way of

dealing with the matter is to involve private financing, and we shall have to look long and hard at the issue of public/private financing. Another way is to lease the rolling stock and the trains that are necessary for the system. We must be innovative. If we are not, we shall be failing in our duty to the public.

We need to take a radical look at the question of finance, because the Northern Ireland block is not infinite. It will continue for the foreseeable future but, in the medium term, may well be reviewed by the Westminster Government. We must look for alternative sources of finance, which is a serious challenge for all Assembly Members.

Finally, I believe that we have a wonderful opportunity, both in the Assembly and through our Committee system, to scrutinise properly and bring all of these issues to the public, and we should do that diligently and efficiently.

**The Chairman of the Environment Committee (Rev Dr William McCrea):** I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate and to inform the House that the Environment Committee, of which I am Chairman, has considered the budget implications on the services — or lack of them — that will be provided to our citizens. The Committee noted that the budget reflects the public expenditure plans inherited from the previous Administration. However, we are deeply concerned that the budget has declined in real spending power compared with 1999-2000, and this part of the United Kingdom will suffer the consequences of that lack of funding.

The Committee is concerned that inadequate provision has been made to enable the Department of Environment to meet many of its regulatory and statutory obligations in the current financial year. We outlined to the Minister at a recent meeting some of the concerns that have been expressed on the budget. For example, we mentioned the inability of the Department, because of the lack of funding, to meet many of its legislative requirements and the associated risk of Northern Ireland infringing EU directives. That has serious implications about which we are deeply concerned.

Another major concern is the underfunding of road safety and the shortage of road safety education officers. That must be redressed, otherwise the safety of our children will be adversely affected. In our deliberations, we in the Environment Committee expressed our pleasure that the Public Accounts Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the report on road safety from the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 1999. That is a matter near and dear to the hearts of many members of the Environment Committee. We genuinely believe that there is a total lack of urgency in the matter and that the Department of the Environment could, even with its budget, find financing to enable

appropriate numbers of road safety education officers to be employed as a matter of urgency.

There is also a serious backlog in area development plans and planning applications, and the list seems to get longer. We are told that the reason is the lack of departmental officials to deal with the area plans, which are totally out of date.

Many of them are considerably out of date and will therefore be stopping or impeding the progress and development of the particular district council area.

The Committee is pleased to learn that the Department of Finance and Personnel has now agreed that the planning service can spend £850,000 from receipts to recruit extra staff to process planning applications. We would urge that Department to carry that forth immediately, because those staff are needed urgently.

In the Environment and Heritage Service, there is also a backlog in the transposal of EU directives into Northern Ireland legislation. This also gives rise to the risk of infraction procedures by the EU. The Committee is also pleased that the Department of Finance and Personnel has now agreed that £1.25 million from receipts can now be spent on staff engaged in the new regulatory functions in the Environment and Heritage Service. We hope that, in future, there will be detailed consultations much earlier in the year — as we believe there can be — because we would have liked to have had a more in-depth contribution to make to this budget. The Committee will then, of course, have the opportunity to influence the overall financial allocations to the Department.

The realities of government are now dawning on many Members, and I have no doubt that they will continue to dawn. I have rightly heard Members constantly raising, as I will, the fact that we simply need to invest more money in different aspects of our public services, and we therefore need additional funds. It is not that our Government at Westminster have a lack of funds in the Exchequer's pot, because I believe that they are endeavouring to build up a war chest ready to hand out a list of goodies on the mainland to buy their way to a second term of office at the next general election. Of course, they will have no candidates in Northern Ireland, and therefore I am deeply concerned that they will not be overly troubled about meeting the needs of our constituents. So, although many promises have been made — especially by the pro-agreement parties — that if the Assembly got its hand on the finances, on the wheel, it was going to work miracles, those same promises will lead to frustration and disillusionment because some of them cannot be realised in the foreseeable future.

I believe that there is a need for extra finance, and that is the only way that we can meet the requirements

of our constituents. For example, there is an urgent need under the budget for regional development for a bypass around Cookstown and around Magherafelt. I have been a councillor for 28 years, and we have been listening to talk of a bypass for Magherafelt being on the 15-year programme. In fact, it has now been removed from the 15-year programme after about 15 years. It has been put on the long finger. The Department must be given additional finances to meet those needs.

I thank my hon Friend for the urgency with which he sanctioned the commencement of the Toome bypass. I am delighted that he was able to bring good news to the people in the west of the Province, who are faced daily with long queues to get over the Toomebridge. But when you go up the M2 and come to the Sandyknowes roundabout, you face further queues, so that is another urgent matter to be dealt with.

In the Department of Education budget, there is an urgent need for finances to give proper education to children in rural schools like Churchtown and Toberlane, bearing in mind that a shadow has been cast over them for a number of years with the threat of closure. It is about time the Department of Education removed that threat from these excellent teachers, and the pupils, who have attained excellent education results, with many going on to be head boy or girl in our principal colleges.

3.00 pm

I believe that the threat should be removed, and these schools should be allowed to give an excellent quality of education so as to attract many other children into them. I know that they can, and I know that with the backing of the Department they will.

Another problem is in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. When is the money that has been talked about for so long going to come to the farmers? We have heard about money, new money, and extra money. When will the farmer actually receive this money? When will he stop dying in debt? Promises, promises. When farmers go to the bank, they again find themselves constantly under pressure, because although actual money has been promised, little or none is being made available to them to keep them out of *Stubbs Gazette*. It is an absolute disgrace that money has not been made available to the farming community. Many are the problems within this area.

There is a need to secure the future of the Mid-Ulster and Whiteabbey Hospitals and to ensure that the Northern Board is able to give them the proper finances to work along with the central area hospital in Antrim to provide an excellent service to the vast community they serve. Many are the needs. We need the finance to do the job.

**Mr McHugh:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement, and I would like to address a number of issues in relation to the whole remit of finance and how the budget will be spent next year. My particular interest is in agriculture and rural development, and in the fact that the money has been cut rather than enhanced. I would have thought that at this particular time there should be an increase in funds instead of money being taken away.

It seems there has been a 9% cut since the last budget. At this time of transition, and in a phase during which we are reaching a new future, we need extra funding for many aspects of agriculture and rural development.

The agriculture base is presently being eroded. If we are to have a future in which young farmers want to get involved in agriculture, or a future in which we have an agriculture-based industry, which is still the main industry in many areas such as Fermanagh and south Tyrone, we have to invest in the infrastructure itself. We have to invest in on-farm infrastructure, and in capital funding in the structural base, which has not happened for a number of years. We have not been getting capital funding from Europe or elsewhere, and the British Government have not been looking for capital funding for the farmers of this area either.

If we were to benchmark ourselves, or the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, against those in the South and look at the results and the differences between farming there and the conditions in which their farmers operate compared to ours, we would see that there is no commitment from the British Government to farmers in the North. In the South, there is full commitment to the farmers, in terms of money, structural funding, the application of money, and through policy.

Those are distinct differences that I would like to see changed. However, I would like to see changes being achieved through the better use of our finances — not by taking away money that was going directly to farmers and putting it into another fund which may or may not return it to the areas in which it is needed. Quite a large amount of this money ends up being allocated to outside areas, and it is drained away from the areas for which it was intended. That is something from which we have always suffered.

A vision group in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will look at the whole situation regarding where we are, in terms of agriculture and rural development, and where we want to go in the future. The aims, objectives and actions of that group need to be resourced. If the group comes up with a strategy, that strategy will need to be implemented if we are to make any impact at all. We need resources to do that. It may be that the Department will need to move resources, perhaps away from administration and over-administration,

in terms of paperwork that farmers and everyone else are involved in. That may be the best value for money in terms of implementing the strategy.

There must also be a change in the mindset of the Government and those who work in planning rural development and sustaining many of the projects and initiatives that communities in rural areas have come up with to this point. In a few short years, we shall be faced with the difficult situation whereby many of these projects, which, having built themselves up, are now quite good, may fail because the money and technical expertise they need will not be there to support them. In other words, they will be unable to continue when the European money finishes.

Another point with regard to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is the scrutiny that we can bring to bear to achieve accountability in funding — indeed, beyond the point where the Department gives funds to a particular group. We must see that there is value for money and accountability on how that money is fed down, who gets it, and how it is handled. We must seek best practice in, and be able to justify, the use of the money.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has a great impact on areas west of the Bann, and in particular in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, with its planning policy. 'Shaping Our Future' has yet to reach its final draft. Our concerns are always listened to, but perhaps not always acted on. We ask that they be taken account of in that document's final draft, since many of our concerns in areas such as those west of the Bann are well-founded.

The difficulty in mindset is also evident in issues such as health services and housing, which has seen a £13 million loss this year alone. I should like to know roughly where that money will come from. There is a long waiting list for replacement dwellings, and year on year it is becoming extremely costly to keep people waiting before we can get on with the jobs and building progress. That is a serious question. The other issues are roads, transport corridors and the emphasis on development and where it is to take place. There is a mindset difficulty.

When deciding where money should be spent, there is a notion that rural areas should be kept the way they are and that development should take place in the larger, metropolitan areas of Belfast and Derry. We should be working on cross-border rural policies which are of an all-Ireland nature. The last Member to speak mentioned the difficulties we have with doing things over here and the fact that the final answer may not always do very much for us. We may not have as much control as we imagine.



We should be looking to all-Ireland policies — having control of our destiny in its entirety and using cross-border collaboration and co-operation in funding. Perhaps we should ask the Southern authorities to put money into the roads and main transport corridors. Once again I am thinking in particular of Fermanagh, where there are directions through Sligo if one wishes to return to Belfast. There is an argument for asking the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to go to the South and ask it for some money, since it seems to have plenty. Cavan has £8 million, while Fermanagh's budget is extremely small.

Someone mentioned an increase of 50% as the sum required for the upkeep of roads. We have probably several hundred per cent too little for the upkeep of the road structure in Fermanagh. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, also needs to reverse its thinking on enterprise and investment, particularly in rural areas such as Fermanagh and South Tyrone. There is a tendency to send potential investors to Belfast and the greater Belfast area rather than to us, in spite of the fact that we are an area where tourism could be used to bring us out of our present crisis.

Tourism, while it has a lot going for it, will not replace our base industries, nor will it replace full-time, well-paid jobs as against seasonal and low-paid jobs, which is mostly what people will get from tourism. The other aspect of tourism, and indeed trade and industry, is that we can have tourism used as a millstone round our neck. If we are to have a nice environment, like Fermanagh, and keep that environment beautiful so that people can come from Belfast and urban areas to look at it, we cannot have our heavier industries. Employers like Sean Quinn are the industries that keep areas like that going. If we were to go down the road of tourism only, we would stifle that type of development. We would have to ask whether that was a benefit or not.

With the IDB, there is also the accountability factor given the recent criticisms of the number of jobs created. Job promotions will not take the place of real jobs. I would like to see real jobs on the ground rather than talk about job promotions. I am very dissatisfied with the IDB's recent returns.

That is all I want to say, a Cheann Comhairle. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr McCarthy:** There are many items that one would wish to comment on. The discussion has been wide-ranging, but perhaps a couple of sharp points might get a better response from the Minister. I see that he is taking notice now.

I wish to express the disappointment of my Committee — the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee. The budget for the education and library boards and the miscellaneous library services remains the same as last

year. We all know that more and more people wish to use these services, particularly the libraries. It is obvious that the library service will not be expanded as we would wish. Indeed, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has already acknowledged this deficit. The libraries in Newtownards, Bangor and elsewhere could do with further investment. We should be prepared, as far as possible, to have a library service available to all local communities. Indeed, many of the budgets for Culture, Arts and Leisure remain the same or have been reduced, and that must be regretted. The arts, museums, sports et cetera are being expected to function on a reduced budget. Surely this must be rectified.

The roads budget of the Department for Regional Development looks large indeed, but the budgets given to the local section offices are not. Rural roads maintenance is almost non-existent. As has been mentioned earlier, the provision of road safety measures, such as zebra crossings and traffic calming measures, all depend on funds being made available. Thus, we endanger the lives of young children and senior citizens every time they cross a busy main road or street. I appeal for more funding for a real road-safety policy.

I now want to refer to the Strangford/Portaferry ferry service, which is very important for the many people who use it daily. Our present two vessels are now outdated, particularly the Portaferry. We have been waiting for years for a replacement. Not a second-or third-hand vessel, but a new, modern, up-to-date one with the latest equipment and technology on board is what we want and expect. I ask the Minister if the funding for such a vessel is included in these figures and, if so, when we can expect the new vessel to be in service. Perhaps the Minister would like to consider funding a bridge across Strangford Lough. At present, momentum is growing for this to be the long-term answer to the problem.

3.15 pm

**Mr Attwood:** Firstly, I would like to introduce a number of themes that have been running through meetings of the Enterprise, Trade and Industry Committee in relation to the integration of further and higher education provision, to graduates and to work opportunities in the North. Before suspension, the vice-chancellor of the University of Ulster attended the Committee, and he outlined a number of requirements he sought in order to bring about a situation where further and higher education provision matched the availability of work in the North and elsewhere. When the Minister, Sir Reg Empey, attended a Committee last week he commented positively in respect of these matters. I think it is important that in planning the Programme for Government and in deciding the finance for government, that the initiatives and requirements



outlined by Professor McKenna are endorsed broadly and carefully considered by the relevant Departments and by the Minister himself.

Professor McKenna referred to three issues that were important in relation to bringing about graduate opportunities and the relevance of further and higher education training in the North. He commented that the level of funding for higher education institutes in the North was less than that which was being enjoyed by universities in Britain. Over a number of years there had been a proportional decrease in the level of research funding to our further education institutes. He highlighted that that was impeding the training of undergraduates in the appropriate skills for job opportunities in the North and elsewhere. He asked that the Committee, the Assembly and the relevant Minister look at the issue of increasing research funding for higher education. The proof and the relevance of that request is diverse.

When a trade mission from Belfast City Council attended Boston, Pittsburgh and elsewhere in North America in recent weeks, the number of companies anxious to have relationships with companies in the North whose personnel had come from the universities in the North was, as John Cullinane, a North American friend of Belfast, put it, exceptional. There was a recognition in America that the educational skills of our graduates were very high and that the research output of our universities was of a high calibre. That experience has been duplicated in many other places in many other ways, making Gerry McKenna's point a valid one.

His second point was that there needed to be a re-examination of student numbers and funding for increased student numbers in the North, where, in his view, there were additional opportunities for many thousands of undergraduates if they could gain access to third-level courses. That would not only stop the haemorrhage of students going to universities in Britain and the South, but would also ensure that graduates of universities in the North were available for local job opportunities. There is clear evidence that 90% of graduates in informatics from the University of Ulster now go South. They do not stay in the North, because the job opportunities do not exist here. In respect of the job opportunities that do exist, it will be necessary to have graduates in informatics, high technology and other relevant skills available for those positions. This will require an increase in the number of students going into third-level education.

His third point was that there was a need for further provision, both financial and legislative, to protect intellectual property. Given the trade in ideas and the value of ideas and the transmission of ideas into practice, especially in the high tech area and given the skills that exist in the University of Ulster and

particularly at Queens where Professor John McCannie and his department are based, the protection of intellectual property and investment in intellectual property through the various agencies in the North are going to be important requirements if we are going to increase and improve the quality of our education and the quality of jobs for our graduates.

My second point concerns the future workings of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. When he was before the Committee, the Minister quite properly and correctly said that the board had been working in an adverse environment for the last 30 years because of the civil conflict and resulting image problems. He said that the board would be a key agency, perhaps leading to the development of tourism as the largest industry in the North. He also would have acknowledged that it is necessary for the board to re-examine and revise its management, promotions, structure and policies generally to ensure that it is as energetic and dynamic as possible so as to exploit and enlarge tourist opportunities in the North. That will have consequences for Ministers, as well as for funding.

I will give a small example. The destruction of the tourist centre at the Giant's Causeway is an opportunity to create a better centre for the greater promotion of that part of the North. Out of difficulty comes opportunity. That will have financial and practical consequences for the Assembly, the Executive and the relevant Minister. The Minister of Finance and Personnel needs to be aware of it.

Monica McWilliams has already mentioned the third matter I want to raise. She raised questions about the funding of juvenile justice centres. Justice continues to be a matter reserved to the British Government, but it appeared from what she said — I am open to correction on this — that the funding obligation may fall to the Northern Ireland institutions. A number of financial and practical issues arise from that.

The Northern Ireland Office is conducting a review of the future provision of juvenile justice centres. At present there are three, but it is suggested that there should be only one. I urge any Minister of Finance, whether here or in London, with a funding responsibility for juvenile justice centres, to ensure that we do not go down the road of having only one such centre. We should consider having two. There would be cost consequences, but the benefit would be significant, and not just for juvenile justice. The proximity of juvenile justice centres to the areas where offenders have previously lived is essential for rehabilitation, but there would also be significant benefit for certain communities in the North, particularly west Belfast. There is one juvenile justice centre there at the moment: St Patrick's. The consequences of closure for its 40 staff

would be severe. Juvenile offenders' access to justice provision would be put in jeopardy.

I trust that the conclusion will be to guarantee the two-centre option and ensure that St Patrick's remains open, that the jobs remain in place, that the community in north and west Belfast is still served, and that that disadvantaged community continues to have the benefit, financial and otherwise, of the centre.

My final point is a broader one. I do not wish to reintroduce the issue of the Patten Report and the Police Bill, but in relation to future police funding, it is our understanding that when funding for the Patten recommendations were discussed, the British Government indicated that they would accept, in full, the financial consequences of the change, including severance packages and all other financial consequences that would arise. There is some suggestion that the British Exchequer is taking the opportunity to target funds out of the Northern Ireland budget to fund part of the policing change. Without going into any detail of the change, it would be disadvantageous to the economy in the North and to the financial budget of this institution if that were allowed to happen. I trust that it will not.

**Mr Kennedy:** I realise that many of the main points have already been made. I am reminded of what Henry VIII is alleged to have said to one of his wives: "I do not intend to keep you long." I am speaking on behalf of the Education Committee, of which I am Chairman. Like all departmental Committees, we have had very little time for an effective scrutiny of the main Estimates and spending plans contained in this report. It is my strong view, and that of the Education Committee, that we must ensure that this does not happen again in the next financial round. We call for an agreed procedure of the annual cycle to be put in place as soon as possible. It must include all elements of the public expenditure process, including the spending review and a requirement for all Departments to consult Committees as part of in-year monitoring rounds. If the Assembly is to work properly, efficiently and effectively, all Committees must be involved in that process.

Will the Minister say if and when this procedure will be put in place, so that the Committees can schedule it into their work programmes, which is an important aspect?

My Committee welcomes the additional money for the education sector announced in the March budget. We realise that education has many needs, and that clearly there will not be enough money to provide for all areas, especially in the maintenance of school buildings and the new building capital starts that are required. We will be making a strong case in the future for additional resource allocations, as we are aware that many schools require upgrading. The main fabric of

many school buildings is in a dreadful state and we want to address that problem as quickly as possible.

There is also concern about the cost of administration and the fact that not enough money is reaching the classroom or school principals and hard-working teachers, to allow them to carry out their duties effectively and efficiently. The Education Committee will consider how we can achieve that, but our primary concern is that measures should be put in place urgently, so that for the next financial cycle the Committee will have full access to all of these matters.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Last week, when the Minister of Finance introduced the Estimates to us, we were told that we could speak on anything from Dan to Beer-sheba. I hope that the Minister of Finance will be pleased that I shall go only from Kells to the Causeway and no further. It is not every day that you get to spend £4 billion, give or take two or three million. Some Members told me that their wives would make a very good job at spending £4 billion for them, but the reality is that we must not miss the importance of this debate today.

3.30 pm

Members have to decide today whether they are going to approve a Supply resolution that will allocate billions of pounds to people in Northern Ireland. Some Members think this is a done deal and that we are therefore wasting time discussing it. However, there are many issues that we can flag up to the Minister of Finance, and to the other Departments, to draw attention to policy and how resources are allocated to achieve policy, and I hope that Members can do that.

Last week my party was criticised publicly by the Minister for fun and freebies, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure — I do not see him here today. He said that my party had the opportunity to wreck this process by not voting through the appropriation. My party is not interested in hurting the people of Northern Ireland, but it is interested in targeting enemy number one: the Republican movement.

This debate does not lend itself to attacks of a party political nature, and I hope that the Minister for fun and freebies, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure will remember that, the next time that he cares to open his mouth about this particular subject.

Many parties have said that they want to see this money allocated on a fair and equitable basis, and we can all agree with that. The north-east of the Province is growing in population, yet the Estimates clearly show that Government spending has not increased on a pro rata basis for that area. I believe that my constituency is deprived in the housing, health, education, and economic development budgets. There is nothing in these Estimates or in this Supply debate and motion that shows to me that

that is going to change radically. Cash is in short supply, but so too are imaginative and constructive policies. Until Ministers actually develop imaginative and constructive policies, all that the Assembly will be is a rubber-stamping house for policies that are initiated in Whitehall and elsewhere.

As regards the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Estimates do not show how much of the budget for that Department will be spent on meeting the Minister's key policy priorities versus that spent on administration. We see the millions of pounds that are going to be allocated to the administration of the Department, but we do not see how that money is going to achieve key policies and priorities. In fact, the Agriculture Committee is still waiting to hear from the Minister of Agriculture what the key priorities are. I hope that we will hear them soon because we need to see not only those key priorities and policies but also a key strategy on how to implement those policies.

The entire community relies on the economic activity of the farming community, yet incomes in that community are down, in some areas by over 50%, and we need activity to generate incomes in the agriculture sector. In my constituency, the Agivey pork processing plant and the Ahoghill processing plant have been lost, resulting in the loss of over 300 jobs. It is essential that we get alternative employment opportunities in this sector. Dr McCrea asked the rhetorical question about when the farmers would actually get money in their pockets. Looking at the Northern Ireland Estimates and the Supply resolution, I say to my Colleague that it looks like they are not going to get that money in their pockets. The Supply resolution does not allow for it.

My constituents are also concerned when they see ex-prisoners being retrained, re-educated, rehoused and rehabilitated, while those who have worked in society, especially the farming community, do not appear to have those same opportunities and privileges. I would like to see a farm retirement scheme adopted by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and to see the Government construct a policy on this issue. I would also like to see the Minister showing Members that she has the teeth to face Europe on the beef labelling categorisation policy that is currently before the European Union.

I would like to see subsidies paid effectively and on time to the farmers. I would also like to see a farmland planning easement scheme on the agenda. This would allow farmers to release their land for special planning projects.

With regard to economic development, the region which I represent is ripe for investment. Infrastructure is improving. There is a young, educated workforce; there is an excellent research university on our doorstep; and there is a tradition of a hard work ethic. Yet these

Estimates, like previous Estimates, have ignored the fact that there should be investment in the north-east. In the last 10 years there has been no IDB investment in Ballymoney at all. Many of my constituents have asked why. Many people from west of the Bann, and indeed from west Belfast, feel that their area is in most economic need because of high unemployment. In reality, the most recent unemployment statistics show that the Moyle area is Northern Ireland's unemployment black spot, not west Belfast and not parts of Northern Ireland west of the Bann. In the Moyle area 10·4% of people are unemployed, yet there does not appear to be an economic or investment strategy from Government or in these Estimates to address that issue.

With regard to LEDU, I am glad that the record appears to be a little better. In Ballymena, 44 clients employ 822 people. That is a vast improvement on the IDB figures. I want to see this expanding to Ballymoney and Ballycastle and, indeed, the development of the entire constituency.

I am also concerned about the loss of the service between Ballycastle and Campbelltown. That service is essential for tourism and for infrastructure, yet it appears to be on hold. I hope that the Department for Regional Development and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry can co-operate to ensure that this service is reintroduced.

Mr Attwood mentioned the development of the Causeway Centre, and I welcome some of the points he made on that. I am pleased that Gerry Loughran has said that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board will now be taking a lead on behalf of the Department. Ian Henderson, the former Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, is now the project manager responsible for the development of a new Causeway Centre which will be bigger and better than ever before, and I welcome that.

My Colleague, Mr Sammy Wilson, mentioned the loss of finances to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Everyone across the Province must be concerned at the loss of £13·7 million there. In North Antrim central heating projects will be set back by three years. That causes me great concern, as it must do to other Members.

Many Members have attacked the Minister for Regional Development on how he intends to use these Estimates. There have been some welcome developments in his Department. More than £600,000 has been allocated for minor road works in my constituency, and there is going to be a massive road safety development costing over £150,000 on the Frosses Road, which will be very welcome. A new dual carriageway is also to be developed between Woodgreen and Ballee. That is excellent news for the entire area. We all look forward to seeing more money put in to the Province's roads.



Health has many problems, including the loss of occupational therapists, and there does not appear to be money available to ensure that more occupational therapists are employed.

We are here either to administer Whitehall policy or to be innovators. The current Estimates give us little room for innovation or creativity. We must prove that devolution is more than just an expensive administration process.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. This has been a very constructive and worthwhile debate, and, while many Members may feel it is a fait accompli, the concerns Members have raised are reflected across the Six Counties. I know that the Minister — and it is great to have a local Minister — will take note of these concerns.

I want to raise the issue of the £13·7 million reduction in the Housing Executive Budget, £10 million of which was a planned reduction from the previous year and £3·7 million of which was due to the loss of rental income on house sales. The impact of that will be a 28% reduction in adaptations. Members have raised this matter before, and those who sit in councils know that there is already a lengthy waiting list for adaptations. That reduction and the insufficient budget will further compound that problem, because the demand for adaptations always outstrips the budget for them. More particularly, it will put a stop to the installation of oil heating, which a lot of elderly people have been waiting for for years.

Many of the schemes that the Housing Executive had planned are going to be moved back until after Christmas, and the kitchen schemes have been abandoned. No kitchens at all are to be installed as part of the Housing Executive's planned cyclical maintenance. That is very serious.

The reason I am flagging these issues today, a Chathaoirligh, is that we are talking about next year's budget. We are already saying that this is what we want to happen next year. Next year's budget is crucial because a lot of what the Housing Executive is going to do after Christmas will gobble up next year's budget.

I want to make the case — and I think this will be supported by every Member in the Assembly; at least, we should agree it in principle — for allowing the Housing Executive to keep its surplus capital receipts to enable it address the serious underfunding in its budget, an underfunding that has been going on for years. Perhaps that could be agreed in principle over the next couple of years.

The Good Friday Agreement made special consideration for Irish language provision. I want to raise the issue of accommodation for Irish language teacher training. It may be included in the budget; I am not sure if it is. I

want to remind the Minister that there is a very big demand for Irish language teacher training. However, there are only six available places in St Mary's College, Belfast, for teacher training through the medium of Irish, and that is hopelessly inadequate.

I also want to raise the serious situation of student grants. I know that the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, Mr Farren, is currently undertaking a review of student finances, and we hope that the review will recommend the restoration of student grants.

The replacement of student grants by loans has the potential to create a two-tier system in higher and further education. It is ironic — and I am sure that this is not lost on Members — that one hears the Labour Government currently enquiring into class discrimination in education admissions. However, if this Government continues, and if we do not address this issue in our budget allocation over the next few years, we will have exactly the same situation here.

I am glad to see that the Scottish Parliament has recommended in the Cubie Report that there should be a full restoration of student grants and the removal of tuition fees, because our future wealth is in our students and young people.

3.45 pm

Last, but not least — and I think the Minister is acutely aware of this — is the amount allocated to the IDB for grants. In Derry City and the Foyle area, which I represent, IDB's grant aid allocation to their client companies fell by 15% last year. I have serious concerns which are shared by the Public Accounts Committee. I come from a city that has the highest long-term endemic unemployment. We have lost 3,000 jobs over the last three years. We may not be able to do very much about the allocation to the IDB this year, but I would like to see this concern addressed. Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh.

**Mr Beggs:** I wish to discuss a range of issues, some of which will be relevant to everyone, and some of which will use local illustration. I am a Member of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee, and I want to turn first to that Department. In the Estimates £21·5 million is allocated for student fees. Can the Minister tell us what provision, or options, are available for increasing departmental funding so that student arrangements, which have already been introduced to Scotland, England and Wales, can be reciprocated here? Are additional funds available? Are there reserve funds? That is a major issue which we must address soon.

With regard to capital expenditure, I, like many other Members, regret that there has not been an opportunity for detailed discussions of the Estimates. We do not



know what lies behind many of the figures — for example, the capital expenditure reserved for further education colleges. It has not been possible so far to get to the bottom of what is envisaged here. How is this money to be spent?

My constituency, East Antrim, is one of the few in Northern Ireland without a further education college. The college servicing the constituency is in North Belfast. It is not convenient to the centres of population in East Antrim. Some of the £16·5 million should be used to support the planned redevelopment of a Larne campus building, which is currently closed. Again, there is an equality issue here. It is about equality of access for the people of East Antrim — particularly those in part-time education — who have to travel considerable distances.

Turning to wider educational issues, we are all aware of deficiencies in many school buildings. Millbrook Primary School — a state school not far from where I live — has been closed, not on educational grounds, but on health and safety grounds. That has resulted in the local community being scattered and disrupted, despite the fact that there is a need — and the local area plan highlights the fact that there is an estimated future need — for a school in the vicinity.

There is a great deal of concern that Irish medium schools with as few as 12 pupils are being considered while existing schools with 40 or 50 pupils are being closed, and the requirement of 100 plus has been set out for new builds in other areas. Again, where is the equality?

Turning to the roads and transport budget, I notice that £16 million has been set aside for rail services and approximately £20 million for road passenger services. These figures are only about half the levels of Government funding provided in England, Wales and Scotland for public transport. The Transport Research Institute in Edinburgh recently revealed that in 1998 Translink received 5·3p per passenger mile, while Scotrail received 22·1p per passenger mile, and Liverpool 41·5p. We are not funding our public transport.

During this period £1·42 per head of population was spent on Translink and the bus services in Northern Ireland, compared to £3·10 per head in Great Britain, excluding the London area.

There is inequality in the funds being put in to public transport. There is a need for re-investment in this area.

As was mentioned earlier, there is growing car ownership and growing congestion, whether on the M1, the M2 at Mallusk, on the A2 into Carrickfergus or the route into my own constituency in Larne. How is this going to be addressed? Improvement of public transport is one way of doing so, along with further investment in roads and rail. In order to encourage people to use

public transport we must invest in it. We must improve the service and develop it to a level where people will choose to use it because it provides a better and faster service than the car.

A recent report by the transport watchdog of the General Consumer Council revealed that only 12% of Translink passengers at present have the option of travelling by car. Many people using public transport have no other option, so it is important that we invest in this area.

This is also an environmental issue that will affect the health of everybody in Belfast, whether in north, south, east or west Belfast. There is a great deal of congestion in the centre of Belfast, and the pollution is being released into the atmosphere. Everyone in Belfast, including children, is breathing that in. We have also an obligation to reduce pollution on a global level. Everyone recognises that public transport is a more energy-efficient means of transport for conveying people from A to B, and funding for this area must be increased in the future.

After reading the Estimates it is unclear whether EU funding has been allocated to any of the public transport services in the next financial year; perhaps the Minister will clarify that. I have had previous reports about this which gave me cause for concern. In particular, I am thinking about the Larne to Belfast railway line in my constituency. It is supposedly part of the trans-European network which transports people from Belfast to Glasgow, London or Dublin. I am not aware of funding from Europe having been allocated to upgrade this rail service, despite the fact that previous European money has been used for the Belfast to Dublin route and even the Bangor line. I urge that European funding should be made available for the rail services in East Antrim.

In relation to the Water Service, I welcome the increase in funding — it will receive £171 million during the next financial year. I recently attended a public meeting of the Friends of Larne Lough at which a celebrated environmental expert expressed major concerns about the environment and the pollution going into the lough, largely as a result of sewage, inadequate treatment, out-of-date treatment works and continuing expansion of new housing with no regard to the public infrastructure that has been provided to deal with the sewage problem which that has created. This pollution has arisen despite the fact that Larne Lough is an area of special scientific interest. I am flagging up the fact that it is an area that will require a great deal of expenditure in the future. It will be costly, but if we are to protect our environment, we will have to consider additional funding.

I hope that in the future we will be able to enjoy real scrutiny of the Estimates and have a better understanding of what has been presented. Decisions

will not be easy because difficult cuts will have to be agreed. It will not be a case of everybody just wishing for additional expenditure. But that is what responsible representation and responsible, accountable democracy is about. I hope that we will all be up to making those difficult decisions which will be presented to us.

**Mr O'Connor:** Like other Members, I am particularly concerned about the 3·5% cut in the housing allocation. As inflation is running at about 2·5%, we are talking about a 6% cut. It must be borne in mind that people in a Housing Executive house cannot afford to buy a house. When we talk about targeting social need, they are the people who need to be targeted.

Much has been made about house sales capital. Sooner or later that particular well will run dry and we shall have to make alternative provision. Owner occupancy is already 70% and it is unlikely to go much higher. We will have to make contingency plans for the future.

Mr S Wilson mentioned housing adaptations which presently cost £22 million per annum. If proper legislation were introduced, ensuring that all social housing would be built to the highest standard, we could do away with the need for many of these adaptations. Indeed, when multi-element repairs are being carried out and houses are being rewired, it would be just as easy to make the power points and light switches accessible for disabled people at no additional cost. I am concerned that many of these houses are between 35 and 40 years old, and because of this cut, there will be no new kitchens or bathrooms in the incoming year.

I turn to the Department for Regional Development's budget. As has been stated by Mr Beggs, who is also from East Antrim, two trans-European network routes run through the area — the railway link from Larne through to Dublin and Cork and the road network from Larne to Rosslare. I wonder what European funding is available for these particular routes, given that in the South of Ireland similar routes receive 85% European funding. Is there any potential for that here?

In the Department for Regional Development's budget, £20 million has been set aside for road passenger services, and £16 million for rail passenger services. That concerns me, although I appreciate the need for public transport and the need for a good public transport infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company has been allowed to build up reserves of £40 million, when it should have been spending money on these projects all along. I am concerned about the financial management of such money.

This is the product of a comprehensive spending review announced to the Assembly 18 months ago by the former Minister, Paul Murphy. I believe that we

should have our own comprehensive spending review and that we should start to look at the priorities for the people of Northern Ireland and how to deliver them, as opposed to discussing what someone from England thinks they ought to be.

With regard to the budget of the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, the Larne campus, as Mr Beggs has said, has been closed. To get a new campus, we have been told, ground will have to be sold to raise the finance.

4.00 pm

In the area where I live, we are talking about trying to educate and retrain, to motivate people for today's ever-increasing technological world, and without the provision of an institute—

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will Members please refrain from carrying on a conversation while somebody is speaking?

**Mr O'Connor:** The absence of an institute where that can be done is disadvantaging the people of East Antrim. I would also like to mention the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I was glad to hear the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety talk about the increased level of co-operation that was taking place. Hopefully, the research that the Department in Dublin has carried out will reduce some of the costs that are currently being incurred here on research into illnesses such as cancer.

In that Department there is also a public safety element, and when we hear about joined-up government, we should be considering that in terms of public safety. If the Department for Regional Development has to spend £10,000 straightening a particular part of a road, we must ask ourselves if it is better to do that, or treat God knows how many people who are going to have an accident there? When we talk about how much it is going to cost to put seat belts into school buses we must ask ourselves how much is it going to cost if we do not?

In terms of the whole aspect of public safety, I believe that each Department has a responsibility. If we are able, through this joined-up governmental process within our Executive, to make decisions when Departments interlink, that will save money in the long-term and be for the overall good of our people.

I would like to touch on two small points. The first is tourism, and we welcome the fact that there is going to be a 5·7% increase in the Culture, Arts and Leisure budget, particularly as this is one of the areas where there is potential for growth. In areas that I represent, such as Glenarm and Carnlough, where there are not many employment opportunities, I hope that this will bring some wealth to the local economy. The second

point is that I notice the Department for Regional Development refunds approximately £7 million on fuel duty to Translink. I am not quite clear about that, but I think it is a very serious issue and one that has to be looked at. Our road haulage industry is going down the pan. Unfortunately, we depend greatly on our road haulage industry and on our ports for our survival and economic prosperity. Something must be done to ensure that our road haulage operators can operate on a level playing field with those in the Irish Republic. That is what we have to aim for.

I would like to finish by saying that it is a pleasure to stand here and speak in an attempt to serve the people I represent in the presence of a locally elected Minister of Finance and Personnel. Indeed, I notice that the Minister for Social Development is also here. These are the people who are going to be delivering the goods to us — we hope. I thank them for their presence, I thank the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his attentiveness, and I hope that we will be able to paddle our own canoe from now on.

**Mr Poots:** A number of Members said that there is not enough money in this budget. Of course, there never can be enough money in the budget, no matter how large it is. I am sure that Members could make demands of the Minister which would spend all that money. Nevertheless, there is some validity in that point, and a lot of it is down to the Barnett formula that sets the budget for Northern Ireland. As I understand it, that is basically a mere formula calculated solely on population and not taking other situations into account which could increase the budget.

The result is evident, and people often point out how well the Irish Republic is doing in comparison with Northern Ireland. In terms of business growth, the Irish Republic is not doing that much better than Northern Ireland. Growth in Northern Ireland is sitting at around 6·5% whereas in the Irish Republic it is around 8·5%. The key difference arises when it comes to public spending in that the growth that has taken place in the Irish Republic has allowed public spending to increase significantly. I suspect that the growth that has taken place in Northern Ireland has led to a reduction in the subvention that has normally come from the United Kingdom budget.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

There have been historical problems with our budget and historical reasons for our not having enough money to spend. The Minister of Education could do with £500 million to build new schools and the road and rail infrastructures are in a very bad condition. This is not just because of the actual budgets that have been allocated to us over the years. Much of the problem stems from the fact that the budgets have been dipped into by the Government to pay for security and

compensation measures. The blame for that has to lie, more than anything else of course, with the people who carried out the terrorist acts, namely the paramilitary organisations. They must carry the can for the fact that so many schools are crumbling down around us and so many roads have bends on them where people lose their lives.

The Republican agenda is, of course, still being followed to the detriment of public spending in Northern Ireland. For example, the North/South bodies now set up are eating into budgets which could otherwise be better spent. The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission is costing £431,000. The Food Safety Promotion Board, which the Minister told us this morning is advisory and therefore a talking shop, is costing £1 million. Waterways Inland is costing £1·3 million. The North/South Language Body is costing £2,303,000.

When we turn the page we find that funding for the libraries has been cut. Investment in those inland fisheries and waterways unaffected by the cross-border aspect has been cut. The Youth Council's budget has been cut. These cuts have taken place to finance North/South bodies, which we do not need.

I want to touch on how the budget cuts will affect some of the Departments, particularly the Department of the Environment. First of all, I should like to welcome the fact that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has allowed extra money raised in the Department of the Environment to be spent in it. Many more planning applications have been made. More money has come into the Planning Service. However, it has a backlog of over 4,000 cases. People may say that planning is a fairly trivial matter compared to health or education issues, but it affects these issues directly. If the planning system becomes clogged up, it delays virtually every other aspect. If one wishes to carry out development, and the planning for it does not go ahead within a reasonable period, it can often cost a great deal more money for the Department of Education and the Department of Health to carry on with those parts of their remits.

I also express concern at the funding available for the Environment and Heritage Service. That service currently needs 23 new professional officers to carry out its work. For a number of years now, it has not been operating properly. We hear many people expressing concern about the environment. In Northern Ireland we do not have enough money to employ the environmental officers needed to ensure that the environment is properly managed and maintained.

If one turns to the Department for Regional Development one sees more problems. In total, its budget amounts to around £400 million. It was recently announced that £180 million was needed to improve



railway services alone. People from that Department recently told our council that they would need £200 million per annum just to maintain the current road infrastructure. Clearly they are not going to get that. An example is the case at the Spelga Dam, where the road collapsed. Basic maintenance was not carried out, with the result that it cost more than £1 million to repair that road, when a much smaller amount of money would have repaired it in the first instance.

Roads are breaking up, but the money is not available to carry out proper drainage and resource work, resulting in significant amounts of extra money being poured in to carry out necessary improvements. When towns get clogged up and bypasses are needed or when there are accident black spots, the money is not available for those roads either.

I am also concerned about the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, which has decided to cut its budget on the promotion of skills and abilities of those in work. One of the most important benefits that we could have in Northern Ireland is for people who are currently in work to receive further training and education. It is a major selling point in encouraging inward investment if we can say to investors that we have a Government who are prepared to help and invest in staff to bring them on, and a Government who are willing to educate staff to be better able to carry out their jobs, allowing their work to be done efficiently.

One glaring aspect of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is that it costs more to administer agriculture in Northern Ireland than is actually made by farmers throughout Northern Ireland. Something must be done when we have a Department that is spending more money than the people whom it is supposed to represent are making. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has to start delivering to the farming community of Northern Ireland. Many new measures have been introduced and implemented by that Department, yet the beef ban has not been lifted. Many conditions have been imposed on farmers in Northern Ireland, who are part of the United Kingdom, but which are not imposed on farmers in other parts of the European Union. This creates a problem as farmers are working at a loss. The Department is introducing and implementing these pieces of legislation at a high cost to the taxpayer, but they will deliver no tangible benefit to the taxpayer in the long run. That must also be addressed.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Is mian liom labhairt ar na meastúcháin le haghaidh seirbhísí agus caiteachais na Roinne Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta agus Roinn an Oideachais don bhliain 2000-01. Go bunúsach, is mian liom béim a leagan ar an mhaoiniú breise atá de dhíth ar—agus

idir—an dá Roinn; sa dóigh is gur féidir cláir thábhachtacha a chur i gcrích agus déileáil le hachair thosaíochta go héifeachtach.

Ciallaíonn drochstaid cuid mhór d'fhoirgnimh ár gcuid scoltach go bhfuil gá le hathchóiriú raidiceach, mór-infheistiú airgid, agus ollphlean um thógáil scoltach leis na fadhbanna a bhaineas le droch-chóir a shárú. Tuigim gur achar é seo ina bhfuil suim faoi leith ag an Aire Máirtín Mac Aonghusa agus fáiltim roimh a fhócas ar an achar seo.

Tá gá le héalú ó bhotháin shoghluaiste mar sheomraí ranga.

Tá tábhacht na réamhscolaíochta luachmhar againn uilig agus tacaímid le leathnú an chur ar fáil de áiteacha maoinithe sa réamhscolaíocht d'iomlán ár gcuid páistí. Beidh tuilleadh maoinithe de dhíth—níl aon imeacht air seo.

Lena chois sin, beidh mór-infheistiú airgid de dhíth le Comhairle úr na Gaelscolaíochta a mhaoiniú mar is cóir agus chomh maith leis sin le freastal ar na riachtanais atá ag fás leo san oideachas lánGhaeilge—mar a leagadh amach chomh beacht sin i reachtaíocht Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta.

Beidh riachtanas do thraenáil fhóirsteanach do mhúinteoirí agus dá bhfoirne cunta fosta.

Cuireann athrú na gcritéar reatha do aitheantas agus do mhaoiniú na nGaelscoltacha agus do na haonaid taobh istigh de scoltacha an Bhéarla béim ar an riachtanas le caiteachas breise san earnáil seo atá ag borradh léi.

Tá an iomad achar eile ar fhreagracht na Roinne Oideachais a chuireann brú ar an bhuiséad reatha.

Orthu seo tá dálaí seirbhíse, agus struchtúr agus riarachán thuarastal na múinteoirí; níos mó saoire ag múinteoirí gluaiseacht ar fud na hÉireann; tabhairt faoi fhadhb na ndaltaí nach mbaineann amach na spriocanna a leagtar amach dóibh sa chóras oideachais; agus airgead úr a fháil le díol as saináiseanna den scoth le riar ar riachtanais an oideachais speisialta.

Treoraíonn na pointí seo uilig an t-Aire chuige go gcaithfidh sé aithbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mheastúcháin na Roinne Oideachais. Go raibh maith agat.

4.15 pm

I want to talk about the 2000-01 Estimates for services and expenditure by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and by the Department of Education. Essentially I wish to emphasise the need for increased funding for and across both Departments, so that crucial programmes can be delivered and that priority areas can be addressed effectively. Dr Birnie referred to

“a bigger cake, if not a bigger slice of the cake”.



I appreciate that an already significant amount of money goes into the Department of Education. However, and this has been mentioned, the poor condition of many of our school buildings demands a radical overhaul. It demands a building plan, a major school capital investment programme, to overcome the many problems associated with inadequate and outdated accommodation. I know that this is an area in which our Minister for Education has a special interest, and I welcome this. We must move beyond the proliferation of mobile huts as classrooms.

We all value the importance of pre-school education and support the objective of extending the availability of funded pre-school places to all our children. Naturally, this will require additional funding, and there is no escaping this reality.

Major financial investment will be required to properly resource the new council for Irish medium education and to meet its growing needs, as outlined in part by Mrs Nelis and as legislated for so precisely in the Good Friday Agreement. The need for suitable training for teachers and their support staff, and the revision of the existing criteria for recognition and funding of Irish medium schools as well as units within English medium schools highlight the need for additional spending in this burgeoning sector. To refer to Sammy Wilson's unenlightened comments earlier, what is taking place is that actuality is being given to the Good Friday Agreement. Nothing is being sneaked in by the back or the front doors.

There are many other areas within the remit and responsibility of the Department of Education which place pressure on the current budget. These include the need to review the conditions of service and the structure and administration of teacher salaries; greater freedom for mobility of teachers throughout Ireland; the tackling of educational underachievement; and the need to find new money for better specialist facilities to ensure that the needs of pupils with special educational needs are met. One specific example is autistic children who need very specialised units and for whom provision at present is nowhere near adequate.

In my opinion, all of this should steer and guide the Minister in the future when he is reviewing the Estimate figures for the Department of Education, and as a member of the Statutory Committee for Education, I look forward to being properly consulted in advance.

Specifically in relation to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I believe that a greater share of the budget than the allocated amount of £64,320,000 needs to be made available. I concur with Mr Close's remarks regarding the very positive potential of this Department. Mr Close quoted the example of sport, and that is very relevant. This is a fledgling Department which needs all the support it can muster to help unify our community.

To all intents and purposes, the overall arts allocation is inadequate having effectively remained static for a number of years now. There has been a marginal increase but I am calling for more. Community arts have suffered most as a consequence. This situation has persisted over recent years, and the reorientation of public money in this direction is required.

The business of promoting the Irish language and of contributing substantially toward the work of the North/South Language Body also present a challenge with major resource implications as we give what I call actuality to the Good Friday Agreement.

In conclusion, I wish to refer to the need to invest in road maintenance. The people west of the Bann need a re-balancing. I concur with Mr McCarthy and Mr McHugh, among others, who emphasised this earlier. Geoff Allister of Roads Service has said that where £30m is provided, £80m is required. That type of investment is urgently needed west of the Bann, with reference to secondary as well as primary roads. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Ford:** Despite the efforts of the Minister and of Members around the Chamber, this debate is a charade. The Minister has laid the Estimates before us. We are all making our points, be they local or general, but at the end of the day we have no choice but to accept the Estimates and pass the Appropriation Bill by the accelerated procedure. Until the Assembly has a proper Programme of Government before it, there is no point in discussing a budget statement. We badly need to see the Executive's Programme of Government. What we have at the moment — and I am not insulting the Minister, because he has no choice at this time, and I say "at this time" advisedly — is a slavish read-across from the English Government. It is a programme prepared by the UK Government, who are now responsible solely for setting spending priorities in England.

In this context, we need to start using the size of the Assembly to its greatest effect and to make a real difference. In this developing, enlarging and deepening Europe, it is clear that, as someone once said, the nation state is now too big for the small things and too small for the big things. Our priorities should be those that we set, in light of policies set largely by Brussels, in areas like agriculture. The Assembly will be judged on its ability to get the small things right. That will be the test for Ministers and those who hold power here.

The first thing that we should look at, and which has been largely ignored as we all produce our wish lists — the Minister should not worry, I have a wish-list too — is the economy of Northern Ireland. Clearly we are not competitive compared to our competitors, or as we sometimes regard them, our colleagues, in Scotland, Wales or the Republic. There are many factors in this, such as the consequences of the troubles, which we

should not make cheap political points about but must acknowledge, and over-dependence on a small number of declining industries. The problem with our inward investment strategy in recent years is that it has been largely targeted on dependency on grants rather than having some kind of tax break arrangement. Under-investment in our transport infrastructure has created problems for the economy. There is a major lack of skills in our workforce, particularly in the information economy, despite the high standard of education in the Province.

There are two particular factors affecting us in contrast to the Republic. First, we have no say in fiscal policies such as business taxation. Secondly, we are not just excluded from the Euro zone, but we are right up against the Euro zone. Members only have to look at the way certain businesses, such as petrol suppliers, are being affected all over Northern Ireland to see the problems that is creating.

We still have one of the largest public sectors, as a share of gross domestic product, in Europe. It is coming down, but it is still unnaturally high. I am not arguing for less public spending because it is quite clear that we need to preserve the level of public spending on essential services. Rather, we require more growth in the private sector.

There has been a lot of common ground in this debate. I do not intend to rehash all of it. Members around the Chamber have brought up the issue of finance for third level education. As the parent of one student and one potential student, I declare an interest. Our Scottish colleagues have shown, thanks to my political friends in the Liberal Democrats, that it is possible to change the way student finances are organised in a part of the United Kingdom. If we mean anything by what we say in the Assembly, we will be looking to Ministers to produce changes there.

We have had quite a lot of talk about the transport infrastructure and, as somebody who has been complaining about public transport, and especially railways, in his constituency for nine to ten years, I am delighted that we are talking about this and not just about pot holes in the Glenelly Valley or the state of the A26 or the Toome bypass. Work is clearly needed in all sections of transport, but it is needed more in public rather than in private transport and roads at this stage.

There is also the major issue of the Health Service, which is probably the number one concern for most people, especially when the annual winter crisis comes round and people react as if they did not expect it. People are clearly not happy with the quality of care. There is a major problem with the times of waiting lists and, while most of the debate has focused on the question of acute hospitals, there are many other parts of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public

Safety's remit that also need to be looked at. Community care and preventive medicine are both integral parts of the quality of care we provide, and yet they are underfunded, significantly more so in many ways than the acute hospitals. It is all too easy to react to the needs of an acute hospital and forget the other basic underlying services which are just as essential, but much less politically sexy.

To go back to my past life as a social worker, there is absolutely no doubt that both psychiatric services and family and childcare services have not been funded at a level they should have been, and this is a major problem which needs to be addressed. We must ensure that those services are brought up to a reasonable level. Over a period of years we should be seeking to see that the proportion of spending on health and social services, as a share of GDP, rises to something rather closer to the European average, rather than lagging well below it. Those funds have to be found from somewhere, and the Minister will not be surprised to know that we should be seeking to do that by tax-varying powers. What we must ensure is that we do not just look to the regional rate or to devolving certain functions to district councils without giving them the money they need. They must not be used as a cheap way of providing essential services. We have to look to something which gets some sort of progressive and transparent taxation, and the rates, whether they be district or regional, are neither progressive nor transparent.

Tax-varying powers are going to be crucial for the future of the Assembly, as they are going to be crucial for the future of the Scottish Parliament. Even in the short to medium term, before we can address that issue, other issues could be addressed which could help to make some of the savings we need. We have a huge problem with administrative costs and bureaucracy, particularly in the Health Service with its four boards and seventeen, eighteen or nineteen trusts and massive duplication. I can never remember the number of trusts because the amalgamations seem to come and go at times. That all needs to be looked at. We also need to look at shared integrated services. There are too many cases — and education is the most obvious — where there is a duplication of services because people apparently will not travel from one area to another. We need to overcome that communal separation, which would benefit both the community and the finances.

I trust this is the last year in which we will have a budget statement without a complete Programme of Government before us. I would like to see a programme which will address the needs of Northern Ireland and begin to make a difference. We can then have a real debate on priorities and not this sham charade we have gone through today, with a series of wish-lists which do not address the real problem. That is the test which will

be applied in years to come to the Ministers of this place, both collectively and individually.

**Mr Speaker:** There are still seven Members who wish to speak in this Supply debate, which requires a cross-community vote. Then we have to take the Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill, which also requires a cross-community vote. Standing Orders require that we finish at 6.00 pm, so I appeal to Members still to speak to keep their remarks as concise as they can so that we complete as much business as possible. We must also be fair to the Minister who wishes to reply. Clearly he will not be able to do so briefly, given the number and range of matters that have been raised.

4.30 pm

**Mr Bradley:** I was hoping that this debate would go on until lunchtime tomorrow so that I could have read from Hansard and said everything that should have been said.

Every Member has recognised the Minister's position and what he has inherited. However, I have taken figures from the publication. If we look at the provisions sought by the various Departments we find that percentage adjustments read as follows: Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 0.7% higher; Department for Social Development, 2% higher; Department of the Environment, 2.4% higher; Department of Health and Social Services, 7.7% higher; Department of Education, 8.7% higher; Department for Regional Development, 10.9% higher; Department of Higher and Further Education, 12% higher; and the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, 6.3% higher.

However, it is possibly because I come from the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee background that I notice those figures. I have every right to be concerned about the 38.4% reduction in the provisions sought for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Minister will understand my concern because I note that his Department also has a minus figure of almost 6%, but that is certainly a lot less than the 38.4% reduction for agriculture.

I cannot resist asking whether the 38.4% reduction is a reflection of the British Government's attitude to the agriculture economy in general. I believe that that is our feeling. We fought through the years, and we saw the farmers' situation. We continually realised their difficulties. We knew what the British Government was doing. However, when you see the figures of the planned reductions in front of you, the Assembly could not get up and going soon enough. As has been mentioned earlier, that is the beauty of having our own Ministers.

Does the Minister agree that the failure of the British Government to draw down all agri-monetary

compensation funding from Europe acts as a deterrent to the financial viability of the agriculture industry here? Will the continuance of such a policy affect his plans for the future and will it make life more difficult for him if the British Government continue to fail to draw down that money for us?

Can the Minister assure the Assembly that his future budgets will reflect the importance of agriculture in industry and in the overall economy of Northern Ireland.

**Ms Gildernew:** Go raibh maith agat. I too welcome the publication of these Estimates and the tabling of the motion. However, I have a number of concerns about the funding for the Department for Social Development. Economic empowerment is crucial to the process of urban regeneration and to the social and physical well-being of our communities. The elimination of poverty and the stigma of dependency must be a key priority of the Assembly, and in order to create a better future for all our citizens we need to fund areas to tackle poverty properly.

We have the right to expect the state to provide good quality housing. I am concerned, therefore, that the Housing Executive's budget was recently slashed by £13.7 million, meaning that essential maintenance to Housing Executive properties will have to be cancelled this year. If we are to bring down housing waiting lists, reduce the number of people waiting for disabled adaptations, and reduce levels of unfitness — particularly in rural counties such as Fermanagh and Tyrone — the Housing Executive must be properly resourced. There is still a long way to go in terms of the high levels of dereliction and unfitness in many parts of the Six Counties.

If we have the resources needed to provide quality homes for all then we can effectively tackle the problems faced by other Departments, particularly the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Need, and not financial restraints, should determine new build programmes, and we must be innovative in dealing with issues such as homelessness and long waiting lists, particularly in areas of Belfast and Derry.

Another area of concern is the community and voluntary sector, which is currently under severe pressure due to the gap in European funding. Given that this sector is one of the largest employers in the Six Counties and has done exemplary work in terms of community development, it is disgraceful that we have not legislated for this gap. The implications of many community organisations having to close their doors, possibly permanently, are impossible to imagine. Government Departments have not considered the absence of the cross-border and cross-community



aspects of community development and how their demise will be dealt with.

We need to be thinking of special initiatives for deprived areas and ways of eliminating social exclusion, not creating additional pressures on this sector. There is a dire need for funding for both rural and urban parts of the Six Counties and the border counties in order to create social, economic and physical regeneration.

We must share the wealth to create parity and avoid concentrating resources in one or two parts of the North. Initiatives like Laganaside have done much to enhance that part of Belfast but at what expense to the rest of Belfast or the other counties?

I am greatly concerned too that there may be a channelling of European money towards subsidising businesses, not because I disagree with giving financial backing to small businesses but because of the dependency on this funding by the voluntary sector. The bulk of funding for this sector is EU money, and there is a definite lack of will to adequately fund the sector from Government coffers. We need to address this immediately. The contribution made by this sector is immeasurable and totally under-valued, and its lifespan has not yet come to a natural end. We must ensure that provision is made to put the mainstream funding necessary into this sector immediately and for some years to come.

The minute increase in the Department for Social Development budget is not enough. We must target social need in all aspects of society and, given that this Department takes care of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society, it is imperative that we put enough resources into it to eliminate poverty and restore self-confidence, dignity and justice to our local communities. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Shannon:** I would like to discuss two issues. The first one relates to the Housing Executive's budget being cut. What worries me, as a representative for Strangford, is that with £13.7m being taken off the budget it is the rural economy that will suffer. There is money set aside for regeneration in Belfast but in the areas I represent the money is not there.

I want to know why the schemes are falling behind. Some have been on the list for five or six years. There are people waiting for heating schemes which, we were told, were going to be implemented in the next year and which we now find could be a year or two away. We have these problems right across the borough. Why is there this discrimination? Why is there unfair play with regard to my constituency when Belfast gets all the money it needs? The allocation of funds must be fair.

On the subject of funding, what about the funding required for occupational therapists to enable them to provide the services required. The finance must be

available so that they can make visits and carry out the schemes. We seem to be falling behind on such issues. Has there been an allocation in the budget for this? £4.3 billion seems a lot of money — it is a lot of money — but when you see the areas where there is a need they have to be identified and the need dealt with.

Another area which has not been covered is fishing. The Minister, in his address to the Assembly, had one sentence on fishing. I am sure this does not reflect his interest in this particular part of the economy. I must express concern if it does. In Northern Ireland as a whole, there are perhaps 2,500 jobs directly related to fishing and an income from landings of perhaps £100 million. This is not small fry by any means, even though some people only ever see a fish when it is in batter and comes out of a chip shop. People in my constituency and across Northern Ireland want to know what funding is set aside for fishermen. The depth of feeling and concern in the fishing industry continues to grow in the face of Government unwillingness to properly address the issue. We can see from the budget exactly what is happening.

Many people depend entirely on the sea for their income. Portavogie, Ardglass, Kilkeel, Annalong and places along the north coast need fishing to survive. These places have no other option. The legislation emanating from Europe has been a deciding factor. I want to know what has been set aside to help the fishermen. I suspect very little.

No Member has mentioned the fishing industry today, but we have to realise the integral part that it contributes to Northern Ireland's economy. The local fisheries division based at Stormont has not proved itself to be friends of the fishermen. Indeed, its officials proved themselves to — dare I say it — have an arrogant and, perhaps, pompous attitude towards the fishermen. They do not listen to what happens on the ground, and they do not hear what the men are saying. They have also been overenthusiastic in pursuing EU directives, again to the detriment of the fishing industry. Contrast this against the very lax attitude in Spain when it comes to enforcing fishing rules and regulations. It is unfair that our fishermen should be pursued with such zeal, unlike other parts of Europe. That is unfair.

I also draw attention to the £70 million that will be spent by the Northern Ireland Office to provide a helicopter, an aeroplane and five Royal Navy vessels to ensure that the new legislation is maintained. Would it not be better to spend that £70 million on the fishing industry? Would it not be better to ensure that there is money for all those boats and jobs in order to boost the economy, rather than trying to crucify the fishermen, who, by the way, are agreeing to and following the rules and regulations? There is room for further regeneration and processing in the fishing industry.



What funding has been set aside in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for the specific task of helping the fishing industry, providing the jobs and giving the people the opportunities? I suspect there has been none, but I would like to know. It is of great concern that both Westminster and Europe have disregarded a strategy and do not seem to have any policy in relation to it. For instance, the number of boats in Portavogie has reduced from 95 to 55. Some of the boats in Northern Ireland's fishing industry, specifically those in Portavogie, are between 25 and 32 years old. What money has the Department set aside to upgrade the fishing boats? What money has the Department set aside to try to help the industry to get out of the doldrums it is in and look to the next 10, 15 or 20 years?

The Minister mentioned the money that comes through from Europe. What moneys has he set aside for the slipways, for the ice houses, for the upgrading of the facilities, for the dredging of the harbours, and for the provision of the new harbour walls? What money has been set aside for that? What is the fishing industry getting out of this deal? I suspect it is getting very little. The people that we represent would like to know exactly what is on the plate for them. We would like to know that as well. We want to see opportunities for young men and women to come into the fishing industry. But that has not been the case, because young men are leaving the fishing industry. They do not see a future in it, and they do not see the potential in it. Unless their fathers were to hand the boats over to them, in most cases they would not bother pursuing a job in the fishing industry. What facilities and opportunities have been made available for young people to go into the fishing industry? I would like to know the position on that.

In the short-term in relation to the European rules and regulations, an effective compensation system is required, similar to the one in Spain — one that takes people out of the industry for a short time and compensates them for that period. That is the sort of scheme we should have in Northern Ireland so that our people are not disenfranchised, just as they are not in Spain and elsewhere.

It is time that the Department woke up to what is happening and went to Europe with some semblance of desire to locate the necessary funding to alleviate the current crisis in fishing. In short, our fisheries representatives have caved in to Europe on every occasion and do not seem to be truly prepared to fight their corner and, indeed, our corner as well. I would love to be able to return to my constituency and to give people the assurances that the fishing industry is all right, that there is help there and that there is finance, so that the fishermen could feel that regeneration would be taking place in Portavogie and all the other harbours in Northern Ireland. But I suspect that is not the case.

4.45 pm

Many fishermen feel that they are discriminated against. They are asking over and over again "What moneys are available to keep our fishing industry going? What moneys are available to provide new jobs? What moneys are available for regeneration and for further processing?" I would like the Minister to answer those questions.

**Mr J Kelly:** With reference to Ian Paisley Jnr's remarks about the education and rehabilitation of prisoners, may I remind him that it was the inflammatory rhetoric of his party that led many young Loyalists into prison. It is a bit rich for him to be talking in such derogatory terms about prisoners from any locality.

Sammy Wilson mentioned the Minister of Education giving money the day before suspension but made no mention of the DUP or of Nigel Dodds throwing £40 million at the Larne bypass. Nigel, who wants to make a "Mickey Marley's roundabout" of the Executive, was quite happy to give £40 million to the Larne area. A cheann Comhairle.

Sue Ramsey and I and other colleagues were meeting with the health authorities on an ongoing basis before and during suspension, but particularly during suspension. We have met with medical practitioners from all disciplines in the field. The consensus from those people is that the Health Service is sick. They are looking for a radical, root-and-branch reform of the Health Service. It was interesting that, coming from all backgrounds, they were looking for local solutions as distinct from British solutions. They were not just looking for local solutions for this part of the island of Ireland, but they were wondering how we could develop the health services in other parts of the island putting, perhaps, less stress on the finances required overall. The question of local accountability for health services came up again and again. They were particularly concerned with capital funding for equipment such as x-ray machines, scanners and such like, that we do not hear too much about.

In one case a machine was taken from the Throne Hospital, where it had been since 1963, and brought to the Royal Victoria Hospital. This gives us some insight into the real depth of deprivation within the Health Service. I know that the Minister has a limited budget and cannot do everything, but perhaps those are matters that could and should be critically addressed.

Reference has been made to tuition fees. It is my view, and the view of my party, that education is as much a part of the infrastructure as roads, electricity, rail and all the other elements that go to make up that infrastructure. Students should be the beneficiaries of our educational system and not the victims of it.

Looking at education, and looking at all the difficulties that students face, education should be free, for all children. They are the people who are going to make up the society of the future and, if education is as essential as all other parts of our infrastructure, we should be looking at these issues in a very critical and serious way. We should not be attempting to penny-pinch with education.

Roads, a Cheann Comhairle, are of great concern to people west of the Bann — I say that as a representative of a constituency there. The current condition of the roads is a problem for people travelling. If you take the north-west corridor for example, and you get as far as Toome, what happens then? Then from Toome you try to get through Dungiven, or further up through the other villages and towns — it is a bottleneck by and large.

Compare that to roads structures in the Twenty-six Counties and the way in which they have been developed. The north-west is a vital corridor, and not because the Minister or John Hume comes from Derry. It is a vital corridor for tourism and the whole infrastructure of this part of the island, and it is something that we should look at seriously.

It impinges on all aspects and facets of our lives, particularly tourism, which we are trying to develop. If we are to encourage people to come to Larne and travel on, let us look at the road structures from Larne to the north-west, and how one manages to get through them. If there is a question of discretion, a Cheann Comhairle, then the Minister might look at those areas most in need of the updating and refurbishment of their roads.

The IDB situation, and the question of accountability within it, leaves much to be desired. For example, Desmond and Sons closed a shirt factory in Magherafelt with the loss of some 80 jobs. A total of 1,500 jobs have been lost in textiles in the south Derry/Magherafelt District Council area over the last three years.

The factory was sold by Desmond and Sons to a man who wishes to use it as a bingo hall. It had contained machinery and all the elements needed for another entrepreneur to take over and provide employment. However, Desmond and Sons sold it, and it will now be used as a bingo hall. When I questioned the background to this, I discovered that the IDB had actually invested £3·8 million in this factory, and when I asked what had happened to the £3·8 million, I was told that it had gone past its sell-by date. In other words, it cannot claw back the £3·8 million, because the sell-by date has gone. Desmond and Sons therefore not only has the £3·8 million, but also the profits from a factory that it sold for a bingo hall. When one questions the company about that, one does not receive any satisfactory explanation for it.

There is also the question of the IDB's lack of enthusiasm for providing industrial development land within the Magherafelt District Council area. No matter how often we talk to its officials, we find that there is some reason relating to finance why they cannot do it. Then we find that £3·8 million has gone down the tubes.

Water and sewerage are also questions, a Cheann Comhairle, critical to the rural population. It is amazing that, in the year 2000, there are people in rural communities without running water or sewerage. They depend on a septic tank — and these are clusters of houses. Where that situation exists with no proper sewerage system it leads, of course to other environmental problems. I could go on and give the Minister a headache — if he so wished — about the problems besetting this community after 30, 40, or perhaps even 50 years of neglect. They must be addressed urgently. David Ford has gone, but he did not do too badly for a man who called this a sham — he spoke for about ten minutes. But he was right to call this a sham. He is right to say that the whole system in this part of the island requires money far and beyond that contained in the Estimates. I know that is not the Minister's fault, but it is not there at the moment. It is something we should be looking at extremely seriously.

**Mr Morrow:** I am sure Mr Durkan will leave the Assembly today wondering just what he has to do. He has brought forward a package of some £4·3 billion, and yet everyone tells him it is not quite enough. That is right, Mr Durkan, it is not quite enough. Bring forward £10 billion and we will spend it for you. We will give you the programme all right.

I should, however, like first of all to deal with some remarks Mr Kelly made against my Colleague Ian Paisley Jnr.

He chose to make them when my Colleague was not here. He said that it was rhetoric for Members of the DUP to say that some people had to be put behind bars to necessitate their rehabilitation. I say to Mr Kelly that it was rhetoric and action from his cohorts that put people in their grave, and that they have no opportunity of being rehabilitated — they have been permanently removed from society. Perhaps he will keep that in mind when he makes his utterances in the House. They have a very hollow ring and they will not —

**Mr J Kelly:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Speaker:** It is a matter for the Member whether he will give way.

**Mr Morrow:** No, I am not giving way. Those remarks will not find much credence or respect from this side of the House.

There are a number of points that I want to make. I was interested to hear Mr Poots say that money that was generated in planning was spent in that same area. Why can it not be the same for money from the sale of Housing Executive houses? We are told that money is not spent from that budget, or if it is, it is certainly not used to replace properties. We now have a frightening situation in which virtually no public housing is available because no new houses are being built, which will lead in a very short time to another crisis in housing. Many people are desperate for housing. I am sure that Members have examples of constituents coming to them, telling them that they have been waiting for housing for two to four years. I had an example of that only last week. It is very difficult to reassure people that one day they will be housed when I know that in my constituency, and in the area in which they are looking for a house, no houses are being built. Indeed, no new houses have been planned for the next five-year programme. This issue has to be addressed.

As for the roads infrastructure in rural communities, I smile when I hear those who represent urban constituencies talk about a poor service from public transport. We have no railways in my constituency. There are no trains. If some of my constituents want to see a bus they have to rush out to their gate to see one going past every two or three weeks. That is the sort of service that we receive from public transport. Therefore, I feel that we do have something to gripe about when we say that public transport is totally inadequate. That matter has to be given very serious consideration.

Instead of hospitals being upgraded and new ones built, a rural dweller will find to his dismay that existing ones are being closed. That is another penalty for the rural dweller.

Children who want to go to a rural primary school find that their schools too are under the chop. Small Protestant schools in particular are being continually run down and closed. That is another penalty for being a rural dweller.

Agriculture has gone through one of the worst crises in its history, but we are told that the way out is for farmers to be more innovative. They must diversify and change. Farmers are quite prepared to diversify, to be innovative and to change, but alas, they are not being given the opportunity.

5.00 pm

Many farmers find that they have to sell off plots of land as building sites in order to maintain a living. Yet, when they seek planning permission, do they get any comfort, support or encouragement? Alas, they do not. Many are told that they are living in green belt areas and that the policy in such areas is being stringently adhered to. Any time farmers take the opportunity to lift

themselves out of their difficulties they are told that they cannot do it because of planning legislation.

The rural dweller will not fare any better in the future than he has in the past. I would like to see expenditure being targeted to areas where there are needs crying out. We have listed some of them and there are others. The textile industry has been mentioned. It is going through another crisis. Experts tell us that much of our textile industry will disappear within a three year period. What package has been drawn up to alleviate that or to ensure that it does not happen? What package will ensure that our factories, which bring much needed work to areas, do not become desolate, rundown factory shelves?

For 30 years the rural community has suffered from underfunding — at times I believe that has been deliberate — to encourage people out of the rural areas and into towns and villages. That is quite iniquitous. It cannot, and will not, be tolerated. Those who have been brought up in the countryside and have earned their living there, and in rural communities, should be encouraged and given every incentive to ensure that they can stay there. Do we want our rural areas to become a wasteland? Do we want to see no more rural schools, or more hospitals closed, even in what we deem to be medium to large size towns? Do we want to find that the whole thing has been centralised, with people being pushed and orientated in a direction in which they have no desire to go? I feel that in the future the Minister should apply himself to these issues so as to ensure that everyone gets a fair crack of the whip, particularly the rural dwellers who, to date, have been left to the side as if they do not matter.

**Ms Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat. I initially welcome the increase in the budget allocation which the Minister of Finance, Mr Mark Durkan, indicated he would give to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. We need to be aware that there has traditionally been an underspend on health and social services, which has been recognised lately by the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

In previous years British Ministers have underfunded the Department of Health and the result of this is long hospital waiting lists, including those for occupational therapy and care in the community, as well as the underfunding of initiatives such as the Children Order.

Even though the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety commands a major part of the overall budget, a large percentage is eaten up by the acute sector. As was pointed out earlier, in recent years everyone accepted that the Eastern Health and Social Services Board has been underfunded. Some people say that it has been underfunded to the tune of £15 million.

Within the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area it is accepted that the North and West Belfast



Health and Social Services Trust has been traditionally underfunded. Due to the lack of money made available in previous years to the Department, especially in the area of children's services, let us be in no doubt that these services have been, and continue to be, in a state of crisis.

During presentations to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, all the health boards expressed concern that they are failing to meet their statutory and moral duty under the Children Order owing to the lack of resources and finance.

Residential care is another major concern, as other Members pointed out. The Chairperson of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee stated that it will carry out a hearing into children's services. I am sure that, once again, the main themes of this hearing will be lack of money and resources, especially under the Children Order.

I am sure Mr Durkan is fed up hearing that this morning, but I wish to point out that it is up to local people to undo the years of underfunding by British Ministers. It is crucial that everyone's entitlement to a quality Health Service be recognised. Health is the cornerstone of our lives and those of our children.

I am concerned that any additional money that can be given by the Minister to the Minister of Health may be ring-fenced as in previous years. This must be done properly, since we have seen money supposedly ring-fenced for children's services being used to pay off debts, balance the books and put a nice smile on bad management in the trusts and boards.

I ask the Minister to direct his attention to the financial crisis currently affecting all aspects of children's lives.

**Mr Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I shall be very brief. The IDB was mentioned earlier, and the report from the Public Accounts Committee in Westminster certainly drew attention to some of the difficulties experienced with the money it spent. That affected my constituency in West Belfast, where IDB spending per job ran to the tune of £50,000. Owing to the accelerated passage and nature of this Bill, I should like to set it on record that the IDB will have to work more closely with local organisations, enterprises or partnerships towards ensuring that job creation is improved or enhanced. In other words, the IDB must work with the strategies which local communities, it is to be hoped, spearhead and drive.

Even in the context of TSN, the IDB's report talks not of trying to locate industry in areas of need or disadvantage, but rather in or around them. My understanding is that almost the entire Six County area is taken as an area of disadvantage. In the future, for the IDB to get best value while of course relating to TSN,

there must be more area-specific targeting of employment opportunities and working with communities and other enterprises — either through local partnerships or elected representatives — to ensure that job creation is better focused. In my constituency, a substantial amount of money has been directed at organisations like Mackie, which collapsed, or to consolidate jobs at Bass Ireland or even the Ford Motor Company. However, it is my understanding that there has been a net loss of jobs in west Belfast in the past year or so. I ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure best value in the future from the IDB on social need targets. We want the IDB to work better with communities than in the past. We take the question of disadvantaged areas seriously and therefore ask IDB to try to be more specific in locating job opportunities in the future.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** Having sat through this debate I have some sympathy for you, Mr Speaker — perhaps more than before.

I was listening, however. I do not mean this to be the Frazier Crane idea of listening, but I was doing so, and those points I do not have time to answer fully and properly will be followed up by my Department and me, or by the respective departmental Ministers. I take Mrs Nelis's point that many of the remarks were made not so much because people were trying to change the Estimates — rather they were laying down markers for future budgetary considerations.

Today has clearly been useful. The debate has been constructive and responsible. The Estimates are complex and difficult, but I have been impressed by the uniformly high quality of the contributions from all the Assembly parties taking part.

The public can take heart from the fact that their representatives have demonstrated today that they can work effectively to ensure that key public services are sustained and scrutinised. During the course of the debate Members have raised a considerable number of issues, concerns and ideas, and, as I indicated in my opening remarks, I will try to deal with as many of these as possible in the time available. Where this is not possible we will try to provide a written response.

First, I would like to deal with some of the issues of general concern that were raised by Members. Mr Molloy, as Chairman of the Committee on Finance and Personnel, raised the important issue of the process and timetable for the 2000 spending review. This was also of concern to other Members, including Dr Birnie. Nearly all the Committee Chairpersons who contributed were raising questions, not just in relation to their concerns about the lack of opportunity that they had in this process at Committee level, but they also wanted to know when the Committees were going to find time to have their say in relation to the 2000 spending review. I



fully intend to do all that is reasonably possible to ensure that the Assembly and its Committees can properly fulfil their important responsibilities in the spending review. Clearly it would be desirable for the Assembly to have defined financial procedures, and I am fully committed to assisting the Assembly in the consideration and development of such procedures and will certainly work with all relevant Committees and persons in the Assembly to that end.

As we face the 2000 spending review the broad outline of the timetable is as follows. From the end of June into July the United Kingdom spending review will conclude, and Northern Ireland's allocations for the next three years will then be known. From July to October there will be the consideration of Northern Ireland spending priorities, aligned with the work that will be taking place on developing the Programme for Government. In October we need to be looking at the formal presentation of the budget for consideration by the Assembly, with the 2001-02 budgets being settled in early December. Obviously within that broad timetable we will need to ensure an appropriate opportunity for consultation, examination and discussion.

Mr P Doherty raised the need to secure the maximum resources to meet the needs of public services, and he was not the only Member who spoke in the debate to highlight this issue. It was mentioned all the way through, right up until Mr Morrow's contribution. We are all concerned about this matter. The Executive will do all in its power to ensure that we receive a fair share of public expenditure, and we will also look carefully at the scope for raising additional resources by our own efforts. However, to be frank, there will never be enough resources to do all that we will wish to do, and that is why we have to pursue efficiency and the elimination of waste with all possible rigour. We will also have to prioritise our spending so that the most important actions and needy areas are addressed first. Hard decisions will be needed, and that is why an agreed Programme for Government is crucial to the process, a fact that Mr Ford identified in his contribution.

Turning to some more specific issues raised by Members, Mr Neeson raised questions on public transport, as did many others. He expressed concern, particularly in relation to railways, and asked what more could be done. Mr A Maginness, among others, followed this up. I fully agree with those sentiments. An efficient and effective transport system is vital to the Northern Ireland economy and to public life. Significant new investment is needed to improve public transport and the roads infrastructure, but consideration of the proper level of investment necessary must await the outcome of the railways taskforce report which is due in the summer.

Mr Neeson and Dr Hendron also referred to the uncertainty regarding the future of hospital services and the particular problem with waiting lists. The future of hospital services is a key issue and one that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

It is important that we do all we can to ensure safe and effective hospital services for all our people. I am aware that Northern Ireland has a particular waiting list problem. This is one of a range of pressures faced by the Department of Health and Social Services. I understand that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is working to develop ways of tackling this problem.

5.15 pm

Mr Neeson and Mr Hay raised issues in relation to the urgency of a decision on the natural gas pipeline. As Mr Hay indicated, it is no secret that I am keen to see the natural gas industry extended beyond the Greater Belfast area. The Executive however recognise that gas pipeline projects are a matter for the private sector to take forward. At present the Director General of Gas for Northern Ireland is assessing applications for licences to take gas to the north, north-west and the south-east areas. We await the final outcome with interest. It is for consideration what, if any, subsidy these schemes may require and their priority in the Executive's spending plans including the transitional programme.

A question was also raised in relation to Harland & Wolff. As we indicated last week, there has been encouraging news for Harland & Wolff and its employees. Officials at the IDB are maintaining close contact with the company on the details of the project and we will obviously be following progress closely.

Ms McWilliams raised a number of issues in relation to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety including the question of a transfer of responsibilities in the juvenile justice area and also the lack of care packages for people over the age of 65. She also expressed concerns in relation to GP fundholding. She also reminded me of a question that she had raised last week.

First, devolution has not brought about any changes in the responsibilities in the juvenile justice area. If there is any aspect of the system which is of particular concern I suggest that Ms McWilliams or Mr Attwood, who also raised this point, set out their concerns more fully in writing.

On the level of care packages it is more properly a matter for the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to respond on the detailed allocation of funding in her Department, and the particular priority that she would attribute to a particular sector. I will ask her to respond directly on this matter.

The GP fundholding scheme will continue in Northern Ireland until at least April 2001. The ending of fundholding is linked with decisions on the development of primary care centre health and social services. These will be matters for the new Administration to consider.

Finally, as Ms McWilliams pointed out, I did not cover the DHSS Vote C in my opening remarks—but I will do so now. The provision sought for this Vote does show a substantial increase over the provision voted in 1999/2000. In that year significant additional receipts in respect of arrears of employers' contributions regarding compensation payments were received. This meant that the actual amount required in 1999/2000 was a lesser amount than normal. However, in 2001 these receipts will not be available and a higher level of provision is therefore required. I will explain this matter in more detail in writing to Ms McWilliams.

Ms McWilliams also raised the issue of student loans—as did many other Members, including Mr Ford and Mrs Nelis. In particular, Ms McWilliams raised questions about a £14 million provision being set aside to cover cancelled loans due to long-term deferment or death, and borrowers defaulting on their payments. In response to those questions, where a financial scheme is driven by loans there inevitably will be an element of bad debt that cannot be recovered. In terms of the broader questions relating to the whole issue of student loans and student finance in general, as Members are aware, a review of student finance in Northern Ireland commenced in March and is due to be completed by the end of the summer. The review will cover full-time and part-time students in further and higher education and in addition to tuition fees will include different forms of support, such as loans, allowances, access funds and discretionary awards. This will take account of recent developments in Scotland, England and Wales.

Ms McWilliams also asked about the significant drop in the provision for urban development and regeneration that was apparent in the Estimates.

This programme is a matter for the Minister for Social Development. However, I understand that the drop from £87m to £61m is attributable to a reduction in the EU peace programme. This is an initial allocation and will be looked at again in-year, when requirements are clear and the necessary public expenditure cover is made available.

Mr Sammy Wilson and Mary Nelis, among others, asked whether consideration would be given to increasing the housing allocation in the 2000 spending review to cope with problems caused by reductions in the current housing budget. Mr Shannon, among others, identified some of the particular problems. In 2000-01, the Housing Executive will have gross resources of £528 million. In 1999-2000, it received an additional

£7.5 million as part of the Chancellor's initiative to help improve some of the worst Housing Executive estates. That was a one-off. Together with a reduction of £3.5 million in rental income this year as a result of the successful home sales scheme, this accounts for most of the shortfall Members have identified. The success of the sales programme also means that the Housing Executive has fewer houses to maintain. I look forward to considering the housing requirements of the Minister for Social Development in the Executive Committee during the 2000 spending review.

Sammy Wilson also raised the system of allocating funds within the schools capital budget. Within the total resources available, the capital programme is determined on the basis of educational need. This determination takes account of projects in the top three categories of the schools' planning list. It is informed by consultation with the education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other school interests about priorities, together with advisors and the Education and Training Inspectorate about the relative educational and building needs of the schools concerned. In addition, projects must be sufficiently advanced in planning to be considered for the programme.

The make-up of the 2000-01 programme is as follows: controlled schools, nine schemes, £28 million; maintained schools, six schemes, £23 million; voluntary grammar schools, two schemes, £19.4 million; grant-maintained schools, one scheme, £1.1 million. Although this year's capital new starts programme, at £72 million, is the largest to date, it was simply not possible to meet all the demands. A number of high priority schemes could not be included. Unsuccessful projects will be considered again next year. It is for the Minister of Education to comment on operational decisions should Members require further clarification on individual schools.

Mr Sammy Wilson raised the issue of accommodating the Education Minister in Castle Buildings. My Department has overall responsibility for providing Departments and their Ministers with accommodation, using a central accommodation budget. I can therefore assure the Member that any costs associated with the Minister's request will fall on that central budget and will not affect the main spending programmes of the Department of Education. That money comes out of the Department of Finance and Personnel's budget.

Many Members touched on wider accommodation issues with respect to the location of Civil Service jobs. As is obvious from previous questions, I am conscious of Members' interest in this matter. As I have said before, it is my intention to bring forward proposals for a review of accommodation needs as soon as possible, taking account of a number of relevant policy

considerations, including the location of Civil Service jobs, new TSN and the broader equality agenda.

George Savage commented on the rural economy, the promotion of agriculture and the low incidence of BSE, and many others took up these points including Mr McHugh, Mr Paisley Jnr and Mr Bradley. I recognise the importance of the agriculture industry and the rural economy generally. In December 1999 Ms Rodgers announced an exercise aimed at developing a strategic vision for the future of the agri-food industry in Northern Ireland. This lay dormant for part of the period of suspension. The terms of reference for this exercise comprise identifying the problems and opportunities in the rural economy over the next decade, taking account of wider national, EU and global issues and, informed by this, developing a vision for the agri-food industry to enable the industry to map out a strategy to meet that vision. On the low incidence BSE status, the Minister has said from the outset that the case for Northern Ireland to be considered as a BSE low incidence region is very strong. I can confirm that she is giving this a very high priority and has been in close contact with the UK Agriculture Minister, who is very supportive.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development officials are continuing to work closely with the other UK Agriculture Departments on a plan that explains how Northern Ireland could operate as a low incidence region. It is hoped that this plan will be submitted formally to the commission very soon. Simultaneously, the plan will be issued for wide public consultation throughout the UK.

Mr Savage was also the first of many Members to raise questions about developing new markets in Europe for the textile industry and to ask about what other measures could be put forward to support this vulnerable sector. Obviously the recent announcements of job losses in the industry are deeply regrettable. It should also be remembered that we still have some very strong and competitive companies. The future of the industry depends on the implementation of change and a focus on innovative management, product differentiation and export growth. As I indicated last week, both the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, along with the IDB, and the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, along with the Training and Employment Agency, are looking at precisely this area.

I was asked first by Mr Campbell and then by several other Members, including Dr O'Hagan, about EU social fund grants to community groups. Negotiations with the European Commission over the development of new structural fund programmes are proceeding with all speed, and we aim to ensure that the gap between the old and the new programmes is minimised. The new

programme will be shaped to target Northern Ireland's needs for the years 2000-04, and groups presently receiving funding will have to submit an application and compete with any new ideas and proposals which are put forward.

Many questions were raised about the IDB. Both Mr P Doherty and Mr McHugh raised points about the IDB being held accountable for investment in underprivileged areas. Subject to the requirements of potential investors, IDB does encourage companies to look at locations across Northern Ireland and at new TSN areas in particular. However, the final decision on whether to locate rests with the investor. IDB is also working closely with all the councils to improve the quality of information available for inward investors and to promote all areas of Northern Ireland. Changes in the general political and security climate should, I hope, lead to improvements in this area.

Mr Close also raised some points on agriculture and rural development and, in particular, identified what appeared to be a significant drop in the budget for that Department's programme. That point was also taken up by Mr Bradley. As I have already said, I recognise the difficulties which the farming industry has been facing.

5.30 pm

Although the provision sought for 2000-01 is 38.4% lower than the final net provision for 1999-00, this disguises an increase in expenditure overall because of the treatment of receipts from the Intervention Board. On domestic policy, lines one and two of the Estimate, the reduced provision sought in 2000-01 arises because of additional resources allocated during 1999-00 to meet payments made under agri-environment schemes and for hill livestock compensation allowances. The Estimate does not yet reflect the additional resources announced by the Prime Minister at the agriculture summit on 30 March, which are worth some £16 million.

Mr Close, Mr Attwood and Mr O'Connor raised the issue of tourism. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's budget for the 2000-01 financial year is £15.8 million. As the Members have stated, tourism continues to play an important role in the economic development of Northern Ireland. During 1999, an estimated 1.641 million visitors came here, contributing £255 million to the local economy. Spending by holiday visitors and domestic holiday makers accounts for approximately 1.8% of Northern Ireland's GDP and is estimated to sustain around 14,750 jobs. Given a peaceful scenario, tourism has the potential to reach levels similar to those of our neighbours in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland and to sustain an additional 20,000 jobs.

In a point not dissimilar to the one raised about superannuation in the Department of Health, Social



Services and Public Safety's budget, Mr Close queried why net spending on teachers' superannuation has risen to £76 million, compared to £67 million last year. These payments reflect the working of the scheme, and that can vary year to year. Members should note that the expenditure is counted as annually managed expenditure, which means that the funds are automatically made available to Northern Ireland and do not impact on other spending. Naturally, the other side of that coin is that the savings on that budget cannot be used elsewhere.

Dr Hendron raised several issues in relation to aspects of health and social services. The provision for 2000-01 includes £169 million above the planned amount for 1999-00. As I said last week, that represents cash growth of over 9%. On residential childcare, an additional £1.5 million is being made available to health and social services boards in 2000-01 to make improvements in this area.

Of the additional resources announced by the Chancellor, a further £5 million is being made available to support the provision of more residential places, and to continue with the implementation of the Children Order 1995.

The development of cancer services is a key area for health and social services. This year an additional £8 million of recurrent money has been allocated, which will enable further improvements to be made in cancer services.

Mr Leslie highlighted the need for close liaison with Scotland in some areas, and flagged up the greater role that the private finance initiative could play in public service projects. He also emphasised the need for careful scrutiny of administrative costs. I fully agree with him. The debate today has highlighted the many demands that are being placed on our public services, and clearly we will not be able to achieve all that we desire without significant contributions from the private sector. PFI and PPP schemes provide a realistic and achievable way of securing this. Through my Department I will be pressing other Departments to be innovative and imaginative in this area, and I will also be looking to do all that we can to reduce the burden of administrative costs.

Mr Alban Maginness raised the issue that not enough money was being invested in the Water Service. This is clearly a matter for the Minister for Regional Development. However, I understand that the Water Service has a water resource strategy which is reviewed periodically to maintain the balance between increasing demand and the supplies of water available. Long-term proposals arising out of this strategy enable the provision of new sources to be planned and allow the efficient management of existing demand and supplies. The latest periodic review has just commenced and is due to report in 2001.

James Leslie and Patricia Lewsley questioned the number of bodies involved in administering education. Other Members subsequently took this point up and asked about the number of intermediary bodies involved in the administration of other programmes as well, not least in the areas of health and social services. This is an important concern and will obviously have to be dealt with within the Programme for Government and the overall allocation of public expenditure. I am sure that the respective Departments will welcome the support and involvement of the departmental Committees.

Several Members also raised issues to do with pressures on the running costs of the Department of the Environment. Dr McCrea, in particular, said that these were having a detrimental effect on road safety education, the planning service and the incorporation of EU directives into Northern Ireland legislation. I am aware of the pressures referred to, and I am pleased that Dr McCrea and other Members have recognised the efforts made by my Department to help the Department of the Environment to resolve the matter. Discussions with the Department are continuing in an effort to find further flexibility, though I am sure that Members will appreciate that this is only one of many areas where we face pressure on running costs.

Dr O'Hagan asked at least five questions. I will try to answer them briefly. She asked how much money had been set aside for the Civic Forum. Some £300,000 has been set aside in 2001 for the Civic Forum. She asked if the principle of additionality would be guaranteed in EU funding. Both the European grant and matching funding elements of the new Peace II programme will be directly additional to the Northern Ireland block, as was the case with the first peace programme money. I was also asked whether I would ensure that the Department would enshrine the principle of North/South co-operation in accordance with all relevant agreements? I will, of course, make every effort to ensure that the principle of North/South co-operation is enshrined in the Department of Finance and Personnel's contribution to the development and management of the peace programmes and other European programmes. I give a similar commitment to operating in terms of openness and transparency.

Dr O'Hagan's final question was about whether EU funds would be routed through councils rather than district partnerships, as at present. The peace programme and the structural funds are obviously subjects of further, developing discussion. Indeed, there is a meeting of the interim monitoring committee this week, and we will be looking at precisely how best to build on the success of those models that developed during the life of the first peace programme. We want to try to harness the capacities that exist at both council and partnership level to ensure that we make the most of the Peace II programme, and to ensure that we actually



sustain those models beyond the life of the Peace II programme.

I am not one of those people who praises partnerships, says that they were great and then allows them to become a biodegradable carrier bag that dissolves at the end of the peace programme. We need to look very carefully at how we develop the work of both councils and partnerships, and take up many of the comments that were made about the need to make sure that people at local level do not just contribute to community development, but actually contribute to economic development as well.

Mr McCarthy had asked about plans to replace the Strangford ferry, and, in particular, raised questions about the estimates. It is obviously a matter for the Minister for Regional Development. However, I understand that provision has been made in the current 2001-02 financial years for replacement of the Strangford ferry.

We were also asked about the Ballycastle/Campbeltown ferry service by Ian Paisley Jnr. The latest position is that, in April, a new carrier expressed interest in operating the service for the 2000 summer season, and approached Moyle District Council for assistance to run the shore-based activities at Ballycastle. The Council has made a business case to the Department for Regional Development for financial support and this is currently being considered.

We were also asked by Mr McCrea and Mr Paisley Jnr when the money is going to come to the farmers. Obviously, several schemes are involved, each of which has a specific timetable for the submission of claims and the resultant payment to the claimant. These are covered by citizen's charter targets and every effort is made to meet these.

I referred earlier to the fact that my Department had allowed the Department of the Environment to use some of its receipts to relieve some of its serious service pressures. Some Members have subsequently raised the point in relation to the Housing Executive asking why, similarly, it should not keep its receipts. All receipts need to be looked at in relation to the most pressing needs across the block, and not linked automatically to any particular area, even the Department in which they arise. I think that Members would agree that that is only fair, because not all Departments have receipts available to them. It could skew the allocation of resources if we said that all receipts automatically fell within the programme area of the Department in which they arose. That said, I note the problems in housing that many Members have articulated today.

Mr Beggs raised concern about student awards and, in particular, asked whether additional funds could be allocated to that programme. I have already referred to

the review that the Minister began earlier this year. Opportunities will arise in the monitoring rounds for the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to flag up any pressures arising in the current financial year. In relation to future years, this will be addressed in the 2000 spending review and will take account of the current review of student finance in Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs and Mr O'Connor both asked about the case of EU funds to support trans-European networks. Negotiation on the new EU programmes is still in progress, and it is too early to know precisely what projects will be funded. I fully support the case for the development of trans-European networks, but there will be many conflicting demands on the new EU programmes. It might not be possible to support all the areas we wish.

Road maintenance funding was also raised by several Members, including Alban Maginness and Seamus Close. The maintenance of road and footway services and their underlying structure is vital to Northern Ireland's social and economic well-being. I understand it is the top priority of the Roads Service of the Department for Regional Development. The Main Estimates include some £39 million for expenditure on structural maintenance.

In the forthcoming spending review the Executive Committee will be looking very carefully at the priority which needs to be given to roads and public transport in the future.

Towards the end, Edwin Poots asked about the Barnett formula for determining Northern Ireland public expenditure allocations. That is not unrelated to some of the issues we will be dealing with in the 2000 spending review. The Barnett formula largely removes the need for detailed negotiation with the Treasury on spending needs, and is also applied to Scotland and Wales. To that extent it allows allocations to be scrutinised here. The Executive recognises the disadvantages of the mechanism, and we clearly have to look at these issues in the future.

5.45 pm

In relation to many of the questions identified earlier about railways and the need for new rolling stock, as well as raising questions Danny O'Connor proposed that asset leasing should be used to help the Transport Holding Company to buy new stock. This is not always a cost-effective means of procuring assets in the public sector, as the Government is able to borrow at lower rates than the private sector. There is not any great advantage in that option, if any at all. There may be considerable advantages in the sort of PFI/PPP options that some Members mentioned and which are currently being considered by the railways task force.

Several Members referred to underfunding in programmes in respect of the budget for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. As Members have recognised, the budget reflects the Executive Committee's decision to adopt the inherited public expenditure plans for 2000-01. There will be opportunities in the monitoring rounds for the Minister to flag-up any pressures that cannot be contained in the existing provision and in relation to future years. This will be addressed in the 2000 spending review.

Time is working against us, but I will make a couple more points. There was a suggestion from Mr Poots that EU receipts had not been spent to the best possible effect. As Minister of Finance, I attach a high priority to ensuring that EU receipts are spent to the best possible effect, with due regard to proper accountability and value for money. A wide range of projects has been funded under the current programme, and these projects have made a positive contribution to almost every aspect of Northern Ireland life. Like every programme it needs to be subject to continuing scrutiny and appraisal.

Some Members also raised questions about the payment of agri-monetary compensation. We are fully aware of the difficulties faced by the agriculture industry here, and the UK Government have already made — or are making — considerable sums of agri-monetary compensation available at considerable cost to the taxpayer. Payment of compensation cannot, however, be varied on a regional basis. In view of the many competing pressures on the public purse, compensation has been targeted on the hardest-pressed sectors — the various livestock sectors.

I will not have time to go through all the questions I wished to answer. However, I assure Members that the points they made about how unsatisfactory this process has been have been well registered. There is nobody who has more interest than I in ensuring that these areas are properly probed and examined at the level of the respective departmental Committees. When this happens there may be fewer questions of that nature for me to answer. There may be far more positive ideas for us to follow up, in terms of improvement, achieving greater efficiency and identifying other ways of resourcing these important programmes. As indicated, I take to heart the points that were made in relation to people's wish to have a full and proper input into the considerations on the 2000 spending review.

Unsatisfactory as it has been to have had to go through accelerated passage, as you, Mr Speaker, pointed out a fair number of Members have participated in this debate. If you discount, for instance, the Ministers and yourself, Mr Speaker — not that I would normally want to discount you — we are certainly doing very well in comparison to other places in terms of the range and breadth of involvement in the Chamber. We

should not lose sight of that. Members have done a good day's work in this debate. It will give me and my ministerial Colleagues many more days work to do, and obviously it will be up to others to judge whether that turns out to be good work.

**Mr Speaker:** If it is to pass, the motion must have cross-community support. I shall call for Ayes and for Noes. If it is clear that on all sides of the House there are Ayes, *nem con*, we shall not have a Division, in order to save time. If, however, there are Noes, the House will divide.

*Question put, and agreed to nemine contradicente.*

*Resolved:*

That a sum not exceeding £4,296,588,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund to complete the sum necessary to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending 31 March 2001 for expenditure by Northern Ireland Departments.

## ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

**Mr Speaker:** Before moving to the next item of business I need to make a ruling. At the start of business today Dr Paisley raised the question of having a debate and was advised that it might be possible by leave of the Assembly. Under Initial Standing Orders 6(4), leave of the Assembly could be given, at that time, on the Floor of the House for a motion to be debated. However, this provision was not included in the new Standing Orders, which were agreed by the House. I therefore consider that it cannot be used in this case.

A private notice question can be put down on the day and considered. However, a private notice question, like any other question, must address a responsibility of a Minister or the Commission. I do not consider that the question of a visit by His Royal Highness Prince Charles is a matter over which any Minister has responsibility. Finally, even if a motion were put down for Standing Orders to be set aside to facilitate a debate, there would have to be a notice of motion on the Order Paper that had been passed by cross-community support. Since I am not at all clear that His Royal Highness has made any statement in this regard, and as one would be questioning his decision, albeit on advice, I consider that it might well be a debate that encroached on the Royal Prerogative. That would be entirely out of order for the Assembly, as for Westminster, and my ruling is that no such debate can take place.

## APPROPRIATION BILL

### Second Stage

**Mr Speaker:** The Second Stage of the Appropriation Bill has to be passed with cross-community support too, and I remind Members that business will be interrupted at 6 o'clock.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** I beg to move:

That the Second Stage of the Appropriation Bill (N/A 5/99) be agreed.

We have had a full and useful debate on the Supply resolution. As the Appropriation Bill is concerned with the same matters, I do not propose to add to the points that I made in my introduction.

**Mr Close:** We in the Alliance Party hope that this is the proverbial bottom line for the type of procedures that we have had to go through to arrive at this stage. I shall emphasise that point. When one considers that there were something like 27 Votes in the Estimates, covering £7 billion or £8 billion, and we were each allocated 10 minutes to speak, each Vote received only about 22 or 23 seconds. That demonstrates the inadequacy of this procedure.

I also hope that it is the bottom line in relation to unaccountability. I hope that, through a proper Programme of Government, those of us on the Finance and Personnel Committee will be given an opportunity to cost that Programme of Government properly, so that we can deliver the best possible services to the people of Northern Ireland who elected us. We are all here to serve them.

We also have a responsibility not only to seek more in our begging bowls, but to look at the figures in the Bill and try to realise the areas where savings can be made. The question that has already been touched upon is whether we need that number of education and library boards, health boards, health trusts and local authorities in Northern Ireland?

We must look at areas such as these to try to provide the savings necessary to provide better services for the people of Northern Ireland.

**Mr Durkan:** It was clear from my remarks last week and today that I fully sympathise with the frustration of many Members and, in particular, with the frustration of the Finance and Personnel Committee. I have had to tell Members of the Committee that there are two Committees in my life: the departmental Committee and the Executive Committee. Unfortunately the way these things work means that often I can only go to one after I have been to the other. I know that is frustrating for members of the departmental Committee. In exploring how best to develop bespoke procedures that suit our

particular circumstances, we need to address that issue so that we can have all the necessary scrutiny and include all the additional input into planning that Assembly Members can offer — not just via the Finance and Personnel Committee but via all the Committees. One of the things that struck me about today's debate was the very clear strength of insight and interest that was coming from Members, based on their experience in the departmental Committees. We want to try to build on that, and to harness that, to ensure that we improve how we plan and manage, so that in turn we can improve the delivery of public services.

**Mr Speaker:** As I have indicated, this motion requires cross-community support too. If there are Ayes from all sides, *nem con*, I will consider that we do not need a Division.

*Question put, and agreed to nemine contradicente.*

*Resolved:*

That the Second Stage of the Appropriation Bill (NIA 5/99) be agreed.

*The sitting was suspended at 5.57 pm.*



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 13 June 2000

*The sitting begun and suspended on Monday 12 June 2000 was resumed at 10.30 am.*

**Mr Speaker:** May I advise business managers that the Business Committee will meet 10 minutes after the rise of the House.

## UNITED CHRISTIAN BROADCASTERS

**The Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee (Mr O'Neill):** I beg to move

That this Assembly calls upon the appropriate broadcast licensing authorities to facilitate United Christian Broadcasters in their use of unused AM frequencies.

The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee received representations from United Christian Broadcasters UCB. Having deliberated on the matter at some length, we felt that it would be significant and important to bring this motion before the House by way of support. As you are aware, Mr Speaker, this is not a devolved matter. However, the Committee takes it so seriously, on the basis that it involves a simple, fundamental human right, that we felt it necessary to bring it to the attention of the House and inveigle Members into giving their support so as to strengthen the case for relieving what we consider to be an injustice.

Who are UCB? They are an international and interdenominational charity — and I would stress the interdenominational aspect of their work, since in our country this can be an interesting subject. They cross all community groups and have representation from all organised Christian religions. They have offices in Belfast, Dublin and various other parts of the world. Their European studios are located in Stoke-on-Trent, and they have large support in Britain and Ireland. They can count on 270,000 people who would petition to support them. Some 30,000 are from Northern Ireland, and 10,000 are from the Republic.

Yesterday I received a petition signed by 27,000 people in support of UCB's request for fair treatment. I have examined the box of petitions, and I understand they were examined by the Minister responsible in the Dáil, who instructed her officials to spend three days going through them — much to their satisfaction. I do

not have that time or those resources. However, from what I can see, they are clearly a very representative set of petition seekers.

The UCB radio station began in the 1980s when the present managing director, Mr Gareth Littler, campaigned in Parliament to bring about freedom for Christian radio.

He petitioned Parliament with 273,000 signatures — and succeeded in obtaining a satellite licence. Unfortunately, however, a clause was added to the Broadcasting Act to exclude any religious body from broadcasting nationally. The Minister responsible for the Act was Mr David Mellor, whom, I am sure, many in the House remember well. His action was never debated on the Floor of the House of Commons. In other words, the insertion of that clause, which has prevented Christian music radio stations from obtaining a licence to broadcast on ordinary radio ever since, was a unilateral act of the Minister.

Of course, this has a particular impact in Northern Ireland, where, as we know, there is a very keen interest in Christian music. UCB began broadcasting in May 1993, on satellite, and it continues to do so. However, in 1997 it was refused even an application for a licence. It is not even allowed to apply for a licence because of the 1990 and the more recent 1996 Broadcasting Acts. This law is exclusive, discriminatory and needs to be changed.

Christians are being excluded from broadcasting, and as a result UCB took legal action and advice from Baker and MacKenzie, a top law firm in London. David Pannick QC, one of the most highly respected barristers in Britain, gave the opinion that the refusal to give the UCB an application form for a radio licence was a breach of the rights given to all under the Human Rights Convention, and a denial of freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom from discrimination. In the Good Friday Agreement, in the section entitled "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity", the parties affirmed

"the right to freedom and expression of religion; the right to pursue democratically, national and political aspirations; the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of ... creed".

This action by UCB is continuing through the European Court of Human Rights, and the outcome is awaited.

It is also important to point out that the BBC seeks to retain its monopoly on religious broadcasting nationally, while it clearly has no plans to provide a 24-hour specialist Christian radio music station. The lack of such a station presents some difficulties. I will try to outline some of them. Over the years both the BBC and ITV have drastically cut the time allocated to religious broadcasting. ITV companies give an average of only

2% of the available broadcasting hours per week. Last year, BBC1 did not have a Christmas Day service and there is no indication that there will be any improvement in this respect.

There are also concerns about quality. While some religious programmes have clearly been excellent, many have not.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Does the Member accept that, while the BBC does from time to time neglect its public duty, it provides many good religious programmes — for instance, Steve Stockman's radio programme on a Sunday evening, 'Songs of Praise' on BBC television and 'Sunday Sequence', which provides a wide range of thought-provoking religious ideas? We can be hard on the BBC from time to time, but it still provides that service.

**Mr O'Neill:** I accept what Mr Paisley says. When he intervened I was saying that, while some religious programmes have been excellent — and, as he has done, we can name them — others have not been particularly helpful to the Christian faith. There has been a tendency to trivialise it, and some have even blended Christianity with such things as witchcraft. There is therefore a question about the standard as well as the frequency of religious programming.

The 1996 agreement between the Government and the BBC, and the Broadcasting Act 1996 simply expanded the 1990 national religious disqualification to include local digital licences. This ensured that there would be no future competition for the state broadcaster's national religious monopoly. It could be argued that this breaks competition law.

That Northern Ireland has been affected already is demonstrated by the way in which the UCB's requests for an application for the recently advertised local digital radio licence was treated. In April the radio authority refused the UCB access to a Northern Ireland licence and, as I said earlier, would not even provide an application form. There is no Christian music radio station in Northern Ireland today. Such a service is banned by the combined forces of the BBC and the UK Government. It is not that there is a shortage of frequencies or an inability to provide programming. Atheists are not being told that there is a shortage of frequencies for them. This is straightforward, unfortunate discrimination against Christians, and the total ban on religious groups still applies. Up to 200 digital licences are being made available around the United Kingdom, but none of them can be for a Christian music station.

When one looks at it in that particular light, one can see, as I said at the outset, that there is a basic point of principle at stake here about freedom. There is also a question of standards in Christian broadcasting stations, and one fear often expressed about Christian radio

stations perhaps arises from some of the abuses that may have occurred in the United States with the exploitative, televangelist approach.

I should like to assure the House that there are safeguards in that very same Broadcasting Act 1990 which would control the quality of any Christian radio station. There are three in particular to which I draw Members' attention. Ownership by fit and proper persons is dealt with in Part III, section 86(4)(a). Responsible programming which does not exploit is dealt with in Part III, section 90(1) and 90(2). In addition, under Part I, 4(1)(a) of the 1996 Act, authorities may impose additional licensing conditions as they deem necessary. These three sections would provide direct control over such radio stations and should assure those who may have concerns about the exploitative nature of certain broadcasting companies they may have come across in America.

*10.45 am*

Following the UCB submission to Members on 9 March 1999, 85% of the Members from our ranks have signed in support, and I expect that support may have grown somewhat since. This is a reflection of the very point I made at the beginning, that people recognise this as a denial of a basic and fundamental human right. It is also interesting to note that 88·88% of MPs in Northern Ireland — and I do not know how that figure was arrived at — have also signed up in support of it.

In the Republic of Ireland, as I said earlier, the Minister for Broadcasting, Síle de Valera, in a speech in the Dáil, acknowledged the need for a licensing regime for the United Christian Broadcasters' radio station. There is, therefore, a strong case to be answered here, and the Committee is asking that the House approve this motion. A case can then be put to those people who allocate licenses to illustrate that we have major concerns about this denial of what we describe as a basic human right, and we can ask them to reconsider their views with regard to Christian broadcasting in general.

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee decided that this debate could run for two hours. Given the substantial number of Members who wish to speak, I can allow only five minutes for each and then 15 minutes for the proposer's winding-up speech.

*(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)*

**Mr Benson:** I thank Mr O'Neill and his Committee for bringing forward this important motion. I also thank him for the very detailed statement he has made this morning. I will not be repeating any of it.

I fully support today's motion that the appropriate broadcasting licensing authority be asked to facilitate the United Christian Broadcasters and allow them to

broadcast on unused AM frequencies. What have we to lose by supporting this motion? There is an opportunity to provide twenty-four hour Christian broadcasting for those who want it and all the existing stations and programmes for those who do not. In a broadly Christian country it seems ridiculous that independent ethnic radio stations have air space, while a Christian radio station cannot find the space to provide a valuable service to the people. The irony is that the Russian federation has given the United Christian Broadcasters access to four AM frequencies previously used for propaganda, yet the United Kingdom Government will not remove the legal obstacles. Throughout the world, Ireland is referred to as the Land of saints and scholars. I am sure we all claim to have high Christian and moral values. It is therefore imperative that the United Christian Broadcasters be granted the necessary licence and facilities so that they can reinforce Christian values among the general public. I ask all in the Chamber to fully support this important motion.

**Mr Shannon:** I endorse the comments that have been put forward. This issue concerns many of us, and all members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee endorsed the proposal. Constituents have contacted us about it, and therefore it is important that we discuss it today. The UCB put their case to Assembly Members some 18 months ago, and a concerted campaign has been operating ever since. The matter was brought before the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee by those with a particular interest in it, and as a result of the representations that were made to us 85% of MLAs signed the motion. It is interesting that a majority of MPs have done likewise. This shows that among the political parties in this Chamber there is a united front. There is a desire to make sure that this issue be brought to the fore and that the Government respond positively to it.

The ban on the UCB is totally discriminating. It affects all sections of the community, and all feel aggrieved. The ban on religious ownership of the national radio stations in the United Kingdom is contained in the Broadcasting Act 1990. As a direct result of that — and I know that my Colleague has mentioned some of the BBC's efforts — the BBC has a monopoly on religious broadcasting nationally. This is before the European Court of Human Rights, where the matter will be decided. There is an issue to be addressed: the BBC should not have the monopoly of all national religious broadcasting.

We were urged at the time to write to Janet Anderson, the Minister responsible. We have not received a response, which is disappointing, for that is what the people want. Only independent specialist Christian radio stations can meet the unfilled request, and the UCB could do just that. The number of people who have written on this issue to Assembly Members, to our

Members of Parliament and to the councils is enormous. Indeed, in the Dáil there are moves afoot to make sure that there will be changes there.

Changes in legislation are important and something we wish to see. We do not have power in the Assembly to make those changes; that power lies in London.

The United Kingdom law is out of step with almost all of Europe and even with north and south America. We have all received a chart that shows all the countries where UCB stations and private stations can tell their different stories in music and in word. But there is a gap. Cuba, a country with a very strict regime, has a radio licence facility, as do the Eastern bloc countries, Switzerland, the United States and Argentina. Some of these countries we have not got on well with in the past. The United Kingdom is the one country that is out of step, out of tune and, some would say, out of frequency with the rest of Europe and the rest of the world.

The people who benefit from UCB are numerous, especially in rural areas. For many who live in rural parts of Northern Ireland, the only contact with the outside world is through radio. It is important that that thirst for Christian radio and music can be quenched. The UCB, as it has shown in other parts of the world, can present a programme of Christian radio — music, verse and word — to those who listen to and use Christian religious programmes.

At present people can get these programmes through satellite and cable television. They cater for some 300,000 people, but not for everyone. Not everyone has a satellite dish or can receive cable television.

Broadcasting can, and indeed does, show many immoral practices. The balance that is needed is not there. The UCB has adopted the very same guidelines that the BBC once had for religious broadcasting as a basis for all its work. The UCB is not operating and giving a service in Northern Ireland purely and simply because of the BBC and the United Kingdom Government.

There must be controls so that cults and other religions can be responsible. The UCB has met the demands that have been made, and it is important that that is said as well. Recent newspaper reports have highlighted chronic depression as the reason for the fact that many young people commit suicide. That shows the need for the UCB radio station's uplifting and life-changing message of reconciliation. The Minister in London needs to change the law and remove this discrimination urgently. The alternative is to devolve responsibility for broadcasting licences to the Assembly.

**Mr McElduff:** A LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom, ag labhairt ar son Sinn Féin, tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I want to support the motion in principle. We all appreciate the strength of the UCB's lobby.



UCB's lobby is very highly motivated and obviously well resourced. That group has spoken to many Assembly Members individually and has written to everyone. TDs in other parts of the country have also been lobbied.

My party's support for the motion should come as no surprise, given our direct experience of censorship — of having our voice suppressed, access to the airwaves denied and actors' voices substituted for ours in the past which no doubt, provided work for Equity. We all know that censorship does not work. Section 31 did not work with RTE in the Twenty-Six Counties, nor did its application in the North. Exclusion from the broadcast media was a very undemocratic experience for our party. It was wrong, unjust and unfair, and we would not seek to impose such censorship on United Christian Broadcasters. Essentially, we see this as a human rights issue, which is relevant to the equality agenda, as legislated for in the new era of the Good Friday Agreement.

As a party, Sinn Féin has consistently championed the right of all people to freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of speech and freedom from discrimination. Not surprisingly, neither I nor any other member of Sinn Féin holds any brief for UCB as an organisation. However, it is appropriate to invoke article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which cites the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Obviously, it is correct and legitimate to outline some of the responsibilities that automatically accompany rights in this matter. We all have our own concerns about programme content and the need to avoid the denigration of other religions. I assume that UCB has no intention of going down that road, but I want to make the point that we all have our individual preferences with regard to a more ecumenical inclusive approach that reflects the diversity of religions. We can seek assurances about accepted guidelines and standards, but when someone supports something in principle, it is more about the principle than about the content.

In conclusion, we support the motion in principle. Early this morning I listened to the tape — “A Gift from God” — which was presented to us by UCB. It begins

“It is 6.25 am; what a beautiful morning to wake up to God.”

I asked a friend of mine yesterday for his views, and he quoted a very popular song:

“All God's creatures have a place in the choir.”

It is a nice sentiment. From Sinn Féin's point of view, that includes the Rev William McCrea.

**Dr Birnie:** It will be hard to follow that last point.

In this House we often face difficult issues of competing principles, one of which is the allocation of

public money. It is very hard to identify the principle that could be held to oppose this motion. Moreover, there is no commitment for spending public money on it. It requires support because it is an issue of freedom, human rights and religious tolerance. As such, UCB's campaign has received widespread public support, and, as the Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee said, it has received widespread cross-party support in the Assembly. It seems that UCB has fallen victim to the Broadcasting Act 1990, schedule 2, in particular, and we wonder why that schedule was included. The Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee suggested that that schedule owed much to the exaggerated fears of the then Minister, David Mellor, about the potential invasion of the United Kingdom media by the grosser aspects of United States-style televangelism.

11.00 am

Those fears were almost certainly misplaced to begin with, and did not justify what was a gross limitation on freedom and religious tolerance. It will be objected that if permission is given to an exclusively Christian broadcaster, Islamic stations, for example, will inevitably follow. There are two responses to that. First, if one takes a strong view on religious liberty, one will not wish to stop Islamic broadcasting. In any case, it will happen under provisions for racial equality and so forth. There is no technical limitation on broadcasting by UCB. As I understand it, the AM frequencies are available.

In his opening speech, the Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee rightly said that there is a high level of public support for this type of motion. As Mr Shannon said, it is an upsetting situation when many other countries such as Slovakia and Argentina, which have not hitherto been regarded as paragons of liberalism, now have better freedom of religious broadcasting legislation than the United Kingdom. There seems to be progress on changing UCB's position in the Republic of Ireland, which I welcome, and also in Europe under the European Convention on Human Rights. I appeal to the United Kingdom authorities not to be found wanting. I urge the House to support the motion.

**Mr A Maginness:** This is a matter of freedom of speech — indeed, of freedom of religion. When one examines the statutory basis of the ban on religious ownership of national radio stations in the UK and religious broadcasting, one wonders why such a restriction was imposed in the first place. It is difficult to say. There was no real debate at Westminster on this particular aspect of the Broadcasting Act 1990. Perhaps it was not intended to have this effect. If that were so, UCB would have an easier path, but I suspect that that was not the position. The real suspicion is that the BBC



wishes to hold on to its monopoly of religious broadcasting. That is the stumbling block. We should send a strong message to the BBC and to Westminster that we disagree profoundly with this ban — that we see it as a very serious infringement of religious freedom and freedom of speech; that we do not believe that a large, powerful organisation funded exclusively by the public should enjoy such a monopoly over an area of great sensitivity that deeply affects many people.

If the 1990 Act was bad, the Broadcasting Act 1996 was even worse. The 1996 Act extends the ban to include local digital licences. That is clearly unacceptable. There should not have been an extension of this ban. As Mr O'Neill, the Chairman of the Committee, said, the UCB requested a form of application for a recently advertised local digital radio licence but was refused. That is a matter for great regret.

I welcome this debate, which is of great service to the House and to the community in general. It raises the questions about the sort of devolution that we want. One is beginning to realise, having experienced the supply debate yesterday, that there are restrictions in relation to devolution in terms of monetary issues and in the raising of public funds for all our public bodies. We now realise that we are restricted even in terms of broadcasting. It would be useful if the Government were to consider extending the ability of the Administration here to grant broadcasting licences. Surely, granting licences would come under our capable purview, and is something that we should be seeking from the Westminster Government.

There is a much more sympathetic attitude in the Republic. The Minister responsible for broadcasting matters, Síle de Valera, has said that she will amend the legislation in the Republic of Ireland in order to permit UCB to broadcast. That is progressive and should be welcomed. The decision contrasts sharply with the current policy of the Westminster Administration.

UCB is currently confined to the more heavenly sphere of satellite broadcasting. However, I am reliably informed that it would be happy to add to its heavenly operation a more earthly role as a terrestrial broadcaster.

**Mr Carrick:** I speak in support of the motion. United Christian Broadcasters has experienced frustration in its attempts to overcome apparent discrimination to establish freedom of expression. I believe that it is my duty in the Assembly to ensure that this organisation receives equality of treatment and the right to freedom of expression. We need to overcome the national monopoly held by the BBC.

On the subject of equality of treatment, there can be no justification for the continuing stance taken by the broadcasting authorities to hinder the issue of a licence to United Christian Broadcasters. I come from a

Christian background — Christian in the biblical sense: one who is justified by faith alone, reached by redeeming love and saved by Christ's matchless grace. Biblically, I take the name "Christian" based upon the absolute supremacy of the word of Christ, the sufficiency of the work of Christ and the superiority of the way of Christ.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 demands equality of opportunity and Christians should not be discriminated against, or hindered in the proclamation of the Christian message or the word of God. There are many differences of emphasis in worship. Indeed, there is an ecumenical interpretation that I do not agree with, but, whatever one's beliefs, the principle of equality of opportunity is still valid.

The continual rejection by the broadcasting authorities to deny UCB an application to broadcast gospel music is unacceptable. The creation of a level playing field, to include the right of Christians to promote the Christian gospel in word and music, is imperative.

This brings me to the second principle — the right to freedom of expression. We live in an age where we have witnessed the decline of moral standards and values. The expression of this downgrade is no more evident than in the broadcasting industry, whether it be on television or radio. All sorts of deviant behaviour and perverted values are represented regularly in the media.

Without a blush, without a pang of conscience, and without a thought for the consequences, all sorts of vulgarities, obscenities and lewd activities are portrayed and conveyed through the media. How much more vital is it then for a Christian message to be available to the populace, when they eventually realise that the wantonness of this pleasure-seeking, depraved world is failing them? It is essential for the moral good of our people that the right of Christians to bring a message of hope, love, compassion, life and, indeed, eternal life be upheld in a world that is lying in the lap of iniquity. To restrict the freedom of expression for Christians is to deny to a needy world the one sure solution to all its problems. Christ is the answer.

We may differ culturally and religiously. Socially we may move in different circles and hold different political perspectives. However, the Christian gospel message is one that concerns all cultural, social and political views, for in it Christ states

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Therefore it is important that the United Christian Broadcasters, and others like-minded, be afforded the right to use the airwaves to convey this message of all messages — that Christ loves the world of sinners lost and ruined by the fall, and salvation he offers free to all.

Finally, as an Assembly, Members should seek to expose and oppose the anti-competitive process of the national monopoly relating to religious broadcasting. The contemporary gospel music broadcast by UCB reflects and proclaims the faith of the Church, as found in the Bible and the living traditions and preaching of the visible Christian Church.

**Mr J Kelly:** A LeasCheann Comhairle. I rise to support the motion although having listened to what Mervyn Carrick said, which had a touch of the zealot about it, I have some feeling of reservation because to be too zealous in religious terms can be dangerous. However, I support the motion because as far as the BBC is concerned, there has been too much of a broadcasting monopoly over the years. We have been tied too much by the monopoly under the Broadcasting Act on all aspects, but particularly in relation to religion.

I enjoy, as much as anyone, listening to religious programmes. Indeed, just last night I turned on RTÉ, and Hans Küng was on. Hans Küng has been silenced by the Catholic Church for giving expression to what it terms radical views in relation to Christianity. So it was good to be able to listen to someone like Hans Küng. Had it not been for RTÉ, and its use of the airwaves, we might not have heard a different view of Catholicism from a man who is an ordained priest, a Catholic and a theologian. It therefore has advantages. Rights carry with them responsibility. There is no right without responsibility. We have to be conscious of our responsibilities in relation to these matters, and the airwaves should not be used to insult, by any word or act, another religion, whether Muslim, Hindu, Catholic, Protestant or Presbyterian. I am sure that the United Christian Broadcasters are conscious of this.

We have to be conscious of our responsibilities in relation to broadcasting, and particularly our Christian broadcasting.

11.15 am

My Colleague Mr McElduff mentioned article 9, but article 10 refers to the rights to freedom of expression, freedom to hold opinions and freedom to receive and impart information. Those are all important, particularly in terms of our religious input into society. How is it approached? How do we deal with it, given all the sensitivities involved?

I agree with Mr Carrick, that day and daily, our lives and homes are invaded by the most materialistic of considerations. Yet no one cries out, calls for a ban or seeks to suppress advertising that in many ways causes hardship to families, particularly advertising that is aimed at young people and children and, given the enticements involved, puts parents under a great deal of stress. Perhaps because there is too much money

involved no one wants to ban or restrict advertising. Yet when we come to a Christian message, we find this embargo. Maybe that speaks volumes about attitudes in the new millennium to Christianity in general.

In principle, I support the motion.

I will finish by echoing Mr McElduff. What about a cross-community choir with an opportunity to sing from the same hymn sheet? There are two Testaments, the Old Testament and the New Testament. I like to think that we will be concentrating, by and large, on the New Testament.

**Mr McCarthy:** It is a delight to hear such a united voice in the Chamber this morning. Long may that continue. As the Alliance Party's representative on the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, I fully support the efforts of the UCB to get a licence from the licensing authority and the United Kingdom Government to broadcast Christian music throughout these islands.

It is to the eternal shame of the broadcasting authority that it has continually refused a licence to enable the UCB to provide a service to a very wide and appreciative audience. What is it afraid of? It is often said that we live in a Christian society. If that is the case, surely it must follow that every effort be made to promote the Christian way of life. And what better way to do that than to offer a variety of Christian broadcasts in the form of music, praise and worship? There must be space for everyone.

The Alliance Party has always supported freedom of choice. Here we are being denied that freedom, for whatever reason. It is to be hoped that after today's debate the attitude of the authority will change. The Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee has welcomed the fact that the Dublin authorities have recently acknowledged the need for a licence to be given to the UCB so that local Christian music can be available to all who wish to hear it. There is also an economic benefit to be gained by local Irish artists who will have the airwaves to advance their musical talents.

Undoubtedly, the Christian music of the UCB has brought, and will continue to bring, great comfort, peace and reconciliation to many people. It must be our prayer and hope today that the Government will grant the necessary licence without delay. I fully support the motion.

**Mr Roche:** I have no intention of following the first Sinn Féin contributor to the debate, who used the motion as a political platform and whose comments were absolutely reprehensible. The ban on Sinn Féin/IRA that existed in both the United Kingdom and the Republic was not a denial of human rights; it was there to prevent an organisation that literally murdered Protestants in their place of worship and murdered a young Catholic girl coming from her place of worship from using the

broadcasting media as a means of legitimising its foul, murderous activity.

UCB is a highly professional broadcasting organisation, licensed since 1993 to broadcast —

**Mr J Kelly:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Roche:** I will not give way.

It has been licensed since 1993 to broadcast via the Astra satellite. UCB is a registered charity run by 50 full-time staff and hundreds of volunteers. It operates two round-the-clock music radio stations. UCB Europe presents praise, worship and easy-listening music, Bible readings and factual programmes for adults. UCB Cross Rhythms presents contemporary gospel music for young people.

The breakdown of UCB output is 70% Christian music and 30% speech-based material, made up of Christian testimonies, interviews, Bible readings, phone-ins and competitions. Contemporary Christian music is the fastest growing genre of music in the world, and UCB gospel music broadcasts reflect and proclaim the faith of the church as it is found in the Bible and in the living traditions and teachings of the visible Christian churches. This type of gospel music is virtually unrepresented in the programming of the BBC and independent local radio stations. This means that there is a very large demand for the type of Christian music provided by UCB — a demand that is not being met by the BBC.

UCB's problem is that under the 1990 Broadcasting Act it is not permitted access to a national radio frequency, and this ban was extended to local digital radio under the 1996 Broadcasting Act. That legislation effectively represents lobbying by the BBC for a monopoly of national religious broadcasting. This monopoly is entirely unacceptable at the very time that the technical advance into digital is opening up the opportunity for a great diversity of broadcasting. Responsible Christian broadcasting represented by an organisation such as UCB must be permitted to be part of that diversity. This is not intended as an adverse comment on the BBC's religious broadcasting. It is simply to make the case that religious broadcasting should not be effectively monopolised by one broadcasting organisation.

There is no Christian music radio in Northern Ireland today because it is banned as a result of the 1990 and 1996 legislation. The people of Northern Ireland are being disadvantaged by the UK's secular regulators. This is absolutely unacceptable. The unacceptability of the situation has been recently highlighted by William Hague. He said to an audience of about 8,000 people at this year's spring harvest Bible camp in April

"It is unacceptable that a glass ceiling has been placed over the vision of Christian broadcasters like Premier in London and United

Christian Broadcasters. With so much material on television that no parent would want their children to see, we must give a full opportunity for Christians to put forward exciting and wholesome alternatives. The next Conservative Government will ensure that Christians have the same right to national and digital licences as anyone else."

The point about the unsuitable material on television was well made by Mr Carrick.

The vote today will set the precedent for change. The NIUP supports absolutely the right of UCB to have the access that it requires to make use of unused AM frequencies. We support the motion.

**Dr Adamson:** The history of Christian music in Ireland in general, and in Ulster in particular, is both interesting and of profound importance in the development of both European and world civilisations. I am particularly glad that Éamonn O'Neill has brought this motion before us, he being an O'Neill and Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee.

In the early monasteries of Ireland hymnology was central to worship. Two of the most important monasteries were Movilla and Bangor. In the sixth century many of the great scholars and saints of Ireland were educated in one or other of them. Columba, who was of the house of the O'Neill, studied under St Finnian at Movilla, and Comgall of Bangor helped him in his work among the Picts of Alba — what we now know as Scotland.

In 563 Columba founded the great religious centre of Iona, which was to become the cultural apotheosis of Scotland. The followers of Columba were composed of all the peoples of Ireland, united in religion. From the Bangor monastery were also to come Columbanus, who founded Luxeuil in France and Bobbio in Italy, and St Gall, who founded a monastery and canton of that name in Switzerland. These were to be the chief centres of scholarship and religion that brought Europe, at last, out of the Dark Ages. The glory of these monks was the celebration of a perfected and refined *Laus Perennis*, which is Latin for perennial praise, and in singing this hymnology and psalmody continuously, day and night, they entered into a covenant of mutual love and service in the Church of Jesus Christ. Their singing has not been equalled.

Later in Ireland we had the development of the people who became known as the Ulster-Scots. In America they were known as the Scotch-Irish. Following their emigrations to America they merged quickly into the American nation, although the Ulster speech itself was to stay alive in the hill country of Appalachia and beyond, where Scotch-Irish traditional music may still be heard. Among the earliest songs were ballads of King William of Orange, so that those who sang them became known as the Billy-boys of the hill country, or hill-billies.



Rooted deep in the traditions of the British Isles peasantry, traditional music themes came to reinforce the ancient cultural divide between north and west Britain and Ireland, and south and east Britain. Transposed to America, therefore, Christian music reached the peak of its development in the southern states. Musicologist W H Williams has written

“Ireland’s initial impact upon American music came predominantly from Ulster... Whatever their influence in terms of cabin and barn styles...town planning, and so on, it seems likely that the greatest and most lasting contribution of the Scotch-Irish [or Ulster-Scots] was music. And however one may define their particular religious and ethnic identity, musically they should be considered Ulstermen, for they brought with them [that particular] mixture of Scottish and Irish tunes which is still characteristic of large parts of Northern Ireland. When the great English folklorist Cecil Sharp went into the Appalachians to rediscover ‘English’ folk song, he was in fact dealing with people of Ulster descent.”

The centre of Christian music in the United States of America is now Nashville, Tennessee. Of course, this is the epicentre of Scotch-Irish emigration and development. Therefore, in supporting this motion, I look to the cultural aspects of it, and I feel that the United Christian Broadcasters have done us a great service in promoting Christian music again throughout the world and in Ireland and Ulster in particular.

**Mr Dallat:** My lecture in history does not go back quite as far as Ian Adamson’s. I want to talk about the pirate radio station Radio Caroline. Older Members of the Assembly — and I must exclude Paul Berry — will recall that Radio Caroline, the pirate radio station, was broadcast from a ship anchored on the high seas, because the Government wanted to keep control of radio and did not relish the idea of people outside their influence making decisions about what was broadcast.

In those days it was not Christian music that was the problem but pop music. Today the debate continues, but much progress has been made since the day that the arresting party boarded the ship and closed poor Caroline down, robbing us of one of the most popular radio stations ever to occupy the airwaves.

I believe that we have come a long way since then, and I have no doubt that Radio Caroline influenced much of what is happening today. Today we have talk radio, rock radio and classical radio. Apart from the BBC and other national stations, we have some of the best local radio providers, and all of them are meeting the needs of their listeners.

Radio has truly experienced a revival and all thanks to a challenge from that pirate radio station all those years ago. In a way it seems strange that the broadcasting of Christian music remains the one specialist area that has yet to be reformed. People will want to listen to music inspired by the Christian message. They cannot have their station, and that must surely be wrong. I understand the concerns of

Government. They have a responsibility to ensure that such a facility is not hijacked by people who have abused the word of God in the past for their own ends, often adding to people’s agony rather than inspiring the true Christian message. That may be the fear of Government, but surely it is possible to put standards and controls in place which ensure that the privilege of broadcasting Christian music, and messages, is not hijacked by the ungodly.

11.30 am

I am convinced that this sensitive issue can be handled in a way which will enable those who get comfort from listening to music, inspired by messages of Christian love, to enjoy such a service. Therefore it seems bizarre that in a world driven by an unprecedented craze for communication and information there is still a ban on setting up a Christian music station. Notwithstanding the fear that it would be used and abused, surely it is possible to present a united front on this issue and call for the Government to issue a licence. I believe we should do that, while making it clear that such a service would have to reflect a broad Christian message inspired by a genuine desire to bring solace and comfort to the many people who have placed their spiritual welfare in the message of Christianity.

Pardon the pun, but I believe we have enough faith in each other to accept that the days when the Russians used radio for propaganda purposes are gone. Indeed, it is ironic that UCB have got permission from the new Russian Government to utilise AM channels formerly used by the previous Communist regime.

In asking for choice, there is no suggestion that the BBC and other providers of Christian radio programmes will not continue to make a vital contribution in this important field. Indeed, I wish to put on record my appreciation and that of the SDLP for the programmes which have been broadcast on a daily and weekly basis by the BBC and other established broadcasters. Their role in this field will continue, please God. The monopoly on Christian broadcasting is a serious infringement of human rights, and I understand that a case is currently being considered by the International Court of Human Rights. Why should we wait until a decision is made? Let the Government be certain that they can using existing legislation to ensure that only fit persons, as defined in the Broadcasting Act, can qualify for licences. Using the Broadcasting Act, the Government can ensure that the rights to broadcast are not exploited, and there is provision to impose additional licence conditions as the Government deems necessary.

Let us support this call and demonstrate that we have a vision for the future just as those disc jockeys all those years ago braved the high seas so that Radio Caroline could bring pleasure to people. I support the motion,



and could I finish by saying on a lighter note that, unlike this Assembly, Christian radio can be switched off if you do not want to listen to it.

**Mr R Hutchinson:** When Dr Adamson mentioned the Appalachian mountains I could not help thinking about a television programme on Sunday night, after I was at church, which was from that area. It centred on a little church where the people were actually handling poisoned snakes. I wondered if that tradition might have come from Northern Ireland also, because we have got quite a few poisoned snakes here.

It was my pleasure and privilege to host a meeting for UCB in March 1999, when the managing director, Mr Gareth Littler, some of his colleagues and many of the MLAs came along to listen to what the people had to say. I am delighted that many MLAs were impressed with what they heard, and on subsequent days they have lent their support to UCB. I am delighted that this motion has been brought forward in the House, and I am delighted to be able to support it.

I am not saying that I agree with everything that is broadcast by the UCB. I come from a Calvinistical background, and there is much in contemporary Christian music that I find difficult to understand and identify with. However, I do understand that many people do find help and solace in this type of music. I realise that there are diversities within Northern Ireland and on our island, but the UCB speaks to all of those diversities. It transcends all barriers, and the message that is sent out from this radio station has helped many people and has been a blessing and uplifting to those who have listened to it.

Like some of my Colleagues, I find it very difficult to understand all the vileness of depravity, language and actions on radio and television. Yet here is a Christian broadcasting company seeking to deliver a message that brings release, peace and satisfaction, and it cannot get the Government to give it the necessary licence. I suppose that is indicative of a Government that seeks to control people. I realise that the problems that the UCB has had stem from the last Conservative Government, but the Labour Government have continued to deny this very worthy company a licence.

I ask the Government to reconsider this and give a licence to this company so that it can continue to transmit the gospel message, a message that can change lives, a message that can help, a message that can revolutionise people and a message that can make people new creatures in Christ.

I am delighted to be able to support the motion and trust that we will not have to wait much longer for a licence to be granted.

**Mr Irvine:** United Christian Broadcasters would never be called United Religious Broadcasters, for that

would be a contradiction in terms almost. Those whom we seek to influence by this debate will be very taken by our virtual unanimity. They will be shocked, they will be rocked to their foundations, that the representatives of the people of Northern Ireland — some of whom on both sides believe that those on the other side are unchristian — are advocating that religious people have access to their airwaves.

I do not know the *bona fides* of the UCB, and I do not need to know them. All I have to know is that there is a demand to hear the word of God. I do not know whether these people are Christian or simply religious — and I think that that is a justifiable differentiation for someone like me to make. We are bedevilled by religion, yet we have not got the numbers of Christians or the sort of Christianity that we need. The evidence of the 800 years — or the 70 years or the 30 years, depending upon whose history you read — of trauma and difficulty in this society is adequate proof of that.

We advocate that the licence be granted to the UCB, but we point out to it that, as the people who will be judging whether it is wise to give a licence or not will realise, when you start broadcasting, you will be polluted by the religious ones.

They will be demanding, much as they do in politics, a better say than someone else has had. If testimonies are given, will they be those of born-again Christians or just Christians? Whether we like it or not, and whether I define right or wrong, that is a serious problem in this society. Adherence to the Word is often adherence to the interpretation of those who determine for you what the way of God is. I am minded to encourage the United Christian Broadcasters, when they get their licence, to take on the arguments that will be put to them by the religionists, because only by the outworking of the arguments going on among the religionists will we come to accept each other's existence. Like it or not, they are going to exist.

I should also like to point, with some dismay, to those issues already raised in the media, namely the debauchery and difficulties that we all, especially as parents, have to cope with. However, that is merely what we can see. We cannot see people's propensity to look for escapism, be it in alcohol or in drugs, and there has been a massive increase in the last five years in the degree to which our young people especially are running and hiding from the real world.

Nowhere, I am afraid, is the problem greater than in those areas we consider to be our Bible Belt. Belfast may indeed have large-scale problems, but many of the towns in the hinterland of rural Ulster are polluted and in severe danger. If the UCB could save just one person — and I wish it could save more — by giving young people some outlet or direction away from the debauchery in society, the granting of a licence would

be very worthwhile. I wish it all the best and support the motion. I shall wait for the religious complaints.

**Mrs Carson:** I was thinking of a line from a well-known folk song during the debate today. We are talking about “freedom, religion and laws”, and I support the motion. The Assembly should be able to control the licensing of local stations in Northern Ireland. The present Westminster legislation — the Broadcasting Act 1990 — needs to be amended owing to the restructuring of legislation for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The BBC, admirable though its programmes may be, does not give a reasonable outlet for Christian broadcasts and gospel music throughout the week, and even the volume and the type of output on Sundays leave something to be desired.

Where a provider can introduce an additional radio channel which would have to compete with the current BBC service for an audience, this should be welcomed. It would be up to this new radio service to fulfil a need or go out of business. From what we have heard today, the UCB would serve a purpose, and in view of the call for it, it could not possibly go out of business. I am not in favour of monopolies, but it appears that, through this 1990 legislation, the BBC has prevented any new radio stations from providing a Christian music service. I should like to see a level playing field for all those who believe that they could contribute to filling this niche.

The 1990 legislation has flown in the face of freedom of expression and freedom of religion. With this new dispensation, it should now be in the hands of the Assembly to create the appropriate amendments. I hope that, once the motion is passed, something can be done to help to fill this gap in radio programming. The broadcast licensing authorities should take note of this debate and the positive support given by the Assembly — and all-party support is an indicator of the strength of feeling that the present situation cannot and should not continue.

I have pleasure in supporting the motion.

11.45 am

**Mr O'Connor:** Today we have a choice to make. Is Northern Ireland still a Christian country or not? I believe that, for all its faults, it is. The choice we have to make is whether United Christian Broadcasters should be granted a licence to broadcast. The licence to broadcast does not mean that anybody is obliged to listen. People have the freedom to change channels. However, it should be available for those who want to hear it.

Many Members have talked about morality this morning. In this country morality is on the downward slope, and the media has a lot to do with it. It started on television with murders, drugs, violence, foul language and pornography. The Internet is used by people for all

sorts of heinous crimes. The lyrics of some of the songs played on the radio could be described as questionable, at best.

Ian Adamson told us how monks from Northern Ireland went out and evangelised Europe. Perhaps in some small way we can start to do that again. I take David Ervine's point about being bedevilled by religion. However, my religion teaches me that God is a God of love. It also teaches me to love my enemies: I should forgive my brother not just seven times but 70 times seven. If we were to look at God as a God of love, it would make things much easier for us in this Assembly.

What we do here today will have an impact on society. It is time for society to get back to basic Christian values. Those values make us what we are, inform how we think about housing or social justice. It is about the basic Christianity that is probably in all of us. It shapes how we think about everything in which we believe. The people of this country have the right to listen to a radio station that promotes the basic Christianity that all of us feel.

I fully support the motion. I do not see how anybody could do other, and I thank the Chairman of the Committee for bringing it forward. I speak not as a politician but as a Christian who is concerned about the state of play in this country today. Anything that can be done to reverse the trend and turn the downward slide must be worthwhile. I commend the motion to all.

**Mr Berry:** I wish to voice my full support for the motion this morning and for the initiative displayed in taking this case to the courts. I have expressed my concern that such violations of basic human rights by the Government are taking place in this country.

We are all aware of the 10-year struggle by United Christian Broadcasters to make available its music broadcast of Christian content, and how it has been thwarted at every turn. I wish to see the UCB supplying an efficient Christian music service to people in Northern Ireland. I will, like other Members in the Chamber, aid the organisation in its efforts to overturn the obvious intolerance of the United Kingdom's secular regulators.

I have listened to Members this morning and have been impressed. As Mr O'Connor said, this country needs to return to Christian values. There still remains an unfulfilled passion for Christian radio and inspirational music, both in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. There is the demand, but the supply is prohibited here.

All of us are here this morning because we have been lobbied time and time again by our constituents. There is no doubt that in Northern Ireland there are thousands of people who support United Christian Broadcasters. I commend the work it has carried out over the years.

This radio station has brought much pleasure to people of both communities in Northern Ireland since it started broadcasting from the Isle of Man in 1987.

While the Government have licensed the pop, rock, talk and classical radios, UCB, which is classed as a religious body, is prohibited from even applying for a national radio licence. Shame on the Government. Society is sick of television programmes portraying sinful acts. We need a return to Christian broadcasting on radio and television.

A few months ago I visited Washington DC. One thing I was impressed by was the gospel stations — the television ones included. They have an important role in the present day, when people are straying from their religious beliefs, from God and from the principles of Christianity. In America, Christian programmes are broadcast not only on radio but also on television. UCB has helped many people in this country, and further afield. I commend the work they do.

A newspaper recently highlighted the subject of chronic depression and the fact that more young people die through suicide than in road accidents in Northern Ireland. This society is corrupted with drink, drugs and other sinful acts. The Assembly could make a good start by backing this motion — as no doubt it will. We need to see Christian values brought back to this country. We are all aware of the corruption in our society. Take the issue of drugs. Young people are being destroyed by drugs. We pray that the Lord will deliver this land from all its sin and destruction.

I am here today to support the United Christian Broadcasters, and I hope that it will get a licence to broadcast its programmes on the radio. It is important that all Assembly Members support this important motion.

**Mr Davis:** I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion. I pay tribute to UCB for the very responsible manner in which it has lobbied Assembly Members in Northern Ireland. Assembly Members from all constituencies in Northern Ireland have given their support, as the ticks on this sheet show. That augurs well for the future. We can all work together for the betterment of the Province and the people we represent.

It is very important that we enlist the help of everyone we can to have this ban lifted. Mr O'Neill spoke of the support coming from Síle de Valera in the Dáil. It is also very important that we have the support of the MPs at Westminster—and, on this, we are not without friends there. On 12 July last year—a very significant date—Edward Leigh, MP for Gainsborough, said

“It is easier to broadcast pornography than it is to broadcast religion in this country.”

I am sure that we all agree. At the same time as the BBC is cutting back its religious broadcasts, the law is preventing churches from offering an alternative. Our broadcasting laws are discriminating against all religious bodies. Digital licences are available throughout the country, but religious bodies cannot apply for them. They are uniquely disadvantaged.

If we believe in human rights and in the European Convention for Human Rights, it is clear that the UCB has a just and righteous case. Article 9 of the convention states

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

Another thing that Edward Leigh said in the debate in the House of Commons is this:

“There is only one Christian local radio station in London, Premier Radio. Why are there 50 religious radio stations in France, but only one in the United Kingdom? The reason is that the codes are so tight that, whereas politicians or anyone else can go on television or the radio to raise funds for charity, to make exclusive claims or to recruit, religious broadcasters are not allowed to do so. If a religious broadcaster manages to get round all the difficulties of the law, the codes are so tight that it is virtually impossible to produce an interesting programme.

What happens abroad? I have already described France. In no other country in the western world is religious broadcasting as tightly constrained as in this country. In America, there are 1,600 Christian radio stations.”

There are Christian radio stations throughout the rest of the world (with the exception of about five various countries), yet we in the United Kingdom, who pride ourselves on Christianity, ban them.

I have no difficulty in supporting this motion wholeheartedly. I am gratified that it has the support of the whole Assembly.

**Mr Wells:** It is worrying that I find myself agreeing with everything that Mr O'Neill, the Member for South Down, has said. This is the first, and probably the last, time for such a thing to happen. However, I found his contribution very useful.

I must also congratulate the UCB on what has proved to be a very effective lobby. I am very impressed by how much people clearly know about this. There is no doubt this is the result of a very effective campaign behind the scenes to educate Members on this important issue. Perhaps there is a lesson here for the future. This is probably the first of many such lobbying campaigns.

There is absolutely no doubt that there is a huge demand for Christian radio in Northern Ireland. This is obvious from the size of the petition that was handed to the Chairman of the Committee and from events such as the recent conference in Coleraine. I understand that 4,000 people attended one Christian conference. The demand for other types of music is already met. Classic FM is perhaps the best-known radio station that



provides a specific type of music and has a very high number of listeners. There are radio stations catering for country music, Irish music, folk music — you name it, and there is a station that caters specifically for it, except, that is, for Christian music. I think that this is long overdue.

This argument has been lost by default, and people are now becoming aware of the injustice which has been done to Christian broadcasters. The penny has dropped. People realise that this situation is untenable.

12.00

I suppose that Mr Mellor did not wish to inflict the excesses of American Christian broadcasting on the United Kingdom. However, the legislation is drawn in such a way that that cannot happen. The onus is on UCB to ensure that their quality is such that that criticism is never raised. I have been given, as I am sure many Members have, a copy of the UCB sample tape. I have played it a hundred times; it has been perpetually on my car stereo. I have found it to be very enjoyable, and I have noticed the extremely high quality of the music.

To be honest, I have to say that UCB's Cross Rhythms station is not my cup of tea. I cannot relate to that type of music at all. Maybe I am showing my age, like Mr Dallat. I cannot relate to this newfangled Christian rock music, reggae and all that. However, I accept that there are many thousands of young people in Northern Ireland who can. They have a right to listen to it. Neither the BBC nor any other state monopoly can dictate to the young people of Northern Ireland or to older Christian people what kind of music they may or may not listen to. It is a fundamental human right. This is such an overwhelming argument that permission must be granted.

Of course, one can listen to UCB on satellite, but I have tried that and it is not practical. Most people who want to listen to Christian music want to do so as they wash the dishes, drive the car or do other things. They want to listen on a portable radio. Clearly, a satellite dish is impractical. You cannot carry it around. Anyway, not everyone in Northern Ireland has access to satellite broadcasting. Hundreds of thousands of people cannot afford it. Therefore it is vital that we grant their wish.

I hold no brief for any particular broadcaster. The principle that applies to UCB must apply to any Christian station and any type of music. If it is of sufficient quality, there is a demand and the bandwidth is available, then it should be allowed. That is the fundamental issue. I am here not to act as a cheerleader for UCB but to enable anyone in the Province who appreciates a certain type of music or a certain type of religious conviction to have that need met, provided that standards are upheld. It gives me great pleasure to

support Mr O'Neill's motion. I urge the House to support it unanimously and show that this is indeed a just cause.

**Mr Boyd:** Much has been said already. This motion is about freedom of expression, which is fundamental to any democratic society. Under the Broadcasting Act 1990, UCB is disqualified from holding a terrestrial national radio licence issued by the radio authority. Current Government policy may be in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. This policy should be amended and primary broadcasting legislation enacted as a matter of urgency.

Christians are currently excluded from the United Kingdom's national broadcasting system. Rock, jazz, soul, classical and other musical varieties can be heard. Christians are being discriminated against. They are not permitted to own a national radio station and broadcast Christian programmes. Today, almost any minority can have access to the national media, yet Christian organisations cannot even obtain an application form.

By autumn 1999, more than 10,000 letters on this issue had been received in Downing Street and 195 MPs had signed an early-day motion in the House of Commons. A quarter of a million people have signed a petition. United Christian Broadcasters Limited has lobbied for permission to broadcast an independent Christian music radio station since the 1980s. This matter needs to be resolved urgently.

UCB is a registered charity run by 50 full-time staff and hundreds of volunteers. It runs two round-the-clock music radio stations. UCB Europe presents praise, worship and easy-listening music with bible readings and factual programmes. UCB Cross Rhythms presents contemporary gospel music for young people. These stations are non-commercial. They are entirely supported by voluntary contributions. The trustees of UCB receive no remuneration for their services.

For those artists working in the contemporary gospel scene, lack of access to the airwaves means that many of them are disadvantaged and relatively unknown. The opportunity to develop the Christian music industry is being missed and the demand remains unfulfilled. With many pressures in life and a high suicide rate, especially among young people, we need to support the motion which, through the gospel message, could bring hope for all society.

The core issue is freedom of speech and religion. This must not be lost because of Sinn Féin's political point-scoring. It is rather hypocritical of Sinn Féin Members to say that they support freedom of religion and expression when the IRA murdered Catholics and Protestants who were travelling to and from their places of worship. I support the motion.

**Mr Beggs:** I too welcome the debate and the opportunity to express my support for United Christian



Broadcasters and its right to broadcast in the United Kingdom. The Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee said that a petition with 27,000 names has been presented to him. More than 250,000 people have signed a petition which has been passed to Westminster. There is widespread support for UCB throughout the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland. There is clearly no logic in the position currently being taken by the United Kingdom Government.

Let us consider the international scene. In New Zealand, three national radio networks broadcast Christian music; in Australia there are approximately 100 such radio stations; and, we have been advised, in Russia, four AM frequencies are available. Throughout the United States, such stations are widespread. The countries that have banned United Christian Broadcasters are Afghanistan, China, Iran, Iraq and, of course, the United Kingdom. The UK is out of step with normal western European Christian values. There should be freedom of religious expression in the United Kingdom.

I have listened to United Christian Broadcasters programmes and found them very positive and uplifting. UCB offers an uplifting and important message in an increasingly discontented and materialistic world. I received from the Minister of Tourism, Film and Broadcasting at Westminster a letter which highlights what is currently banned in the United Kingdom. She said

“The Broadcasting Act 1990 disqualified groups whose objectives were wholly or mainly of a religious nature from holding a terrestrial national radio licence issued by a radio authority ... Religious organisations could hold a satellite, a digital satellite or a radio licence, but not a terrestrial digital radio multiplex or sound programme service licence under the Broadcasting Act 1996”.

If information is of suitable content to be broadcast over satellite, why on earth is it not suitable for broadcasting on conventional radio? I do not understand that at all.

As a parent of young children I try to protect them from unsettling influences. When we think about what we have seen on TV or listened to on the radio in the last few weeks or months there appears to be very little censorship in the United Kingdom. Why should the programmes produced by UCB be censored? UCB broadcasts a message of Christian hope, joy and solace, which answers the basic needs of the human spirit.

I support the motion and hope that it will be supported unanimously in the Chamber, thereby reflecting the widespread cross-community support that has been expressed.

**Mr O'Neill** I will begin by thanking all the Members for their wide-ranging and generous support. The

Committee members in particular will be very pleased that the motion has found what appears to be general favour. I, like others, hope that it will receive unanimous approval today.

I will refer briefly to some of the points raised, starting with the scholarly contribution from Dr Adamson, in which he sketched the historical background and the contributions that people from this island, and this part of the island, made to the many different aspects of music and Christianity. It was most interesting and very pertinent. Then we had a contribution from Roger Hutchinson about snakes. That reminded me of Brendan Behan's comment that when St Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland they all went to New York and became politicians. I am not sure if either of those eminent Members was referring to that kind of thing. However, it was a good and balanced debate. There was always the danger of sermonising, and some Members succumbed a little to that, and did very well at it. Obviously they have had plenty of practice in other forums. However, it was all healthy, good and part of the mix that makes us what we are.

David Ervine expressed concern which I am sure it is shared by many Members. I have no particular brief to speak on behalf of United Christian Broadcasters, but the thing that impressed me about UCB was its comprehensive Christian approach, involving an amalgamation of all the major Christian churches. That is not only good practice for Christian broadcasting but also an example to all of us. In addition, some Members revealed some of their innermost thoughts and feelings. Assemblyman Dallat referred to his progressive age problem, and Assemblyman Wells admitted quite publicly that he is not very groovy. These useful contributions serve to illustrate the complex mix that goes to make up the membership of the Assembly.

Many Members referred to the international scene. Roy Beggs's contribution was very pertinent. It illustrated the performance of some countries which do not allow Christian broadcasting to take place. One sees the sort of league that we are in, and it is not particularly inspiring. I thank the Member for his contribution.

There are many things that I could say, but Members were generally in support throughout the debate. I thank them sincerely for their support, and I hope that there will be a unanimous decision by the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly calls upon the appropriate broadcast licensing authorities to facilitate United Christian Broadcasters in their use of unused AM frequencies.

*Adjourned at 12.15 pm.*



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 19 June 2000

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## ASSEMBLY BUSINESS: EXCLUSION MOTION

**Mr P Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. A motion was submitted to the Business Office to be considered by the Business Committee at its last meeting for inclusion on the Order Paper for today or tomorrow. It was in the form of an exclusion motion. I understand that the Business Committee dealt with this matter in a peculiar manner — it chose to make up a new rule. That rule is not supported by the Standing Orders and it goes beyond the scope of the legislation. It sets more rigorous conditions on a motion being brought to the House than was envisaged by either the legislation or the Standing Orders. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 indicates that

“A motion for a resolution under this section shall not be moved unless ... it is supported by at least 30 members of the Assembly.”

The fact that it says that it “shall not be moved” indicates a process after it has been included on an Order Paper — not before.

It is fairly clear that a precedent was set on two previous occasions when a motion was put down on the Order Paper without the 30 signatures and that you, Mr Speaker, allowed it to be tested. That seems to be the appropriate way for it to be dealt with. There are serious legal issues involved, and precedents could be set by this “off the hip” decision by the Business Committee, which seems to have been taken for political purposes.

I have to say on political grounds that it seems rather peculiar that on the day that the Chief Constable announced that the IRA was involved in a killing —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The point of order has been well expressed and to go further would be to engage in a speech on the matter.

The Business Committee has received a significant number of motions which are on the no-day-named list, two of which are, to my knowledge, on exclusion. The decision that neither of them had achieved a sufficient

level of support to enable them to be brought forward by the Business Committee then was perfectly valid given our Standing Orders. It was not a question of whether a motion on exclusion would be on the Order Paper; it was a matter of when and if there was support.

The reference that the Member made to how things were done previously was, of course, to a time when it was not the democratic decision of the Business Committee that counted, but the benign dictatorship of the Speaker. That he speaks of that time in positive, nostalgic terms I take as a compliment, even though it is not justified as such. What has happened is entirely in order and legal. The motion is on the no-day-named list, along with others for consideration. It would be wrong for me to comment on any decision of the Business Committee, save to say that the minutes of the Committee's meeting become available publicly once they have been approved by the Committee.

**Mr P Robinson:** I would be happy for my party to meet you to take this matter further because you have missed several important points. During the period between the initial Standings Orders and our present ones no change was made which would allow this decision by the Business Committee. Furthermore, there is nothing in the legislation that requires the Business Committee to set this criterion down.

**Mr Speaker:** I have made my ruling. I do not consider what you have said as a challenge but as a request that we meet to discuss this outside the confines of the Chamber. I am happy to do that as we have done so on previous occasions. The ruling nevertheless stands: the decision was in order.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Further to my Colleague's point of order, Mr Speaker. Would it be in order for you to confirm that this action by the Business Committee was taken at the behest of the Ulster Unionist Party to protect Sinn Féin?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member is entirely aware that that was not a point of order. Indeed, the point was a quite improper one.

## UNIVERSITY RESEARCH: FUNDING

**Mr Speaker:** I have received only one indication that a Minister wants to make a statement at this sitting. The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment will make a statement on the support programme for university research, after which we will have up to 45 minutes for questions on it.

**The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren):** I should like to make a statement on the funding of research at Queen's University and the University of Ulster.

I am delighted to come before the Assembly today to announce the support programme for university research — a public-private partnership designed to enhance the strategic approach of the universities to the development of their research capacity, to strengthen the research base in both main universities and, in particular, to increase the amount of research that is of the highest international standard.

I am convinced of the importance of the university research base to the regional economy and to our economic prospects. This was made very clear in the recently published Northern Ireland Economic Council's report, and it is a central theme of 'Strategy 2010'.

That report recognises that university research and development is essential for the future economic well-being of Northern Ireland. Indeed, successful regional economies elsewhere all bear testimony to the importance of a strong research base.

A strengthened research base in Northern Ireland will result in significant contributions to our social, cultural and economic life and will add to our universities' international reputations.

I have listened to the comments of the vice-chancellors of Queen's University and the University of Ulster about the reduction in their research infrastructure funding over recent years, which has contrasted with what has been happening to peer institutions in Britain and the rest of Ireland. I am aware of the implications for the universities in terms of attracting and retaining staff and sustaining and developing research work of high quality. I am also aware that the universities have been working extremely hard to improve their performances in research as evidenced by the research assessment exercise. The significant research achievements of both universities were recognised in the last research assessment exercise. We now wish to give both universities every support in building on and adding to these achievements.

With all this in mind, I announce the support programme for university research (SPUR). The programme will run from 2000-04 and will lead to the investment of up to an additional £40 million in the research infrastructure of Queen's University and the University of Ulster. The Government are willing to invest up to £20 million of this funding over the four-year period and invite the universities to raise matching funding from private sources pound for pound.

This investment will be made on a competitive basis. I have asked the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council to administer the programme and competition, assisted by an international panel of experts, which is currently being drawn together. The universities will be asked to submit their institutional strategic plans and proposals for research by the autumn of this year, and decisions will be made on funding by November. The vice-chancellors will be asked to confirm that they have raised privately the matching funding for their successful proposals before the public funding is released.

The intention is that the additional investment will enable the universities to fund the highest priorities within their strategic plans which are judged by the panel to be of or to be capable of attaining an international level of quality. This may include expenditure on appropriate buildings and equipment or on research teams or other facilities.

This is a prime example of my desire to proceed in partnership with the universities, and I have every confidence that they will come forward with projects which are of the highest quality and will benefit our whole society. This provides both institutions with the opportunity to invest in their highest priority areas and to broaden the base of their international-level research.

I am delighted to announce this programme. It confirms my, and the Executive Committee's, faith in the universities and in the contribution they make to regional life. It is also clear evidence of the Executive's determination to secure viable forward-looking and sustainable economic development. The Executive will shortly announce a package of measures which it hopes to achieve over the next 12 months. I am glad to announce that this programme will be part of that package.

**The Chairman of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee (Dr Birnie):** I am sure that I speak on behalf of my Committee's members when I welcome this announcement. There are, however, three points that need clarification.

First, is the Minister aware that, even if the full £40 million, half of which depends on the private sector, is realised, there will still be a considerable shortfall in



Northern Ireland university-based research and development given what is happening in universities in other regions, its competitors?

10.45 am

I base that argument on the fact that according to the Northern Ireland Economic Council's report of late last year total research and development spending in Northern Ireland — and I am looking at its estimates — represented 1·1% of GDP, compared to 1·4% in the Republic of Ireland. And it was by no means a high performer in European terms. Furthermore, that report indicated that we have the lowest amount per capita of university-based research and development of any region in the United Kingdom, and it estimated that there was an annual shortfall, given the trends in the 1990s in university-based core research and development, of roughly £8·5 million.

That is the first point on which I require clarification. Does the Minister recognise that this is a welcome first step but only a first step?

Secondly, the Minister referred to the mechanism whereby money will be —

**Mr Speaker:** Members are meant to put individual and concise questions. I appeal to the Member and those who follow him to be concise.

**Dr Birnie:** Will the Minister confirm that the mechanism for the delivery of money represents the right balance between achievement of international excellence and meeting locally identified research needs?

Thirdly, will the Minister confirm that there needs to be co-ordination on the research and development effort his Department has some responsibility and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has some? Indeed all Departments have some responsibility for this. It is par excellence a cross-cutting issue requiring further co-ordination from the Centre.

**Dr Farren:** I thank the Member for the questions and for his words of welcome for my announcement.

I realise that we have a lot of leeway to make up and, in his words, he is accepting that this is a first step towards that. I hope that it is the first of many. I do accept comparisons with other regions. Comparisons with the Republic of Ireland are fairly pertinent, but we have to bear in mind that while significant increases have been recorded there in investment in research and development, they are coming from a lower base. The degree of affluence which is now available to the Government there for research and development is something which is quite novel and quite recent. However, we have to continue to seek additional funding. The universities themselves accept their responsibility, and in becoming involved with us in this particular programme they are clearly recognising that

responsibility, especially given that this is a matching funding programme.

With respect to the mechanism that is to be employed in deciding on the projects and proposals that will come forward, I am satisfied that it will achieve the right balance. Research projects which are directed at the local situation should meet, and I have every confidence that they will meet, the highest international standards. There should be no reason for the projects put forward and funded under this programme not being ones that will enhance, as I said in my statement, the international reputations of both universities while the projects themselves may be directed at local needs. I trust that there will be lessons from the outcome of the research supported in other parts of the world as well.

With respect to the need for co-ordination, I should point out that when the Northern Ireland Economic Council's report was published, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, under Sir Reg Empey, and my Department met and decided to examine its implications of that report for improvements in the research and development structure, and a report is imminent from the two Departments — a joint report. When that is available I will put it before the Committee for wider discussion.

The co-ordination which that report called for is something we have in mind, and we will be acting on that as soon as possible.

**The Deputy Chairman of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee (Mr Carrick):** I welcome the Minister's statement. The sum of £5 million per year, £2·5 million of which will come from the public purse, is modest, but very welcome. I trust that the expenditure will be very clearly and properly focused on those areas of need within the university research and development programme. As our Chairman indicated, the research and development sector is vital in promoting the Northern Ireland economy. However, can the Minister assure me that his announcement will have no adverse impact on funding for general research and development in universities? Can he assure me that there will be no let up, and no taking the foot off the pedal, in relation to funding for basic, but very important, research and development? Research and development needs substantial investment, and the announcement does not close the funding gap.

How does the Minister intend to sustain this type of investment, particularly when we find ourselves operating in a very competitive global economy? It is vital that we have some indication of what further funding will be made available as a follow on to this announcement.

**Dr Farren:** I can reassure the Member that this is additional funding which will not impact negatively, as

his question might suggest it will, on the regular funding from my Department to the universities. Obviously, with a programme such as this, which will provide additional funding for four years, we would expect, with the universities, to find the means of extending the period beyond that. At the moment, we can give no commitment about any such extension, but the matter will be kept under review.

Members need to bear in mind that there is a significant annual provision for research and development in the universities, and they have been very successful in attracting funding from many sources apart from the public purse. We encourage them to continue with their endeavours in that regard. We will keep the matter under review, but the specific announcement today will provide a significant contribution over four years.

**Mr Dallat:** This announcement could not come at a better time for Northern Ireland, and it may well be the key to unlocking the future inward investment which is so necessary to illustrate that this Assembly works. Is it recognition of an underfunding of research in our universities?

**Dr Farren:** Universities, and indeed the Department itself, have recognised the need for additional funding. I acknowledged what the vice-chancellors of both universities have said about the funding for research in their respective institutions in the past decade, and our proposal is a significant additional contribution. I trust that it will enhance the reputation of Northern Ireland in the eyes of those who are thinking of investing in this part of the world.

We already know that Northern Ireland has attracted much recent investment because of the reputation of our educational institutions, not least their reputation in research and development. It is recognised that other successful regional economies reflect the significance of a strong research base. The enhancement of that would undoubtedly add to our appeal for inward investment, particularly in high-tech industries which need the support of research and development in universities and other institutions.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. I welcome the Minister's statement in addressing the serious matter of research and development.

How will the Minister's initiative impact on or assist small and medium-sized enterprises? How will it fit in with the universities' assessment of the matching funds? For a small, struggling firm to put its own money into research and development must be a very low priority. Does the Minister believe that this mechanism will facilitate small-and medium-sized enterprises to tap into as well as contribute to it?

In view of press statements yesterday about Walsh visas and the concerns expressed about the quality and conditions of the training programme for young people in the United States, will the Minister make a statement?

**Dr Farren:** The second part of that question is not germane to the statement that I made this morning. I am aware of the issues regarding the Walsh visas and I shall consider making a statement, as I am concerned by what I have read in the press.

In answer to the first part of the Member's question, in devising proposals to be submitted under this programme, the universities will be encouraged to take account of the needs of small-and medium-sized businesses, and I look forward to their doing that. They are already engaged in helping to develop many small-and medium-sized enterprises. However, it is not for the Department, or for me as a Minister, to determine how the money should be allocated. An international panel will be established, which will adjudicate on the proposals from the universities. Given all that has been said, and particularly the Northern Ireland Economic Council's report on the importance of research and development for our economy, we can take it that those needs will be borne in mind. As the proposals develop and are submitted, that need will be reflected.

11.00 am

**Mrs E Bell:** New money for any sector of education is always welcome. My question is similar to those of others about the sustainability of this programme. Can the Minister assure the House that there will be value for money in the job-creation potential for young people? Will it, as one hopes, enhance the long-term development of new industries like the high-tech ones he mentioned? Has there been any discussion about co-operation on the sources of the matching funding?

**Dr Farren:** I should like to start with the second part of the question. First, Members can take it that the programme has been developed through discussions with the universities, and while it is obviously their responsibility to ensure that matching funding is provided, we can at this point be confident that this will be the case. The universities will discharge their responsibility and ensure that matching funding is secured. However, the details of that are essentially a matter for the universities themselves to address. My Department is playing its part by declaring what we can make available, as is evident from my statement.

Regarding the first part of the question, while it is not possible to say with certainty at this point what the precise benefit of research will be to the economy, it is the understanding of the Department and myself that the universities intend to submit proposals which will make a beneficial contribution. However, I should like to stress in answering this question that the fund is not

purely for economic development. It will also be available for projects in social sciences, humanities and the arts. As well as making significant contributions to our economic development, it is also appropriate that contributions be made across all aspects of our social and cultural life.

**Mr Taylor:** The Minister is to be congratulated from all sides of the House on his statement on research in our universities. I hope that it will go some small way towards closing the gap between the funding for research granted to universities here and that granted to those elsewhere in the Kingdom.

Does the Minister agree that investment in research is important when promoting universities internationally? I recently discovered in south-east Asia that both Queen's University and the University of Ulster are very highly regarded. Regrettably, Queen's was not complimented for following up its presentations in the same way that the University of Ulster does. Does the Minister agree that there should be investment abroad to attract more international students to our universities in Northern Ireland?

Secondly, can the Minister say whether the independent panel of experts has already been appointed? Thirdly, can he say if he expects any of this funding to be allocated before the end of the calendar year? Finally, can he assure us that, although it will be awarded on a competitive basis, not all of the £20 million will go to one university?

**Dr Farren:** Which university does the Member have in mind? I should like to reassure him on the question of which university will receive money. I trust that both universities will be in receipt of substantial funding under this programme. Theoretically, it is possible that all of it might go to one, but it is highly unlikely, and both universities, as Members may be aware, have significantly improved their contributions to research of an international standard.

The Member is quite right to relay the impression that he has brought back from south-east Asia to us of the reputation of both institutions. I am very aware that they have worked very hard to attract students both at undergraduate level and at postgraduate level, where, of course, our researchers will be found. For a long time many students have come to both universities from south-east Asia, and I have every confidence that the universities will continue to enhance their reputations there and across the world. Both universities now have links which stretch east, west, north and south in their research enterprises.

I have addressed the first part of the question, that mentioned the significance of research and the panel in several of my previous answers. A strong research and development base is extremely important for our future

economic well-being. My statement said that the international panel is in the course of being put together. Its membership has not yet been finalised, but it will be a small panel consisting of members with international reputations who are well capable of adjudicating on the proposals from the universities. With respect to the point about expenditure this calendar year, my statement did indicate that the allocations will be made in November, and we hope to meet that target.

**Mr Byrne:** I congratulate the Minister on this very appropriate and timely announcement. Does he agree that there is a great need for more collaboration between our two universities and those companies in Northern Ireland who want to be at the forefront of research and development locally and who want to be economically successful in the future?

**Dr Farren:** Yes. If Members examine the annual reports of both universities they will find several examples, across the disciplines, of university researchers working with local enterprises in supportive and developmental ways. Today's announcement can only enhance that. The universities are taking tremendous strides towards ensuring that they have a research base of the highest standard, which is recognised not only throughout these islands but internationally as well. Both institutions have also demonstrated that they are entering into co-operative endeavours.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Everyone will welcome the funds available for university research. However, I would like to press the Minister a little more about this international panel. He says that it will be a small panel. How many members does he envisage? What does he mean by "small"? Which countries will these international panellists come from? How much money will be spent on the panel? Ordinary men and women have a suspicion that far too much is spent on administration and not enough on the actual research. He should keep this in mind, so that people will know that most of the money available is spent on doing the actual job.

**Dr Farren:** I thank the Member for his questions. I can assure him that expenditure on administration will be kept strictly to the minimum required for responsibilities to be discharged. The panel is likely to consist of five members with two local non-voting members and the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council, currently Sir Kenneth Bloomfield. The panel will be international because we want to satisfy ourselves that the funded projects will be ones that stand the test of peer review across the university field and that they will thereby be regarded as being of considerable significance. The individuals who will be part of that panel have not yet been finally determined. Rest assured that they will be people of repute. Expenditure will be the minimum necessary to



ensure that the job is effectively done, and I look forward to the panel's being established. With local involvement and the chairing of the panel by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, we can be assured that its responsibilities will be discharged effectively and efficiently.

**Mr J Kelly:** I welcome the Minister's statement. It is unfortunate that we had only minutes to look at it this morning. We should have had more time to get details on it. Since we had the Minister's senior civil servants with us last Thursday, we could have had sight of the statement or been told of his intention to make it. That being said, A Chathaoirleach — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A number of Members are having difficulty hearing your question, including the Minister. You may put your question.

**Mr J Kelly:** I was saying that I welcomed the statement but that it was unfortunate that we did not have more time to pay attention to the details in it. I also said that it was unfortunate, given that the Minister's senior civil servants were with us last Thursday, that they did not indicate then his intention of making this statement this morning. However, I do welcome it.

I welcome the fact that, apart from the £20 million, there is to be an input from industry to the tune of £20 million. I refer to the student finance situation and to the £15.3 million net that is coming from student tuition fees for this year. Will the Minister pay as much attention to the question of student finance as he has paid to what is contained in this statement?

**Dr Farren:** I thank the Member for his questions. On letting Members of the House have sight of a statement, I have complied with all requirements. The statement itself and the issues involved had to receive Executive clearance, and that was only possible at the Executive meeting last Thursday. Since then I have been in touch with the Chairman of the Committee to brief him, and all Members received a copy at the appropriate time for today's meeting. The requirements have all been met with respect to the circulation of the statement.

I trust that the Member, being a member of the Statutory Committee on Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, will take the opportunity to discuss this matter in greater detail at the Committee's meetings.

11.15 am

With respect to the attention that I am giving to financial support for students, the Member will be very aware that during the first phase of the Executive, I lost no time in addressing this matter. We initiated a review of student financial support which is now drawing to a close — the Committee on Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment is engaged with it

at the moment — so I do not think that either the Department or I can be accused of neglecting it in spite of the attention that we have been giving to finding additional funding for university-based research.

**Rev Robert Coulter:** I too welcome today's announcement and congratulate the Minister on his statement. Following on from his last point, I have been reliably informed by the members of the review Committee that no consideration or provision has yet been given to or made for post-graduate students in research and development. Does the Minister agree that there is little point in funding research and development if there is no money available for those who will be doing the work in the research teams that have been mentioned?

**Dr Farren:** I thank the Member for that very important question. The Department is keeping this matter under review. I imagine, however, that any research projects submitted by the universities will take account of the need for research students to be involved. It would be unlikely that research projects would go ahead unless provision had been made for research students. After all, it is within the context of research projects that researchers gain their expertise. The involvement of a new generation of researchers is a responsibility of the universities. They have to train them and provide opportunities to enable them to develop their expertise and skills in research. I would like to think that such provision will have been made for the projects that go ahead. Obviously, it is a matter for the universities to decide how their projects are staffed, but I would like to think that research students will be among the staff of the various projects and that we will not neglect the need to develop the next generation of researchers.

**Ms Lewsley:** I also welcome the statement made by the Minister this morning. To follow on from the last question asked, does this increase in research funding mean that student numbers will not be increased?

**Dr Farren:** No, I do not think there is any hint or suggestion that other aspects that relate to the development of our universities will be neglected. The issue raised by the Member is currently under review. Between 1999-2002 an additional 2,000 places in higher education will be made available to our universities and university colleges. This issue is constantly under review, and I do not think that it is prejudiced in any way by today's announcement on enhanced funding for research.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** I too welcome the commitment of £20 million of departmental resources to research. However, as the Minister knows, this is not a windfall payment. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Perhaps he could tell the House from which parts of his departmental budget he has had to redistribute resources



in order to make this commitment for the next four years. Further, can he explain to the House whether or not colleges of further education will be able to buy into this research and benefit from it also?

I too welcome the Department's commitment of £20 million to this area. However, this is not a windfall payment, and there is no such thing as a free lunch. Will the Minister explain to the House which parts of his departmental budget he has had to redistribute resources from in order to achieve this commitment? Furthermore, will he tell the House whether colleges in further education will be able to buy into, and derive benefit from, this research?

**Dr Farren:** The additional funding has been created by making savings on a number of services within the Department. This money is being made available over four years, not all at the same time, and is aimed primarily at the two universities. It is a matter for them, in devising their programmes, to determine whether the further education colleges should be involved. The Member will be aware that further education colleges do not currently have a major research role. This research programme is for the universities, but they may involve others, such as business people, in particular projects. That is a matter for their discretion, and I cannot determine it.

**Mr Beggs:** I too welcome the Minister's announcement. Does he agree that, as well as public/private partnership funding, increasingly close co-operation between the universities and the private sector is essential for final year projects, work placements and the tailoring of courses to the needs of industry? Does he also agree that this additional research funding will increase linkages between the education sector and industry and so may bring many additional benefits to the Northern Ireland economy and improve the job prospects of local students?

**Dr Farren:** I thank the Member for that. If, after four years, his questions were to be answered in the negative, there would be considerable disappointment, not just on the parts of the Department and of the Minister of the time, whoever that may be, but throughout the House. Obviously we want to see the benefits to the economy that many people anticipate will follow from this announcement.

As I have said in response to several questions already, there will be many opportunities to enhance co-operation with various sectors of our economy and, indeed, more widely than that. It will be for the panel to decide which projects go ahead, and therefore which sectors of public life will benefit, but I like to think that it will be across the board. Through these projects, the universities will enhance their co-operation with all sections of society: the business world, culture and the arts, the social sciences, and so on. We will have to wait

until individual projects are put forward to see where the investment is most likely to be made, but I expect that this investment will indeed be beneficial.

**Dr McDonnell:** I welcome this statement. I am delighted that the Executive is putting in place essential pump-priming money at the cutting edge of new technology. This is evidence that devolution not only can and does work but will continue to work.

I ask the Minister to ensure that biotechnology and life and health sciences get adequate slices. How will the Executive ensure that it will get value for money for the additional investment?

**Dr Farren:** I cannot be prescriptive about the areas of research that will be supported. The areas highlighted by the Member are ones in which our universities have been very active in terms of research, and I would be surprised if there were not to be some projects associated with them. We have to await the publication of the panel's determinations when it meets to consider what the universities have put forward. Both universities have been working very hard to develop strategic plans covering the courses that they provide across the board, with particular emphasis on research.

I understand that the universities are ready to respond to the challenge contained in today's announcement to ensure that the matching funding will be provided. I can assure the Member — indeed, all Members — that there will be value for money. The expenditure of this significant amount of public funding will be closely monitored, and we will obtain value for the money that we are contributing.

**Mr Shannon:** Does the Minister agree that research work carried out by universities is essential to the successful investigation and treatment of disease, especially in fields where the pharmaceutical industry is unwilling to invest? Does he also agree that the research by both the local universities has been to the forefront of their respective fields of study? Can the Minister give the Assembly a guarantee that the necessary funding will remain available for the completion of all such work currently taking place, and that such important work will not be restricted by lack of finance in the future? Can he also comment on whether private finance has yet been committed, and, if it has not been committed, what would happen to the programme announced today?

**Dr Farren:** I will start with the last part of the Member's set of questions. If matching funding were not made available, then, quite obviously, the terms under which the programme has been announced would not be met. If it were a case of only partially meeting the announced public investment, which is on a pound-for-pound basis, then the programme would only go ahead on a pound-for-pound basis. I am reasonably

confident at this stage that the universities will be able to ensure that the full amount of the matching funding will be provided. However, that is their responsibility. As I said in response to an earlier question, the universities have been in discussion with my Department for some time now on this, and we would not be coming to the House to make the announcement if there was not a reasonable expectation that the matching funding will be provided. At this point, it has to remain an expectation, but quite a confident expectation.

I join the Member in paying tribute to the universities' contributions to research in those areas that he mentioned, and I assure him that my Department will try to provide the necessary support. Obviously all programmes are — to use the Member's own word — restricted by the amount of finance available from time to time. But perhaps "restricted" is not the most appropriate word.

11.30 am

Funding allows things to happen, and I hope that we are allowing new things to happen with the programme announced today. I trust that together with the universities we will take further steps down the road to enable more new things to happen. It is up to the universities — and I stress this point again in response to several questions — themselves to determine, through the projects that they advance, where their emphases for research will lie. It is not the Department's responsibility to be prescriptive, and it would be inappropriate if we were to be so. That is not to say that we do not have our views. In discussion with the universities we can certainly point to what we believe might be valuable. However, the responsibility in these matters is ultimately with the universities themselves.

**Mr Speaker:** The time for questions is up.

## GROUND RENTS BILL

### Second Stage

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):**  
I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Ground Rents Bill (NIA 6/99) be agreed.

This Bill provides a statutory scheme for the redemption of ground rents on residential property in Northern Ireland. The problem this Bill seeks to address is the difficulty experienced in the conveyancing process in Northern Ireland due to the complexity of pyramids of title, of various fee farm grants and of long leasehold estates created by the ground rents system. Complex titles to property are particularly prevalent in certain areas of Belfast and larger towns. For older properties in particular it is not uncommon to discover that apart from the immediate rent owner's receiving the annual ground rent, there are perhaps several further layers of superior rent owners, each of whom is entitled to some payment of a ground rent from other superior rent owners below them in the pyramid.

This Ground Rents Bill has as its primary objective the simplification of land ownership in Northern Ireland. It is creating a scheme that will enable owners of residential properties subject to an annual ground rent to enlarge or convert their title into freehold titles, clear of any rent. The scheme will apply to both long leases and fee farm grants, a common system of land holding throughout both parts of this island. Upon redemption of the ground rent the a home owner will no longer have to pay an annual ground rent to the rent owner.

Other provisions of the Property (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which came into operation earlier this year, already prohibit the creation of new fee farm grants for both residential and commercial property and long leases on residential property. The measures contained in this Bill complement those existing provisions by providing the mechanism whereby existing ground rents can be bought out or redeemed. These reforms are part of the wider policy objective of moving from leasehold to freehold title for residential property in Northern Ireland.

There are two elements to the redemption scheme. First, the Bill introduces a voluntary procedure whereby a rentpayer may redeem the ground rent on his or her property by making an application and paying certain moneys to the Land Registry. If the Registrar of Titles is satisfied that the correct procedure has been followed and the correct money lodged with him, he will issue a certificate of redemption which discharges the particular property from the ground rent.

Notice that the rentpayer has done so will be served on the ground rent owner who cannot object to redemption of the ground rent. On receipt of that notice, the owner can apply to the Land Registry to be paid the money lodged by the rentpayer. If the registrar is satisfied that the person making the application is entitled to the money, he will certify it accordingly, and the appropriate sum will be paid from the Consolidated Fund. The process should be relatively simple and straightforward for all those involved in the scheme, especially rentpayers and ground rent owners.

The second element of the scheme deals with the compulsory redemption of ground rents, which will apply when a house is sold. Whether it is registered or unregistered residential property, the purchaser will have to redeem the ground rent on the property before his or her new title can be registered by the Land Registry.

The purchaser will redeem the ground rent in the same way that a person voluntarily redeems ground rent, which is by applying to the Land Registry and paying money which is then claimed by the ground rent owner of the property purchased.

**Mr Taylor:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Durkan:** I shall not give way. I shall answer questions after I have made my statement.

**Mr Taylor:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is most unusual. A Minister usually gives way when he is making a statement.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It is entirely a matter for the Minister. There will be ample opportunity to question him after he has made his statement.

**Mr P Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you make it clear that anybody with any parliamentary experience knows that a Minister never gives way when making a statement?

**Mr Durkan:** I was referring to money being paid into the Land Registry, which represents a reasonable level of compensation to the owner of the ground rent who, after redemption, will no longer receive that annual income. The compensation payable to the person redeeming the ground rent will be fixed according to a formula laid down in schedule 1 to the Bill, which provides for the amount of the annual ground rent to be multiplied by a fixed number of years. The Ground Rents Bill confers on me the power, by order, to fix the multiplier. I intend to fix the multiplier at 9, which, I believe, will result in fair compensation for ground rent owners, while not placing an undue financial burden on rentpayers, especially those who fall within the compulsory scheme. That figure is an accurate reflection of the purchase price that is currently paid when a ground rent is redeemed.

The Bill also confers on me the power to fix different multipliers for different categories of ground rent. I have no plans to exercise that power at present. However, in the light of experience of the scheme, I shall review whether adopting a single multiplier of 9 for all ground rents proves to be too crude a mechanism for balancing the competing interests of rentpayers and ground rent owners.

A third feature is that the Bill provides detailed provision for the continuation and enforceability of covenants affecting the property when the ground rent has been redeemed. The provisions in this Bill mirror existing provisions in the Property (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which provide for the running of freehold covenants as between successors in title to the property, the ground rent of which has been redeemed. For example, the covenant for quiet enjoyment of the property will continue to bind the owner of the property even though he now has a freehold title.

There is, as yet, no fixed date for commencement of these provisions. However, I can give Members an indication of the order in which I intend to bring the various parts of the redemption scheme into force. When the necessary Land Registry rules are in place, I hope to introduce the voluntary redemption procedure early in 2001.

In respect of the compulsory redemption of ground rents I am proposing a phased introduction to tie in with the introduction of compulsory first registration to the whole of Northern Ireland. I intend that compulsory redemption should first be applied to unregistered residential property towards the end of 2001. Some time after that, and in the light of experience of how well the scheme is operating, I will extend compulsory redemption to registered residential property.

As I stated earlier, this Bill seeks to provide a simple scheme for the buying out of ground rents for both rentpayers and rent owners, with the minimum of expense to both. The Bill is, nevertheless, complex and deals with a very technical area of property law, but I commend it to the Assembly as useful reforming legislation which will help, in the long term, to simplify land ownership in Northern Ireland.

If Members raise any particular points during the debate I will try to answer them in my winding-up speech.

**The Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Bill as a first step in streamlining the whole issue of ground rent and rents across the country, but I do not think that it goes far enough. It deals primarily with dwellings and residential properties, but there are other major issues to do with absentee landlords and landlords of large

estates, such as the Shaftesbury Estate, the Chichester Estate and others, who own large stretches of lands and water right across the country for which people are paying ground rent. Some of these areas of land are undeveloped because people refuse to pay the ground rent.

I am referring specifically to the bed of Lough Neagh, which is owned by the Shaftesbury Estate. Any of the councils in the area around Lough Neagh who want to develop along the shoreline or into the water have to pay the Shaftesbury Estate large amounts of ground rent to be able to do so. This has held up the whole development of Lough Neagh and has curtailed its use in many ways. I hope to see this legislation being extended to deal with that sort of issue.

There are many questions which have to be asked to compensation to landlords, many of whom would have difficulty in justifying their ownership of a particular piece of land, land that had been given to them in the past for their loyalty. It seems a bit strange to receive payment for something which did not belong to you in the first place. We also need to look at the matter of compensation in a number of ways.

I am quite certain a LeasCheann Comhairle that my Committee will be looking at all of these issues and that we will come back at the next stage — the Consideration Stage — with amendments if necessary.

**The Deputy Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Leslie):** I thank the Minister for his statement. This Bill is, I suppose, the most complex piece of legislation to have come before the Assembly so far, and I see that it is winging its way to the Committee on which I sit. Fortunately, we have had the chance to warm up on one or two other easier bits of legislation.

The Bill raises a number of issues. It appears to reflect a fairly diligent development process, but there are a number of items that I would like to put to the Minister to see if he can provide any comfort. I notice, in particular, that a short residuary term is defined in the legislation as 50 years or less, and the Minister has decided, as he has the discretion to do, that the multiplier should be nine. I think that you could argue that the multiplier should be 49 if a residuary term of 50 years is to stand. You could contend that a multiplier of 49 might be suitable for “groundrent.com”, as it would not represent the commercial reality of the value of ground rents. Nonetheless, I think that there seems to be some inconsistency between those two situations.

What does the Minister consider the cost and administrative burden to the Land Registry of carrying out these proposals will be? He is entirely sensible in having a phased introduction so that the system can be tested and the extent of the burden established before the compulsory section is introduced.

Would-be property purchasers need to be aware that they will not feel the benefit of this Bill until a conveyance takes place subsequent to the one that triggers the tidying up of the ground rents issue. The first conveyance taking account of this Bill will simplify things, inasmuch as it will be clear what is to be done about ground rent. However, the complete simplification of the process will not bear fruit until the subsequent conveyance takes place. In that respect, the Bill is silent on the length of time a rent owner's right to a rent paid into the Consolidated Fund will last. Does that imply that the entitlement is perpetual?

11.45 am

In addition to having the discretion to set the multiplier, the Department of Finance and Personnel will determine the basis for the rate of interest paid on unclaimed redemption moneys. What basis will be used to determine that rate of interest, and will the interest be compound?

Clause 8 seems to give some scope to making spurious application to redeem ground rent. It would, in effect, deny the rent owner access to the property. The penalty for false action under clause 9 is contained in clause 24. It is as well that there is a penalty, but does the Minister consider that it will be sufficient to be effective.

Clearly, this Bill can affect mortgages and existing leases. What consultations have taken place with mortgage providers to ensure that section 15 of the Bill, which says that it does not affect the mortgage, satisfies all the concerns of mortgage providers that that will be the case? It would be extremely unfortunate if we were to pass a piece of legislation that leads to many mortgages having to be redocumented, inevitably at cost to the borrower.

I note that the Bill specifically excludes nominal rents of below £1, and clearly there is an argument that it would be uneconomic to try to redeem these rents. However, nominal rents are exceedingly tiresome, for the person receiving them, for the person paying them and, at the time of conveyance, for clearing up any arrears. Would it not be more sensible to have a voluntary provision for the redemption of nominal rent? The parties would be mindful that it might be of some net expense to them to clear up the nominal rent, but it might be considered to be of value. It would be worth considering if the multiplier for clearing up nominal rent should be higher in order to provide an incentive to clear them.

What consideration was given to the problems which occur when there are multiple, or joint, owners? Frequently, such owners disagree, and one of them can be left with the problem of having to sell the property and deal with the difficulties that that entails. Has



sufficient consideration been given, in the framing of the legislation, to take account of this? The compulsory provision may deal with that, but what are the Minister's thoughts on this matter?

Finally, in overall terms this Bill should be welcomed. I look forward to receiving some comfort on the matters I have raised. This seems to be a very diligent attempt to simplify our complicated land law, which I hope will benefit buyers and sellers in the conveyancing process without further enriching the practitioners in that process.

**Ms Lewsley:** I commend the Minister on the Ground Rents Bill, which, I am sure many Members agree, is long overdue. Will he say what will happen to the excess pieces of land that have been left by developers, who have moved on, and say something about absentee landlords who do not take responsibility for maintaining these small pockets of land, such as grass cutting, for example?

**Mr Close:** As I listened to the Minister, the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Committee, one theme emerged. We all agree that this is complex and weighty legislation. I have no doubt that it will require deep soul-searching and concentration when it moves to the Committee stage. One need only glance through the Bill to find clauses which will create all sorts of problems and difficulties. I am thinking of issues such as superior rents, land of separate occupation that is subject to a single ground rent, the effect of the redemption on titles and the continuation of rights and equities affecting leasehold land. I could have a field day being really difficult and demanding answers from the Minister. However, he knows me well enough to know that I would not dare to bowl him any googlies at this early stage. They are all issues that must be dealt with comprehensively.

We must also consider the cost implications of additional staffing and the whole quasi-judicial aspects of how the measure will affect the Land Registry. Our purpose today is to deal with the principles in the Bill, the key one being the simplification of conveyancing. As a rather simple individual, I like things to be made simple. I support the principles in the Bill and look forward to further consideration in the Committee when amendments will be made to make life even more simple.

**Mr Morrow:** I too welcome the Bill and the sooner it becomes legislation, the better for everyone. There are some aspects about which I am concerned and require some clarification from the Minister.

We have a system whereby a substantial number of peppercorn rents are applied to properties across the Province. Since first introducing its scheme of selling off properties, the Housing Executive has sold off about 86,000 homes to date. All those properties are held with a 5p ground rent, if requested. The Housing Executive

does not request those ground rents because it would be too costly to do so. Imagine trying to collect 86,000 5ps across the Province. Does the Bill deal adequately with that issue, which is causing considerable concern?

The Minister also mentioned that the multiplier is 9. I am not sure that I entirely agree with that. A more realistic multiplier would have been 12, and I say that because, if this Bill is to work properly, we need the co-operation of both landlord and tenant. An obstructionist policy could come into play if the landlord discovered that the multiplier was only 9, for that might not be enough to encourage him to get into the scheme. As I have said, 12 would probably be a more realistic figure, and it should be considered.

The legal costs accrued here by a tenant's buying out the ground rent will be considerable, and there are often long and protracted legal matters, particularly searches, which must be carried out. As one solicitor said to me, the legal costs are far in excess of the actual ground rent involved. We therefore need clarification on who will pay those legal costs. Will payment be initiated simply by the person who wishes to purchase, in this case, the tenant? Will landlords be discouraged when they see that they will also be involved in considerable legal costs, though the sums of money they receive will be minimal?

What is the position on mortgaged property? An owner will have to go back to his lender and secure his co-operation, so that will involve searches. This is going to be extremely time-consuming and protracted, and it will take a long time before an owner can purchase his ground rent.

I have also been asked to refer to the future purchase of Housing Executive properties. Will a redemption certificate be issued automatically when a Housing Executive tenant wishes to purchase his home, or will a ground rent of 5p continue to be applicable? I understand that the reasons for this are more legal than anything else. I hope a system can be devised whereby any Executive tenant purchasing his home in future will not find himself lumbered again with this clause.

Regarding a terrace of houses, I understand that there is an agreement at the moment called a header rental agreement, under which one person in a street collects all the ground rent, also becoming liable for it. Does the Bill deal adequately with that situation? If a person lives in the middle of a terrace of houses, can he purchase the ground rent on his home? I can envisage difficulties there, for, from what I have read, I assume that the Bill puts the onus on him to purchase the ground rent for the whole row. We should like to know how that will work out. I will be particularly interested in Mr Durkan's comments on the header rental agreement, since it is a significant matter in need of clarification.

**Mr Taylor:** I shall be very brief. I was sorry that the Minister did not give way. It is normal procedure in another place for a Minister to give way when moving a Second Reading motion. This is something that the House needs to address.

I should first like to raise the question of deciding how much money should be paid for buying out a ground rent. How will the Minister make this decision from year to year? Of course, the amount a lessee pays to buy out a ground rent fluctuates between a multiple of 6, 8, 10, or sometimes 12, depending on bank interest rates at the time. The lease holder will obviously want a return on the capital he receives from the sale of the equivalent of what the annual ground rent had previously been. I want to know how that factor is going to be decided.

12.00

Secondly, there are many people who want to buy out their ground rents. Sinn Féin has mentioned the Shaftesbury Estates, but ignored the Roman Catholic Church in Dublin, which owns many ground rents in Northern Ireland, including most of Ogle Street in Armagh City. The Representative Churches Body of the Church of Ireland similarly controls many ground rents here. Many large institutions own ground rents in Northern Ireland, and this has strangled people here.

Thirdly, many of these ground rents are old and may be only £3 per year. You could possibly buy one out for £30, but the solicitors could charge £200 to transfer ownership. That would dissuade anyone from buying out his ground rent. How is this going to be overcome?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank all Members who have taken part in the debate. Many useful comments have been made about the general principle of the Bill. Members have appreciated that, while this is a complex and technical piece of legislation, it will make all our lives simpler in the long term by removing the outdated system of ground rents on residential property in Northern Ireland. This is a cogent and comprehensive piece of legislation which properly balances the interests of rentpayers and rent owners, while also furthering the policy aim of simplifying land ownership.

The success of the scheme will obviously depend on its practical operation. The legislation provides a workable scheme through which the conveyancing process will be simplified. There has been long and extensive consultation on the policy behind it. This has involved the Law Society, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and many experienced conveyancers in Northern Ireland. Other Government agencies have confirmed that the scheme is workable. This is the scheme that people want and need.

I will try to deal with some of the points that have been raised by Members. Francie Molloy asked why the

Bill is confined purely to residential property. As I said earlier, it is cogent legislation. We felt it was important to concentrate on dealing with the issue of residential property. It was decided to exclude property that was wholly commercial on the basis of representations that were received from many interested bodies. It was thought that there were good reasons for retaining long leases on commercial property. However, provisions of the Property Order already in force prohibit the creation of fee farm grants in relation to commercial property. In the long term this will help simplify the conveyancing of commercial property.

The major issue that the Bill seeks to address is the problem with those residential properties which are subject to a ground rent. The Bill is already complicated in trying to do that, and it would be far more complicated if we tried to include non-residential properties.

James Leslie questioned the use of the figure 9 as a multiplier to calculate the redemption payable to the rent owner. Mr Taylor too referred to this. I admit it has been difficult to judge exactly which multiplier would result in fair compensation on rent owners, without placing an undue financial burden on rentpayers, who will be required to redeem the ground rent once the compulsory redemption process is brought into force.

The Valuation and Lands Agency has advised that a multiplier of 9 is a good reflection of the purchase price currently being paid when a ground rent is redeemed. We also consulted the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors on this issue, and it estimated a figure of between 8 and 10.

**Mr Taylor:** I like the way that the Minister stresses the word “currently”. Does that mean that this multiplier factor will change from one period to another, depending upon how interest rates vary in the United Kingdom?

**Mr Durkan:** As I indicated earlier, I have no plans to vary the multiplier or differentiate the multipliers that would be used in respect of different properties. It is a matter that I will keep under review for a variety of reasons. The Member has raised the question of interest rates, but that may not be the only reason for keeping the multiplier under review.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Is the Minister saying that he retains that power and can, as information comes to him, make a change?

**Mr Durkan:** Yes, I will have the power under the Bill to set different multipliers for different levels of ground as well. I do not intend to use that power at present, as I have said. I want to see how a multiplier of 9 operates during the early stages of the redemption scheme, when only voluntary redemption will actually be involved.

I want to take up Mr Taylor's point about whether or not the multiplier will be high enough to enable the investment of the capital redemption money to generate the same level of income as the existing collection of ground rents does. The answer to that will obviously depend on what investment decisions are taken by rent owners once they are in possession of the redemption money, and that is largely outside my control. However, for the rent owners that are charities — and some are — new legislation which I shall bring before the Assembly in the next session will significantly widen the range of investments available to them and should yield a larger investment income than if the investment were confined to Government stock.

Mr Leslie asked whether the Department had consulted with mortgage lenders, and other Members asked how broad the consultation had been so far. There has been long and extensive consultation with all the interested parties in the development of this ground rent redemption scheme. The relevant professional bodies, such as the Law Society, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and others, were consulted and have been intimately involved in the formulation of the policy to which this Bill will give effect. The scheme commands widespread support among experienced conveyancers. More than 20 organisations and individuals have commented on it in detail, including a number of estate agents involved in the collection of a large number of ground rents.

Mr Leslie also asked about the money being paid into the Consolidated Fund. The reason is that there is no other place for the money to go. If no one claims entitlement to money in the Consolidated Fund, it has to stay there. I do not agree, however, that the Government benefit from the money. All money in the Consolidated Fund, insofar as it is not already earmarked for specific purposes, is available for expenditure on public services.

Mr Leslie also asked about the rate of interest to be paid by the Department of Finance and Personnel, and I will write to him with the details of this. Mr Leslie, and Mr Morrow as well, asked about the position on nominal or peppercorn ground rents. We have decided to exclude nominal or peppercorn rents from the redemption scheme. On consideration it seemed to us that requiring people who pay, say, 50p a year ground rent to operate this redemption scheme, involving an application to the Land Registry and paying the necessary fees, and so on, would not be very sensible. This new definition reflects the original thinking of the land law working group, and it has the support of the professions. We are, however, considering an alternative mechanism for sweeping up these nominal rents, and such a mechanism may be the subject of an amendment at Consideration Stage.

Mr Morrow also asked about the costs involved in the redemption scheme. Under this scheme the costs will lie with each party: the rent owner will pay his costs, and the rentpayer likewise. There is a provision, however, in clause 4, for the person buying out the ground rent to have to pay the Land Registry a sum of money by way of a contribution to the rent owner's costs in claiming the redemption money. As the people benefiting from this scheme are the rentpayers, we thought that this was only fair.

Mr Close and Mr Leslie asked about the implications for the Land Registry. There will, of course, be an impact on the resources of the Land Registry. In time, however, the redemption of the ground rents will simplify the conveyancing process, and the Land Registry is content that it can operate the scheme well. I hope that detailed consideration of the sort that Members have already shown of this Bill — [Interruption]

**Mr Taylor:** I want to repeat briefly my question regarding legal fees. If, for example, there were a ground rent of just £3 per annum, using the Minister's factor of 9 one would have to pay about £27 to buy it out. What incentive will there be to do this if solicitors are still going to charge £200 or £300?

**Mr Durkan:** I ask the Member to look at the Bill again to see that we are talking about a fairly simple procedure — not one that should be subject to complicated or costly legal procedures. That is one of the reasons for working with the Land Registry, going for quite a simple scheme. It has been discussed with, among others, the Law Society, and it is seen as being reasonably straightforward. Clearly, as I pointed out in earlier answers in relation to, for instance, the question of nominal or peppercorn ground rents, we have to make sure that we do not have a scheme that, of itself, discourages the participation of people who could usefully and sensibly benefit from it. We believe that there will be a balance between the fees, in terms of the Land Registry and the redemption multiplier, and that the incentives will be there to operate the scheme properly — initially for the voluntary scheme, and, at a later stage, for a compulsory scheme relating to house sales.

Today's questions show that this is a complicated matter, and there is no easy way of simplifying residential property law in this regard. Ground rent has been a long-standing bugbear, and the various measures which have been examined before have come up against operational difficulties and complications. Certainly, all the parties which were involved in previous efforts and those who have been consulted on this believe that this is the most workable scheme proposed to date.

**Mr S Wilson:** Mr Morrow asked a question about header rents, which I think are probably unique to Belfast. These cause great difficulty, because very often one individual is left to do the job of the estate agent

and collect all the rents. If the person holding the header rent agrees to buy it out, will that exempt him from having to collect the other rents as he does at present?

**Mr Durkan:** The aim of the Bill is to create a situation where we no longer have ground rents — either being paid or being collected. We would have to look at the nature of all property holdings to ensure that the scheme was applicable in that regard. It is not the intention of the Bill to leave any part of Northern Ireland in an anomalous situation with ground rents still being retained, be that under a header agreement or anything else. If particular problems exist in relation to the Belfast area and certain properties, we will give those matters more detailed consideration.

12.15 pm

We would regard the Bill as incomplete if identifiable residential properties were left with outstanding ground rent liabilities. I am happy to write to both Members on this matter. I hope that we can develop this point further in the Committee and at the Consideration Stage of the Bill.

In conclusion, I welcome Members' recognition of the complexity of what we are doing here. We are trying to come up with a simple, understandable and usable system. We do not want fees or multipliers to be so low that there is no incentive or so high that the scheme is prohibitive. We feel that we have achieved the right balance. Other considerations may emerge over time. The Bill provides for certain matters to be kept under review by leaving the power to vary the multiplier with the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

I am glad that so many Members have welcomed the Bill's intent and purpose. The legislation will benefit from that goodwill and from the insight that Members have already brought to bear, as we take it through its further stages.

*Question put and agreed.*

*Resolved:*

That the Second Stage of the Ground Rents Bill (NIA 6/99) be agreed.

## APPROPRIATION BILL

### Consideration Stage

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

**Mr Speaker:** As there are no proposed amendments to this Bill, there may not be any debate. It is a finance Bill, so the clauses must be passed by cross-community support. For the convenience of the Assembly, I propose that when the Questions are put, I will gather the voices, and if it appears to me that there is support for the proposition on all sides and no indication against, I will take that as cross-community support without dividing the House. However, if there is a challenge on any Question, the House will divide in order to demonstrate whether there is cross-community support, in the way that it has done previously.

I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the five clauses of the Bill.

*Leave granted.*

*Clauses 1 to 5 ordered, nemine contradicente, to stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr Speaker:** I propose to deal with the two schedules in the same way, putting them together if the Assembly gives leave.

*Leave granted.*

*Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to nemine contradicente.*

*Long title agreed to.*

**Mr Speaker:** That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Appropriation Bill, which therefore stands referred to the Speaker to judge questions of competence, after which it will be placed on the list of future business.



## ALLOWANCES TO MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND OFFICE HOLDERS BILL

### Consideration Stage

**Mr Speaker:** There will be a series of amendments to this Bill. However, the debate will be suspended from 2.30 pm to 4.00 pm for Question Time. We shall also be taking a lunch break at some point.

I remind Members, though perhaps I ought not to, that there is no guillotine on a Consideration Stage. Members may speak more than once, and no doubt some will do so at some length. If the Consideration Stage has not been completed by 6.00 pm we will have to interrupt the proceedings, in accordance with Standing Orders, and resume them tomorrow at 10.30 am.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Mr Speaker, I did not catch what you said about the break for lunch. What time is proposed?

**Mr Speaker:** I ought to give Members an hour. We shall therefore continue until about 1.30 pm. That gives us just over an hour now.

#### *Clause 1 (Resettlement allowance for members)*

*Amendment (No 7) proposed:* In page 1, line 13, leave out “Act (Northern Ireland) 2000” and insert

“Determination 2000, made by the Secretary of State under section 48 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 by virtue of paragraph 9 of the schedule to the Northern Ireland Act 2000”. — *[Mr Fee]*

*The following amendment (No 8) stood on the Marshalled List:* In clause 3, page 3, line 3, leave out “Act (Northern Ireland) 2000” and insert

“Determination 2000, made by the Secretary of State under section 48 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 by virtue of paragraph 9 of the schedule to the Northern Ireland Act 2000”. — *[Mr Fee]*

**Mr Speaker:** Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List and I have ensured that there are some extra copies in the Lobby, as well as in the Printed Paper Office. The list gives the detailed order of consideration and voting on the amendments, clauses, schedule and long title of the Bill. The amendments have been grouped in my provisional grouping of the selected amendments list. Members may not be familiar with this, and if any Member does not have a copy, there are also copies in the Lobby. This is simply to facilitate sensible debate, as best I can, on the issues that are raised.

When a Member proposes the lead amendment in a group, the debate ought to encompass all the amendments in that group. The mover of an amendment

will be the first to speak and will be called to make the winding-up speech after the debate on that amendment. Where the mover of an amendment, which is the lead amendment in that group, is not the Member in charge, the Member in charge will be called, of course, to speak before the mover’s winding-up speech. I will, however, at the end of the debate on that group, put only the Question on the lead amendment. The Question will then be put on the remaining amendments on that group as they fall later on in the Marshalled List. For these amendments, I will ask the Member to move them formally — normally without debate. However, it is not out of order for a Member to speak to an amendment when it has been formally moved. If that happens, that will, of course, open up a debate, and then the mover of the amendment will be given an opportunity to make a winding-up speech subsequently. That possibility is there. I prevail on Members not to use it excessively, because it makes little point of putting the amendments into groups. However, I am aware that today, and on days when Members are learning the ropes, it may be of value for the consequences of particular amendments being taken or not being taken to be brought to the attention of the House.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On that point, Sir, can these amendments be withdrawn only by the leave of the House?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank Dr Paisley for that point. When we come to the first amendment in a group, it must be moved so that it and the other amendments in the group may be spoken to.

Once it has been moved it is in the possession of the House and can only be removed by leave of the House. If another Member objected to that amendment’s being withdrawn, the House would divide upon the Question. However, later amendments in that group may be debated without having been moved. When an amendment comes forward, I will ask the Member responsible for it whether it is moved or not moved. The Member may then say “Not moved”, and the only person who has a right to insist that it be moved is a Member who had also put his name to it in the first place. Some amendments are in the names of more than one Member, so that is not a matter for the leave of the House. Rather it is a matter for the leave of those other Members who put their names to the amendment in the beginning.

This is a somewhat new procedure for the Assembly. Some Members are familiar with it from other places, but many Members are not. I am perfectly content to take questions of procedure as we go along, because it is a little complex.

**Mr P Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If I have understood you correctly, you are being more generous than the Speaker would be in another place,

where, with a group of amendments, usually the lead amendment only is put to a vote. It would be very rare for the Speaker to allow any of the further amendments in that group to be put to a vote.

**Mr Speaker:** This grouping of amendments is one that I put together to facilitate the debate. It does not have standing in any other sense. Had I been of a different mind, I could have grouped them together in a political sense, but that would have been quite out of line for me, as Speaker, to do. This does not have the vote of the House, so we must allow a degree of flexibility to enable me to assist the House in this debate. The House, in the end, is the governor of what happens, and that is why I am following this path. It does give a degree of latitude that I do not think inappropriate, particularly since the Consideration Stage, as our Standing Orders now have it, is the only opportunity for amendments to be proposed and voted upon.

In other places there are not only two Chambers but a number of occasions for amendments to be put, debated and voted upon. We have to proceed with particular care because we have only one opportunity to ensure good legislation. If we do not use it carefully, we could make a situation worse.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of clarification, Mr Speaker. It does remain the right of a person whose amendment is numbered under this list, if he so wants, to move that amendment. Is that correct?

**Mr Speaker:** That is absolutely the case. Amendments are given a unique number when they are tabled, and numbered in the order in which they were tabled with the Bill Office. This number remains with them until the Bill completes its Consideration Stage. The amendment numbers reflect the order of tabling in the Bill Office, but they do not reflect their order or position for consideration. Their position for consideration is as on the Marshalled List, which takes us through the Bill. As I said, Members may speak more than once.

We will take the debate on the amendments; we will then take the lead amendment; we will then take the clause as amended or not amended, as the case may be, and subsequent clauses until we come to a further amendment and so on; and then, at the end, we will take any schedules and the long title of the Bill.

**Mr P Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There is a bit of difficulty with so many amendment sheets going round, but I notice that amendment 3 says "Leave out clause 3." Have you accepted that as a valid amendment? Should it not simply be a case of voting against the motion that the clause stand part?

**Mr Speaker:** I have accepted it as a valid amendment. If it were not down as an amendment, there could not properly be debate on it. Otherwise one would

facilitate debate on every clause as it came forward rather than simply having Members voting for or against. In most cases they are likely to vote for. If a Member wishes to debate whether a clause should stand part, an amendment ought to be put down. There is a further good reason for this. If a Member tables an amendment to the effect that a clause should not stand part, the removal of that clause is likely to have consequences for the Bill. Some might be technical consequences; some might be content consequences; and some might be consequences for the long title of the Bill. If one did not require that an amendment be put down that, in this case, clause 3 should not stand part, any consequential amendments tabled would not make sense, for one would not know that there was going to be a question of a clause's not standing part.

That is why it is a necessary for us to proceed in this way. I appreciate that everyone is coming to grips with procedures that are necessarily new because of the fewer Consideration Stages.

12.30 pm

**Mr P Robinson:** If this amendment were not passed, it would still be possible to vote against the motion that the clause stand part.

**Mr Speaker:** It would not be possible to debate the matter unless an amendment had been put down on it. It would be possible, if one were minded — perhaps I should not suggest such a thing — to wreck a Bill. One could find oneself voting for consequential amendments, the amendment that the clause not stand part having been passed. One could vote through a technical amendment which would in effect make nonsense of the Bill. The Member who raised the question is, I suspect, quite familiar with such devices. We will therefore proceed with amendment 7.

**Mr Fee:** I would also like to speak also to amendment 8. These are two technical amendments which result directly from the Secretary of State's actions during suspension when he gave a Determination on pension provision for Assembly Members. In effect this means that we will not proceed with the Pensions Bill and, therefore, that the references to the Pensions Bill in the Allowances to Members of the Assembly and Office Holders Bill must be amended accordingly.

Both these amendments have that effect, and I ask Members to support both.

**Mr Maskey:** Sinn Féin will support amendments 7 and 8 since they are technical and legal requirements. However, we shall be voting against clause 1, for it is not appropriate to make such a resettlement grant to people who contest elections and are not re-elected. There is even less of a case for making such grants to people who choose not to stand for re-election.

**Mr Speaker:** Is amendment 7 moved or not moved?

**Mr Fee:** Moved.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Clause 3 (Allowances to persons ceasing to hold certain offices)**

*Amendment (No 9) proposed:* In page 2, line 31, after “1999”, insert

“( ) on the date on which he so ceases, has held a qualifying office (whether or not the same one) for a continuous period of at least six months ending on that date;” — *[Mr Fee]*

*The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:*

*(No 1):* In page 2, line 33, leave out “three” and insert “six”. — *[Chairman, Finance and Personnel Committee]*

*(No 4):* In page 2, after line 39, insert

“( ) No allowance shall be payable under this section where a person has held a qualifying office for a period of less than twelve months.” — *[Mr Leslie]*

*(No 10):* In page 2, after line 39, insert

“( ) No allowance shall be payable under this section where a person has ceased to hold a qualifying office by virtue of the coming into force of section 1 of the Northern Ireland Act 2000.” — *[Mr Fee]*

*(No 11):* In page 2, after line 39, insert

“( ) In reckoning for the purposes of this section —

- (a) the period of six months mentioned in subsection (1), there shall be disregarded—
  - (i) any period during which section 1 of the Northern Ireland Act 2000 is in force; and
  - (ii) any period not exceeding six weeks which falls between two periods of tenure of a qualifying office;
- (b) the period mentioned in subsection (1)(b) or paragraph (a)(ii), there shall be disregarded any period during which the Assembly is dissolved.” — *[Mr Fee]*

*(No 14: amendment to amendment 11):* In line 3, leave out “six” and insert “twelve”. — *[Mr Leslie]*

*(No 15):* In page 2, after line 39, insert

“( ) No allowance shall be payable under this section where a person has been excluded from holding a qualifying office following a resolution of the Assembly under section 30(1) or 30(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.” — *[Mr Leslie]*

*(No 2):* In page 3, after line 3, add

“( ) In reckoning the period of six weeks referred to in subsection (1)(b), no account shall be taken of any time during which the Assembly is dissolved.” — *[The Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee]*

**Mr Fee:** It may be helpful to Members if I recap briefly on the purpose of this Bill and the developments which have taken place since it was originally placed before the Assembly late last year.

The Bill provides for the payment of allowances to Members who leave the Assembly, to help with their adjustment to non-Assembly life and to wind up their Assembly affairs. It also allows for the payment of an allowance to those who step down from office holder posts, and who may or may not continue as Members of the Assembly, to assist them in adjusting to no longer being in receipt of the office holder element of their salary. These allowances are available to Members of the Westminster Parliament, and the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) has recommended that they may be made available in the three devolved Administrations.

The Assembly, when in shadow form, took the view that, as a matter of principle, we should follow SSRB recommendations on salaries, allowances and pensions. The Assembly Commission, which I represent in this matter, has therefore felt obliged to bring forward this Bill in line with the previously expressed wishes of the Assembly.

Clause 1 and the schedule provide for the payment of an allowance of at least six months’ salary to a Member who does not stand for re-election at a general election or who is not re-elected.

Clause 2 provides for an allowance at a similar level to a Member who is obliged to retire from the Assembly on ill-health grounds.

Clause 3 provides for the payment of an allowance to an office holder when he or she ceases to hold a qualifying office.

Clause 4 provides for the payment of a winding-up allowance of up to one third of the office costs allowance to meet actual expenditure by Members on winding up their Assembly affairs on leaving the Assembly.

Clause 5 provides for all the allowances to be paid by the Assembly Commission.

At this point I wish to express my appreciation of the work of the Finance and Personnel Committee, which was more than diligent in its scrutiny of the detailed provisions of the Bill. It has been as a result of the Committee’s work that a number of amendments have been put forward to tighten up the provisions of the Bill in relation to clause 3 which provides for the payment of an allowance to office holders when they cease to hold a qualifying office. The Commission has been more than happy to accept amendments which improve the drafting of the Bill and which, in particular, address differences in local circumstances in Northern Ireland from the situation at Westminster.



The Assembly Commission feels strongly, however, that it would be wrong to depart from the principles of the SSRB's recommendations in the area of salaries, allowances or pensions. By following SSRB consistently we have an open and transparent method of fixing our remuneration and allowances package as recommended by an independent panel of experts. This gives us a sound basis on which to justify this package to our constituents and the wider public. Once we depart in one area from SSRB recommendations we lose the whole basis and justification for following the remainder.

The amendments before us this afternoon fall into two categories. First, we have just dealt with a number of technical amendments concerning the determination by the Secretary of State. Secondly, we have a number of amendments that deal specifically with clause 3 on the payment of allowances to office holders when they cease to hold a qualifying office. In my comments on amendment 9, I will also be referring to amendments 11, 13, 14, 15, 10, 1, 2 and 4.

As originally drafted, clause 3 provides for the payment of an allowance to a Member, who must be under 65 years of age, who ceases to be an office holder and who does not become an office holder again within three weeks. The amount of the allowance is equivalent to three months of the salary the office holder was getting in excess of a Member's basic salary. It is designed to assist Members adjust to the reduction in salary which loss of office entails. We now accept that the drafting of this clause needs to be tightened up for a number of reasons.

First, we agree that an office holder should have to serve a minimum period in office before becoming eligible for the allowance on ceasing to hold the office. At present, theoretically, an office holder could leave office after serving for only one day and yet be eligible for the allowance on leaving. Our feeling is that this qualifying period should be set at six months, after which it would be reasonable to compensate an office holder for the reduction in salary on leaving office.

Secondly, we agree — and the Member mentioned parity with Westminster, and precisely the same scheme is recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body for Westminster, for the Northern Ireland Assembly, for the Scottish Parliament and for the National Assembly of Wales — that the minimum period a former office holder must remain out of office before the allowance becomes payable should be increased from three weeks to six weeks, and that periods during which the Assembly is dissolved should not count towards the six-week period.

Thirdly, provision needs to be made to ensure that payment of the allowance is not triggered by suspension of the devolved Government. On this basis I ask

Members to support the amendments being put down on behalf of the Assembly Commission. Those include amendments 1 and 2, tabled by the Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee, which deal with the points I have mentioned.

Amendment 9 introduces the condition that an office holder must have at least six months' continuous service in one or more qualifying offices to be eligible for an allowance on leaving office under clause 3 of the Bill. Without that amendment, an allowance would become payable on a person's leaving office regardless of how long or short a period he had served as an office holder.

Amendment 11 introduces a number of consequential amendments as a result of the introduction of the qualifying period. Any period of suspension of devolved Government is to be disregarded when calculating the qualifying period. Where there is an interruption in a period of continuous service as an office holder, providing the interruption is six weeks or less, the period either side of the interruption will be considered as continuous. Any period during which the Assembly is dissolved will not count when calculating any period of interruption between two qualifying periods as an office holder. The amendment also restates the provisions of amendment 2 to ensure that any period during which the Assembly is dissolved does not count towards the period during which an office holder must remain out of office, before becoming eligible for an allowance.

12.45 pm

Mr Leslie has tabled two amendments to amendments 9 and 11. The purpose, and the effect, of his amendments would be to increase the qualifying period of service from six months to twelve months. The Assembly Commission feels that this may penalise Members who will serve in public office for perhaps periods of up to ten months, or even for the proverbial 364 days. They would not qualify for an allowance under Mr Leslie's amendments. However, the principle of all these amendments is the same, that is, to introduce a qualifying period of service before an office holder becomes eligible for an allowance on ceasing to hold that office.

A number of other amendments, which are grouped together with amendment 9. Effectively we will be supporting amendments 15 and 10, the purpose of which are to prevent payment of allowances being triggered either as a result of the suspension of the Assembly or indeed by the exclusion of an office holder from office as a result of a decision, or a motion, of this Assembly.

Finally, on this particular group of amendments, I would point out that should the Assembly decide to



support Mr Leslie's amendments, I feel that amendment 4 becomes redundant.

*(Amendment (No 13) to amendment 9 proposed):* In line 3, leave out "six" and insert "twelve". — [Mr Leslie]

12.45 pm

**Mr Leslie:** As the House will be aware, the Bill first came to Committee in January but was subsequently interrupted by the suspension. During its passage in Committee, some concerns were expressed and amendments which were proposed have come through in the past couple of weeks.

Essentially, the debate in Committee revolved round two matters. First, there was the principle of accepting the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body. The Assembly, sitting in shadow form in February 1999, unanimously agreed to accept the principle of the SSRB's recommendations. That proposal, was put to the Assembly by the Commission and was accepted in advance of knowing what those recommendations would be. The key point was that the Assembly should not be seen to be setting its own pay and allowances. It was thought to be much better for such decisions to be in independent hands, so that comments on them would be a matter for a third party and not for the Assembly.

The important thing is that there is no cherry-picking of the allowances proposed by the third party — in this case, the Senior Salaries Review Body. However, considerable disquiet was raised by some Members about some of the allowances that had not been anticipated. On the whole, the allowances proposed would be in line with good employment practice; after all, in politics when you lose a job there is no notice period and the recommendations made by the Senior Salaries Review Body reflect that absence of notice.

Is the qualification test that has been set sufficient? Without altering the intent of the Senior Salaries Review Body, the House could impose on itself a threshold in order for Members to qualify for certain allowances. That is the intention of the amendments in the name of Mr Fee and myself. The issue between us is how high that threshold should be. It could be argued in a great many ways. I contemplated tabling amendments stipulating periods from six months to 24 months; I was uncertain as to the right period. However, following discussions in my party and with others, I felt there was consensus around a 12-month qualifying period. That is what I now propose to the House.

The Assembly might like to bear in mind — this also relates to clause 1 — that Members need some motivation to retire. It would be unfortunate if, in future years — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** You should lead by example.

**Mr Leslie:** Mr Speaker, I look longingly towards retirement, but at the age of 42 I shall have to do a little more work before I can afford to retire. However, I do not think that I would have any difficulty finding more highly paid remuneration than this should I choose to do so.

To return to my point, it would be unfortunate if, in the future, it were written of Members that they appeared to be hanging on to office or their jobs because of the financial consequences of ceasing to do so. Paying an allowance — one quarter of an office holder's allowance is scarcely a king's ransom — forms some sort of recognition of the extra responsibilities borne by office holders.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Why does the Member not do the House the courtesy of telling us what he really means? He really means that he wants to exclude the DUP from having access to this, but he wants Sinn Féin, the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP to be able to do so. That is the real basis of his proposal. Why will he not be honest with us and tell us the reason?

**Mr Leslie:** If the Member had read the minutes of the deliberations of the Finance and Personnel Committee when we were considering this Bill, he would have found that I and other members of the Committee, including Mr Close, whom I am sure will be speaking later, raised this matter. We were thinking about this completely independently of anything the Member's party may or may not do. We actively discussed it in January and February of this year, so the Member's comments are not relevant.

Finally, amendment 15 standing in my name is designed to address the situation where an office holder loses the confidence of the House for any of the reasons laid down in the legislation and loses office for that reason. In those circumstances it would not be appropriate for the allowances to be payable. That concludes my remarks on these amendments at this stage.

**Mr Speaker:** As we proceed to the debate, may I remind Members that this is the first occasion on which we have had a Consideration Stage and that this is an opportunity to address any of the substantial number of amendments.

**The Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy):** A ArdCheann Comhairle, go raibh maith agat. As Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee I am pleased to speak on this Bill. The Bill was referred to the Committee for scrutiny. The Committee met in public to examine the Bill and reported to the Assembly on 8 February. I thank Mr John Fee, the sponsor of the Bill, and his officials for their helpful advice to the Committee and the Assembly Commission. Mr Fee was able to reassure the Committee

that it did not contravene equal opportunities or discrimination legislation.

I also thank Mr Fee for endorsing the amendments put forward by the Committee, and I speak in favour of amendment 11. The Committee examined each of the clauses in turn and agreed that clauses 1, 2 and 4 should stand unamended as part of the Bill. I have many reservations about these clauses, but as Chairman of the Committee, I must speak on its behalf.

Although I speak of the need to amend clause 3, I must also advise the Assembly that the Committee concluded that the allowance provided for by clause 3 to Members and office holders should not form part of the Bill. I shall, therefore, shortly be advising the Assembly to omit that clause entirely, but clause 3 must first be amended as proposed in amendments 1 and 2 to correct some inherent defects. The clause, in its original form, entitles office holders such as Ministers, Presiding Officers and others specified in Standing Orders to a payment equivalent to three months' pay. This would be paid in cases where they ceased to hold office in the Assembly and did not hold office again for three weeks.

The Committee identified a serious deficiency in clause 3 and asked the Commission to reconsider the clause. The Commission did so and agreed that clause 3 should be amended. As presently worded, the three-week period would start as soon as the Assembly was dissolved. Persons could be paid this allowance and then accept another paid office as soon as a new Assembly were elected and office holders appointed. This could be within four weeks of dissolution.

The Committee recommends that the fixed period of three weeks referred to in clause 3 (1b) should be increased to six weeks. No account should be taken of any period during which the Assembly was dissolved when calculating the time. This will ensure that the fixed period for calculating an office holder's entitlement to this only begins once a new Assembly has been elected.

The amendments put forward are to improve the Bill and not simply to cherry-pick the Senior Salaries Review Body's recommendations. It would be entirely different if the Assembly were setting its own salaries and allowances. It is not the same as when we talk about denying ourselves allowances or salaries. On behalf of the Committee I recommend that the Assembly vote in favour of these amendments to clause 3. Chathaoirigh, that concludes my remarks on amendments 1 and 2.

**Mr Campbell:** When Mr Fee introduced this issue he mentioned that a series of amendments had been suggested to clause 3. I commented last week in the Commission that each political party, and each member involved in this issue, would have a particular view on clause 3 — which is the main bone of contention in this

Bill. There were originally a variety of approaches to this scheme, but it appeared that Members were generally content to allow the Senior Salaries Review Body to make the recommendations in the absence of knowledge about the outcome. Mr Paisley suggested that clause 3 was related to the fact that there may soon be a change of ministerial positions — Mr Leslie, of course, rejected this idea. Since the DUP has made it clear that, under certain conditions, there will be changes to ministerial office holders, there have been a number of amendments referring to time periods which coincide with the time when we might hold ministerial positions. It is disingenuous for anyone to argue that clause 3, and the suggested amendments, are not related to the fact that some Members will only be Ministers or office holders for a limited time.

Let no one be in any doubt that the DUP Members in the House today will be voting against clause 3 in its entirety. The issue should be whether to accept in full the recommendations of the SSRB. Owing to recent political changes the Members on this side of the House want people to be absolutely clear that our view is that we should not benefit one jot or tittle from holding office in this Assembly, as derived from clause 3. That is our position, and it is a position, we think, of integrity and of principle.

1.00 pm

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Does the Member not also find it very strange that these dates take no account of any suspension of the Assembly? The allowances still go on. If, because of the activities of one party, say IRA/Sinn Féin does something and the Assembly is suspended again, the allowances will still build up their value. Because of the stand that we have taken they think that they must do something about it. Well, we invite them to do something about it: say goodbye to clause 3, and then no one will benefit. How about that for a test of their integrity?

**Mr Campbell:** It is somewhat invidious that there could be a variety of circumstances under which some Members stand to gain. The clearest message from the House today would be a simple decision to delete clause 3, thus avoiding any accusation of benefit whatsoever. It would avoid too the business of the periods (six months, 12 months, three months — several have been mentioned), which would also leave us open to accusations of political expediency. My party supports the deletion of clause 3.

**Mr Close:** I am absolutely delighted. I am over the moon that on this occasion the Democratic Unionist Party is going to take a principled stand against clause 3. The evidence will show that that is exactly the line that I have been taking from day one when this Bill came before the Finance and Personnel Committee. On that occasion we were told that in principle we had

accepted the SSRB recommendations. Most of the parties were represented on the SSRB and, having accepted its principles, how dared we try to change any of the clauses of this Bill? We stuck to our guns on that issue. We demonstrated that there are times when you have to be a little bit extreme in your view to achieve, through the democratic process, that which is in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland. The point has already been well made.

Look at the number of lines in clause 3, about 15 or 16 lines, and look at the number of lines of amendments to clause 3. I am prepared to support the issues that are coming up under 9, 13, 1, and 11, et cetera, without prejudice to my position on clause 3 — namely that it should be thrown out in its entirety. We will come to that in the debate on amendments 3, 5 and 6.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the whole clause is such a mishmash that the only proper thing to do with it is kick it out. I want to assure Members, certainly those who share my perspective, who feel that there was some political motivation or party-political motivation behind the stand that I have taken on this, that such a view is totally without foundation. I take the view that we, as Members of the Assembly, were elected to the Assembly as equals and that, with regard to any payments for holding office or whatever, we should all be treated as equals. I am conscious of the fact, and no Member of the House should ever lose track of this, that we are responsible to the general public for the expenditure of taxpayers' money. We should not follow blindly SSRB recommendations that are all right for England, Scotland, Wales or whatever. We have a responsibility to the taxpayers of Northern Ireland.

They must be uppermost in our mind. We must never lose sight of that point. We did it some months ago, just shortly after taking our seats, when one of the first things that we approved was an increase in salary. Listen to what the general public said about that. They did not like it. The "I am all right, Jack"/"I am all right, Jill" syndrome is all wrong to the electorate to whom we are accountable.

I will speak about my objections to clause 3 in more detail when the appropriate time comes. Without prejudice at this stage, I think that the amendments improve the mishmash of clause 3 as originally drawn up. Therefore, while not wishing to count my chickens before they are hatched, I am confident that clause 3 will be kicked out by the House. But just in case that does not happen, I am prepared to support the amendments.

**Mr Maskey:** I will not go into every amendment now, because, like one or two other Members, my party will be voting against clause 3 in its entirety for a number of reasons.

Mr Fee made a fair point earlier when he said that we should not depart from the recommendations of the SSRB, but his own amendment to move the qualifying period from three weeks to six months is doing just that. I draw Members' attention to the remarks made by Mr Jim Hamilton from the Department of Finance and Personnel when he gave evidence to the Committee. He made the point that to move the qualifying period from three weeks to, say, six months would more or less render it redundant. Therefore, I think it is a bad amendment.

My party wants to have clause 3 deleted, but if that does not happen we will, of course, seek to improve the Bill as best we can. That is why we will be supporting, as Seamus Close said, some of the amendments without prejudice to our view on clause 3 in its entirety.

I made the point in January of this year at a Committee meeting that a party could replicate the allowances by rotating these posts among a number of its Members, and wanted to make sure that that did not happen. I am glad that the DUP has also adopted this position. That is good.

The SSRB recommendations, in our view, did not take into account the fact that two thirds of Assembly Members will be office holders, which is not the case in the other institutions, including Westminster. While it was important to have an independent judgement made by a body like the SSRB, we cannot slavishly follow all of its recommendations, because some of them are not appropriate. As I have said, it is not appropriate to have two thirds of Members qualifying for these allowances. Also, since office holders will already have received a salary increase, to give them an allowance when they leave their post will be like giving them a double bumper, so to speak. That is not appropriate. We will be supporting some of these amendments, purely to improve the Bill as much as possible, without prejudice to our vote later on to delete clause 3 in its entirety.

**Mr McCartney:** I support some of the sentiments on the principle of clause 3 that have already been expressed by some Members who have already spoken. The population of Northern Ireland views with a great deal of disgust the fact that, for the short periods that the Assembly has been sitting, it has concerned itself, to a very large degree, with the emoluments, salaries, pensions and, now, departure allowances of Members. Anyone I have spoken to sees what is happening here as the clearest possible illustration of what one newspaper described as the "snouts in the trough" syndrome.

As has been said already Assembly Members are not only receiving their salaries, which have been raised to something like £38,000 or £39,000 per year, but are also in receipt of an office allowance of £35,000 or so per year.



Only a limited number are manifestly, expressly and publicly using that allowance for the purpose for which it is paid. On top of that, those who hold office are receiving large sums. The First and the Deputy First Ministers are in receipt of a total salary of approximately £100,000. Other Ministers receive around £34,000 on top of their £39,000 basic salary. This largesse is being distributed throughout most of the offices. Over 50% of Members enjoy some perk in addition to their basic salary. All of them are, as it were, on the strength. This is not an ordinary democracy with a Government from a majority party and an Opposition. The largesse is distributed across all the major parties, particularly those in a position to appoint Ministers and dictate Committee membership. That really is jobs for the boys and, in some cases, the girls. It is undermining the public credit and integrity of the Assembly.

We are now faced with clause 3. This will provide for additional payments to all the office holders, so that they can be eased into positions in public or private life commensurate with the salaries and emoluments they have earned here. The public questions how many of those who receive these vast increases earned or would earn anything comparable either in their previous employment or in any employment they could properly expect to enjoy in the future on the basis of their past experience and professional or business records. I oppose clause 3 in the most fundamental way.

Some of the amendments intend to limit the worst excesses of that clause. Insofar as they do that, they are entitled to a degree of support. The fundamental position of my party and myself is that, as Members from other parties have said, clause 3 is a disgrace. It is no excuse to say that the Senior Salaries Review Body recommended that salaries should be set on the basis of some mystical parity with other elected bodies. It is for Members here, regardless of what some other body may do or what legitimacy some other body may offer, to decide whether it is justified in voting, out of the public purse, emoluments and benefits of this kind. I submit that it is not. If Members continue in this, they will undermine public support. They will be seen as a bunch of elected people feathering their own nests, snorting and snuffling in the biggest trough they can find.

**A Member:** You forgot about your MP's salary.

**Mr McCartney:** A fraction of what I used to earn.  
[Interruption]

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr S Wilson:** I support the comments of my Colleague Mr Gregory Campbell. The DUP completely opposes clause 3. It is significant that the one thing that gets the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party worked up into a frenzy is the issue of pensions payable, as they

thought, to members of this party who were part of the system of rotating ministerial office.

1.15 pm

I notice we do not have any amendments, questions or statements about Sinn Féin Ministers refusing to fly flags and abusing their office. There is no frenzy or lather worked up as far as that is concerned, but when it comes to what they think is an attempt by the DUP to obtain ministerial position for financial gain, they get worked up into a frenzy.

It probably says more about the mindset of the Members who tabled these amendments that that was how they thought when they heard of the DUP's plan to oppose this agreement. They think in terms of money, but we think in terms of principle and standing up for our election manifesto.

Look at the arguments that have been made — and there have not been too many — in defence of clause 3. Mr Fee said that the proposals of the SSRB, which I understand recommended the timescales that are presently in the Bill, should be implemented because they gave transparency. However, when it comes to this issue, suddenly the SSRB recommendations are not all that sacrosanct, and transparency does not matter. We have to ask whether that is the real reason for the amendments. Mr Leslie made the most bizarre point when he said “We need to encourage people to retire.”

I am not going to read from this newspaper, for I got told off earlier; I am just going to show it —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member is aware that to do so is out of order.

**Mr S Wilson:** If one goes by the headline in a certain newspaper this morning — a newspaper that I have no love for — there is going to be no difficulty in finding ways of getting Ulster Unionist Party members to retire because the electorate is going to show them the retirement door. Their own party is saying it — not the DUP. They do not need clause 3 as a retirement plan. If they just call elections they will get all the retirement plans they need. Those are the only two arguments that I have heard so far in defence of clause 3.

I welcome the fact that other parties have followed us. I particularly welcome Mr Close. I think he has become too close to the two parties he sits between — the PUP and Sinn Féin — because he is now going to stick to his guns as well.

Clause 3 would be misinterpreted by the general public. I suspect that there are people who, because of their attempts to make and gain some political capital out of the campaign which we have committed ourselves to in opposing this agreement, may well regret the fact that they have raised this question in the House



today. I suspect they may lose the vote on Clause 3. I am sure that was not the intention of those who have clung on to office, who have thrown principle aside and buried their manifestos. Some of them have done so in pursuit of position and all that it brings. Voting against clause 3 will indicate that Members of the Assembly take a principled stand. It will also be a bad blow for those who were ill advised enough to raise the matter.

**Mr Leslie:** I thought this debate had plenty of steam in it. There was talk of frenzy down at the other end of the House so I assume that there must be more of it to come. Certainly the DUP Members seem to have got themselves into a lather of self-justification, but I am afraid we are unable to match their frenzy at this end of the House.

Members who seek to criticise the Assembly for engaging itself in financial matters are not being entirely just when they consider the legislative structure under which the Assembly was set up and the similar structure of the Scottish Parliament. The House had very little choice but to deal with these matters at the beginning — otherwise there would have been no pay or rations at all. It is just the gauntlet that new legislatures have to run at the beginning of their lives. The purpose of appointing a Senior Salaries Review Body was to minimise the responsibility that the House bears in relation to the decision it takes on those matters.

I am certainly glad that the DUP will be supporting the deletion of clause 3. That is consistent with the position it adopted in Committee. I would be interested to see in future the extent of its devotion to the recommendation of the Senior Salaries Review Body, which it supported when the matter first came before the Assembly in February last year.

There is an extent of misunderstanding about the timetables set in the legislation. The three-week period that the legislation set was not properly thought out and poorly drafted, and that initially moved the Committee to look at the question of what would happen during a period of dissolution. The point was that the clause could have been accidentally triggered over a period of dissolution were the Bill to stand with its original wording. That was the first matter to be addressed by the early amendments.

The issue for the House is whether it accepts the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body. If it chooses to do so, there will be some latitude for the House to set hurdles to be crossed before those recommendations impact, which is what I sought to do through the amendments that I have laid before the House.

**Mr Speaker:** There is not enough time now for either Mr Fee's winding-up speech or for decisions which may well require divisions. I therefore propose,

with the leave of the House, to suspend the sitting. We will resume at 2.30 pm with questions, and the Consideration Stage of this Bill will continue at 4.00 pm.

*Debate suspended.*

*The sitting was suspended at 1.23 pm.*

*On resuming —*

## ASSEMBLY: QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

2.30 pm

**Mr Speaker:** Before we move on to questions to the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, I want to inform Members of an oversight that occurred on the published list of oral questions for next week. Two questions for oral answer by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety have been admitted in the name of the same Member. Members will know that a maximum of one question per Member per Department is permitted. The Member who tabled the question has agreed that number four on the published list — AQO 353/99 — will not be called but will, instead, receive a written answer.

May I take this opportunity to remind Members of the need to observe the rules on the number of questions permitted for each Question Time. Where a question for oral answer has been directed to the wrong Department and the matter is not the responsibility of the Minister answering, it is wholly inappropriate for a Member to ask a supplementary question.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Civic Forum

1. **Mr Ford** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister when the first meeting of the Civic Forum is to take place. (AQO 282/99)

2. **Mr Neeson** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail progress made towards the establishment of the Civic Forum. (AQO 281/99)

4. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister when the composition of the Civic Forum will be announced. (AQO 283/99)

6. **Mr Close** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to give a date for the first meeting of the Civic Forum. (AQO 280/99)

7. **Ms McWilliams** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to confirm the progress to date on the issue of staffing for the Civic Forum and to give an indication of when the Civic Forum will be established. (AQO 311/99)

10. **Mr McClelland** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what progress has been made towards the establishment and operation of the Civic Forum and to list representations made on the same. (AQO 309/99)

11. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister when the Civic Forum is to be established. (AQO 302/99)

12. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline work their office has done to establish the Civic Forum. (AQO 284/99)

**The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon):** With permission, I shall answer questions 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12 together.

Paragraph 34 of strand one of the Good Friday Agreement provided that a consultative Forum would be established. It would comprise representatives of the business, trade-union and voluntary sectors and such other sectors as agreed by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. It would act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues.

The report approved by this Assembly in February 1999 provided that the Civic Forum would have 60 members as well as a chairman. Under the terms of the report, 54 of the nominations for the Forum would be processed under ten headings: voluntary and community; business; trade-union; churches; arts and sport; culture; agriculture and fisheries; community relations; education; and victims.

The report identified groups and organizations which were to be invited to nominate members for the Forum. A further six members, plus the chairperson, will be appointed by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has been working with each of the sectors and, in some cases, assisting with bringing consortia together to draw up a nominating process. Each sector will submit a selection process to us for approval, by the end of June, and we will then carry out the remainder of the process during July and August.

We have had representations about the establishment of the Civic Forum from 54 individuals and organizations. The submissions came from representatives of business, churches, cultural organizations, trade unions, community groups, housing, victims' groups, the education sector, professional and medical groups, and women's groups. A list of all the representations has been placed in the library.

In our report of February 1999 we undertook to have the Civic Forum established within six months of devolution. The chairperson and members of the Forum are to be appointed in September, and its first plenary meeting will take place in October.

The Forum will wish to consider where it will be based, and a number of locations are currently being considered as possible venues for its plenary meetings, but decisions will not be taken until it has been established. The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will provide the initial administrative support to the Civic Forum, and the permanent staffing needs will be agreed, in consultation with the Forum, once it has been established.

**Mr Ford:** I thank the Minister for his lengthy and detailed response and, in particular, for the dates that have now been given. He spoke at length about the criteria that would be applied for the appointment of 54 of the Forum members. Could he give us some detail as to whether he and the First Minister have finalised the criteria for the six nominees in their direct gift? Specifically, has he reached any conclusion following my question on 7 February as to whether members of the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP will be disbarred from those posts?

**The Deputy First Minister:** When there are so many questions grouped, the answer has to be rather lengthy.

No decision has been taken in respect of nominations by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on the criteria by which appointments will be made. We will review the nominations put forward from each sector and take account of the range of expertise and experience needed to inform the deliberations of the Forum on social, economic and cultural matters. We will seek to ensure that the Forum has the appropriate balance to enable it to fully represent all sections of the community in Northern Ireland.

The final part of the Member's question related to the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. I assure the hon Member that the criteria we will use, and the practice we implement, will not result in that type of process. Given the experience of recent years, that must surely be to the disadvantage of the Alliance Party.

**Mr Neeson:** I welcome the statement by the Deputy First Minister that a date has now been set for the establishment of the Civic Forum. As it will happen soon, I think it would be important, and helpful, if this House could be given some idea about where the Forum is going to be located. The Minister referred to the matter in his statement.

**The Deputy First Minister:** A number of venues have been mooted. It is no secret, and one could speculate as to where they may be. There are various suitable venues throughout the North of Ireland. However, the First Minister and I would be very keen that the Forum is actually part of the community, that it is not set apart from it and that it will operate in a way that is close to the community. It would be invidious to list some of the options, but those options may not be the right ones in relation to the general view that the Forum should be part of the community. I would not hesitate to say that the Waterfront Hall has been under consideration. Other venues throughout the North of Ireland have been considered — even Armagh was mentioned. I assure the hon Member that the location will be decided in the best interests of the Forum.

**Ms Lewsley:** Will the Minister give an assurance that the principles of equality and transparency, as outlined in the Good Friday Agreement, will be adhered to in the Civic Forum?

**The Deputy First Minister:** The nominating sectors are aware of the importance of using appropriate processes to select their nominees based soundly on merit. Each sector will submit its proposed selection process to us for approval, and we will seek to ensure that these principles have been adhered to. Additionally, it is crucially important that it is not just the merit principle we must ensure. We must also ensure that the Forum is representative of the entire community in Northern Ireland.

**Mr McClelland:** I also welcome the Minister's statement. Would the Minister take this opportunity to outline the means by which the Civic Forum will make its views on economic and social matters known to this body?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the hon Member for his question. Obviously the means will be initially by deliberation. For some considerable time there has been consultation with the social partners. Secondly, there will be debate within the Forum. The Assembly will be interested in and aware of that debate. Thirdly, there will be direct consultation between the Forum and the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister or a relevant Minister, or, indeed, in whatever circumstances the Assembly decides that it should operate.

**Mr McCarthy:** I apologise for coming in late.

How many staff will be employed to service the Civic Forum, and have these jobs been widely advertised?

**The Deputy First Minister:** It is impossible at this stage to say what the staffing requirements for the Forum will be. The hon Member will agree that it will be a matter for the Civic Forum to decide on the number and the duties of those who will be servicing it. We have made financial provision, if my memory serves me right, of around £300,000 to set up the Forum. The Forum will then make recommendations to us on its staffing requirements, and until such times as that is done, it will be serviced initially, and I repeat initially, from within the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

### Ministers: Assembly Responsibilities

5. **Mr Hussey** asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister what steps have been or will be taken to ensure that Ministers act responsibly towards departmental Committees and respect the will of the Assembly. (AQO 270/99)

**The Deputy First Minister:** The role of departmental Committees is set out in the Good Friday Agreement and reflected in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Paragraph 9 of strand one says

"The Committees will have a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department with which each is associated."

Paragraph 22 says

"All Ministers will liaise regularly with their respective Committees."

Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides for the establishment of Assembly Committees and for the conferral of powers on them as described in paragraph 9 of strand one. Ministers should consult widely while formulating policy and take account of the

views of their Committees and, indeed, of the Assembly, in accordance with the provision of the agreement and in the interests of good government.

The Pledge of Office commits Ministers to supporting and acting in accordance with all decisions of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has adopted a ministerial code which commits Ministers to being as open as possible with the Assembly and to ensure that the information given is accurate and truthful. The code also sets out the circumstances in which a Minister is obliged to bring matters to the attention of the Executive Committee. This includes matters which cut across the responsibility of two or more Ministers and issues which require agreement on prioritisation or the agreement of a common position, or which have implications for the programme of government. In addition, all significant proposed policy initiatives or significant statements of policy, including legislative proposals, must be brought to the attention of the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the secretary to the Executive Committee for possible referral to that Committee.

Consideration is being given to the most appropriate way of bringing the ministerial code to the attention of Members.

**Mr Hussey:** I thank the Deputy First Minister for his response. However, I am sure that the Deputy First Minister will be well aware of the sincere concerns that exist in the House and, indeed, in the community at large about the way in which a Minister may act. I am thinking of the time when the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety acted in a manner which could best be described as unilaterally independent and, at worst, dictatorial when, in acting, she ignored the cross-community opinion of her Committee and the will of the majority of the Assembly. Can the Deputy First Minister assure us that, by whatever means, through Ministers or the Executive Committee, such a situation will not recur?

2.45 pm

**The Deputy First Minister:** We should have recourse to both the agreement and the legislation. Executive authority is discharged on behalf of the Assembly by the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the 10 departmental Ministers. Paragraph 24 of strand one of the agreement states

"Ministers will have full executive authority in their respective areas of responsibility, within any broad programme agreed by the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Assembly as a whole."

On the role of the Assembly's Committees, paragraph 9 of strand one states that they

"have a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department with which each is associated."



Paragraph 22 requires a Minister to liaise regularly with the Executive Committee. Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act provides for the establishment of Assembly Committees and the conferral of those powers on them. All executive authority therefore rests with the Ministers, rather than with the Assembly or its Committees. A departmental Committee cannot override a ministerial decision, nor can the Assembly, except by voting down a piece of legislation. Having said that, in terms of the record, the legislation and the agreement, Ministers should take full account of their departmental Committees' views when formulating policies, just as they should take account of the views of other organisations and interested parties. We hope that all Ministers will want to have an open, transparent and inclusive approach to the departmental Committees, recognising the role they have been given by the Good Friday Agreement.

**Mr S Wilson:** Is the Deputy First Minister aware that a majority of people voting in both the Assembly and the Education Committee voted to have the Union flag flying over Government buildings on authorised days? Is he aware that the Minister of Education ignored those votes? What sanctions, if any, have he and the First Minister imposed on the offending Minister? Has he been summoned to any meetings or had papers withheld? Has he had threats that his departmental responsibilities will be taken over, or is the nature of this Administration so capricious that these sanctions are reserved only for members of anti-agreement parties?

**The Deputy First Minister:** As the Member well knows, no authority resides in the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister in relation to this matter. No legislation resides with anybody, be it the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister or the Secretary of State, so it is not in the power of any of those persons to send letters or to sanction anyone. The reality is, as the Member well knows, that the Secretary of State has tabled an Order in Council which has not yet been activated. When it is activated it will be a matter of the Secretary of State's own choosing. Let us be clear that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has no power of sanction in this matter, nor has it any power of decision in legislation. The Member will also be aware that part of the Order in Council states that the Secretary of State should consult the Assembly. I look forward to seeing the methods he will employ to do that.

**Mr Speaker:** I urge Members to recognise that the more concise they are, the more questions we can get through. We are almost two thirds of the way through the Questions to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, and we have not made enormous progress.

**Ms Gildernew:** As a supplementary to question 5, can the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister tell me what steps have been taken to ensure that Committee Chairs act responsibly towards Committee members and respect their will? The work of the Committee of the Centre has yet to begin due to the inability of the Chair to treat all members in a spirit of equality.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The question is out of order. It is well outside the capacity of the Ministers to respond to a question of that kind.

**Mrs E Bell:** Mr Speaker, following the comments of the Deputy First Minister about transparency in relation to the departmental Committees, would you be indulgent enough to let me know if the budget of £300,000 that has been quoted for the Civic Forum will be communicated to the Committee of the Centre?

**The Deputy First Minister:** That is a notional figure that has been mooted by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to set up and ensure the initial stages of the Civic Forum. That of course is not its budget. When its budget is being decided, it will no doubt be done through representations to the Department of Finance and Personnel and referred to the Committee of the Centre.

**Mr Speaker:** The sprightly Deputy First Minister was so quick to his feet that I did not have an opportunity of ruling that the question was out of order because it was a supplementary to the previous question. That is a reflection on the agility, not only verbally but physically, of the Deputy First Minister.

## European Union Matters

8. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister if any meetings are planned with the British Government to discuss European Union matters. (AQO 299/99)

**The First Minister (Mr Trimble):** There are regular meetings at both ministerial and official level at which European Union matters are discussed. A ministerial group for European co-ordination meets every four to six weeks in the Cabinet Office to co-ordinate and promote Government policy on Europe, which includes Ministers from the devolved regions. The next meeting is scheduled for 27 June. Joint ministerial Committees provide a forum for all the devolved regions to discuss matters of interest with the Government. There will be a joint ministerial Committee on European Union matters.

In addition, individual Ministers meet their counterparts regularly to discuss their own policy areas, many of which have an EU dimension. EU policy is an excepted matter, but, in recognition of the fact that many devolved areas have a major EU dimension, the Government have

acknowledged the need to involve the devolved Administrations in the formulation, negotiation and implementation of policy towards the European Union. This is reflected in the EU concordat. The concordat also recognises the role of the North/South Ministerial Council in considering the EU dimension of relevant matters, although each Government retains sovereignty on the issue.

The Deputy First Minister and I, accompanied by Mr Durkan, will be in Brussels for a day of engagements on Wednesday of this week. We will be meeting President Prodi, Commissioners Barnier, Byrne and Kinnock, as well as a number of Members of the European Parliament. The main purpose of the visit is structural funds, but it is our objective that the Northern Ireland Administration establish strong direct relations with the European institutions. This is an issue that we will be discussing with Sir Stephen Wall, the United Kingdom's permanent representative to the European Union.

**Mr Gallagher:** I note from the First Minister's comments that regular meetings take place on these issues.

In 1996 the British Government opted out of a valuable EU subsidy scheme for schools milk. Consequently, children lost an entitlement as EU citizens to subsidised milk used for catering in all school kitchens and subsidised milk in all secondary schools. Will the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister put pressure on the British Government to reinstate these subsidies? Does the First Minister agree that the reinstatement of this scheme would make a significant contribution to the health and well-being of children here and that the resultant increase in milk consumption would also benefit the hard-pressed agriculture industry? The reinstatement of this scheme would involve no extra financial implications for this devolved Assembly, and it could remove the threat of closure facing some school kitchens, especially in rural areas.

**The First Minister:** The Member, like nearly everyone else here, will have benefited from free school milk. I certainly take the point that he makes with regard to the benefit to the milk industry and the agriculture industry generally. On the specifics of the matter, I cannot comment. I am not aware of the detail of the decision in 1996, but we will look at the matter that the hon Member has raised and consider what we should do about it with our counterparts.

**Mr Taylor:** Is the First Minister aware that our neighbour, the Republic of Ireland, is now suffering the highest inflation rate for 18 years — the highest level of inflation in Euroland? It has the potential now to reach nearly 6% and kill the Celtic tiger. Will he bring to the attention of Her Majesty's Government the implications

of surrendering control over interest rates and thereby exchange rates?

**The First Minister:** It has been observed that within what is now called Euroland, namely those countries which are part of the European single currency, the "one size fits all" interest rate is a matter which can cause problems for particular countries. Whether that is the case with the Republic of Ireland, I am not in a position to comment on at the moment. I am quite sure, in view of the comments that have been made in recent days, and particularly by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the Government are weighing, and will continue to weigh, very carefully the economic pros and cons of the single currency.

**Mr McNamee:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. My question relates very much to the question that has been just asked. Britain's remaining outside the European monetary system is causing particular difficulties for businesses and individuals in the border areas of this part of Ireland because of the continuing fluctuation rate of the euro. Will the First Minister consider, in his discussions with the Government, the difficulties that businesses and individuals endure?

**The First Minister:** The Member is referring to the difficulties encountered in border areas because of the differences in exchange rates. Of course it is not just a matter of the exchange rate; different fiscal regimes operate too. The Member will be aware of the very considerable disadvantage that exists with regard to petrol stations and other retailers where there are strong and significant differences between prices on both sides of the border. This is not strictly an EU matter, rather it is one for our national Government, and we have raised it with them on a number of occasions. We have explored the possibility of trying to have some sort of relief, consistent with EU policy. However, EU policy is quite a disincentive on this. There is a danger that any provision made to assist business in border areas will constitute state aid.

We have also raised with the Government the problems caused by the extensive amount of crime that has become associated with this and the extensive racketeering that is going on in these areas. This is resulting in the loss of hundreds of millions of pounds of revenue and is seriously distorting the operation of the economy and society in the areas affected.

## Decommissioning

9. **Rev Dr Ian Paisley** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister if any reports have been received on progress made by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning since the latest statement of the IRA, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 298/99)

**The First Minister:** The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) was appointed by the British and Irish Governments and makes reports to the Governments rather than to this body. No report has been made since 11 February of this year. In a letter of 15 May, the Secretary of State, Mr Mandelson, said

“We expect the IICD to make regular reports, whose content must be for the IICD to determine. They will be published promptly by the two Governments.”

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Can the First Minister indicate the timetable that he thinks should be set for decommissioning? When does he believe it should start? When will the international monitors commence their work? When will they report progress, and when will they complete their work? Does he not now recognise that he is being taken for a ride by the IRA?

**The First Minister:** I am not going to give any timetable, which would be entirely speculative. I refer the hon Member to the statement made on 6 May in which the IRA leadership referred to putting in place within weeks a confidence-building measure to confirm that its weapons remain secure.

3.00 pm

Of course, the hon Member can work out that the phrase “within weeks” contains a time dimension, and I am sure that he can see that the undertaking by the IRA is one that needs to be redeemed in the very near future.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** The First Minister stated on Thursday that he was awaiting a confidence-building measure by the Provisional IRA, in line with what he supposed to be its obligations to Gen de Chastelain. Were his comments more to do with the fact that his party’s executive was about to meet, rather than with the fact that he realised that it is not known whether decommissioning will actually ever take place?

**The First Minister:** I covered that matter in my previous question when I referred to the IRA statement that it would put the specifics of the matter in place within weeks. On Thursday, I was replying to a question, just as I am doing today.

**Mr Speaker:** The time for these questions is up.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We have these questions on the Order Paper, and it is strange that the last question was answered in the first group of questions. You are well aware, Mr Speaker, that when Ministers in the House of Commons group questions together, they still answer the same number that are usually answered at Question Time. It is entirely unfair for a Member in twelfth place to have his question answered in the first batch. It is possible therefore to get round the system even if a question is put down late, as long as it is similar to earlier

questions. That is why there was such a long list. In the House of Commons, only three or four questions would be grouped together — never more.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member will be aware from a scan of the list that it was not that the last question was answered first, although he would be the first to admit that, on occasion, the last may be first. Eight questions out of 12 covered the same issue. I took a number of questions — I did not call all those Members who had put down questions on the list, even for supplementaries. I ensured that every question at least got asked, was allowed a supplementary from the questioner and at least one further question. That is the most that I can do. As long as Members exercise increasing discipline by phrasing their questions and answers as concisely as possible, we can get through more questions. It would be extremely unusual in the House of Commons for two thirds of all questions on the list to be on the same subject. We must not take up the time of the Minister for Regional Development, who will answer questions for 30 minutes.

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Dromore Bypass

1. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister for Regional Development to indicate when work is likely to commence on the Dromore bypass. (AQO 291/99)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr P Robinson):** The Dromore bypass was opened in 1972. I therefore assume that this question relates to the proposal to construct an underpass at Hillsborough Road, Dromore. Subject to the successful acquisition of land and the completion of the necessary statutory procedures — without the need for a public inquiry — the scheme is expected to commence in January 2001.

**Mr Poots:** I welcome the fact that the work is scheduled to commence in January 2001, as the project has already been delayed. Has consideration been given to incorporating the Milebush Road into the current proposal? That would further alleviate the traffic crossing the carriageway and would perhaps save more lives than the initial project will do.

**Mr P Robinson:** I understand that there would be difficulties in achieving design standards at Milebush Road, and the increased costs would have to be considered. The real benefit comes from the scheme at Hillsborough Road, and the Department is satisfied that that is the best value for money, and a scheme that will bring the best results in the local area.



## A8 (Belfast-Larne Road)

2. **Mr R Hutchinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the current position in regard to the capital improvement programme (1999-2001) for the A8 Belfast to Larne route, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 310/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I am pleased to confirm that, following extensive consultations with district councils and the general public, my Department's Roads Service has identified a £10 million package of improvements to the A8 route. These include: a roundabout at the A8/Doagh Road junction; dualling a 1.5 mile stretch of the carriageway from Doagh Road to Coleman's Corner; a roundabout at Coleman's Corner; a roundabout at the junction of the A8 and the A57 Templepatrick Road; a link road from the A57/A8 roundabout to the Carrickfergus Road/Straid Road junction; speed reduction measures in Ballynure; climbing lanes both north and south of Ballynure; a roundabout at Antiville; and a roundabout at Millbrook with a free-flow lane.

The Roads Service is about to initiate the various statutory procedures. The environmental statement is due to be published on the twenty-eighth of this month. This will be followed by the publication of the direction order in October and the notice of intention to make a vesting order in early 2001. Subject to the successful completion of the statutory procedures, and assuming that no public inquiries are necessary, the improvements could commence in mid-2001.

I recognise the importance of the A8 as part of the trans-European road network and acknowledge the benefit this development will have for Northern Ireland's links to external markets.

**Mr Speaker:** I am not sure whether the Member could possibly have a supplementary question after that, but I will call him anyway.

**Mr R Hutchinson:** And there's more.

This announcement will be welcomed by the people of Larne, and of East Antrim in general. The A8 capital improvement scheme is long overdue. I welcome the Minister's commitment to the crucial aspect of this scheme: greater road safety. I look forward to the commencement of improvement work without further delay and thank the Minister for giving this commitment to the people of East Antrim.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I was right to be uncertain about the possibility of a supplementary question. If the Member has a concise supplementary to put, so be it. Otherwise I will move to the next questioner.

**Mr R Hutchinson:** Does the Minister agree — Sorry. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr P Robinson:** The only thing I would add is that the timetable I set out is subject to the need for public inquiries. If an inquiry becomes necessary, the dates could slip by six months or so.

**Mr K Robinson:** Does the Minister agree that, welcome as the proposals for the A8 are — and I have lobbied for the upgrading of this road for over 110 years — the real solution to freeing up the A8 for strategic traffic back and forth to the port of Larne lies in the proactive development of a rejuvenated commuter service on both the Larne-Belfast and Bleach Green-Antrim railway lines, and in the urgent completion of the short stretch of the A2 between Jordanstown and Greenisland? It is the inadequacy of the other transport links in East Antrim that is forcing commuter traffic on to the A8, and that will nullify all the arrangements that the Minister has announced today.

**Mr Speaker:** I draw the attention of Members to the fact that a question is something that requires a response: yes, no, or some information. It is not an opportunity to make a statement of opinion, however well-informed. It is extremely difficult for the Minister to respond if there is no clear question. I am not clear what the question was, but nevertheless I will give the Minister an opportunity to reply.

**Mr P Robinson:** I think I recognised a question there about railways. During the period of suspension, Minister of State, Adam Ingram, initiated a task force to look at a number of railway-related matters. I expect the task force to report as a matter of urgency on the whole rail network. That brings us to the issue of funding. I hope that I will have the Member's support when I look for increased transportation funding within the Northern Ireland budget.

**Mr Beggs:** Is the Minister aware that over 16,500 vehicles per day travel along the A8; that substantial redevelopment continues in Larne west; that Stena Sealink are returning to Larne in the autumn and that the Millbrook and Antiville junctions are becoming increasingly more dangerous accident black-spots? Will the Minister enable improvements to these junctions to proceed independently should planning delays occur elsewhere?

**Mr P Robinson:** Yes, I can give that assurance. There are a number of separate features to the A8 route proposals, so if one or two of them are slowed down because of statutory processes, or because of inquiries, it will not hold us back on the others.

## Sewage Treatment (Crossgar and Killyleagh)

3. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment he has made of consultation between the Water Service and the local



community concerning the transfer of sewage from Crossgar to Killyleagh, and if he will make a statement.

(AQO 276/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** This scheme was developed during the period of direct rule. The proposals to transfer waste water from Crossgar for treatment at Killyleagh were explained to public representatives who enquired about the scheme, but there was no direct consultation with the local community. I am aware of the concerns expressed by local public representatives and residents about the impact of the scheme on the Killyleagh area. I am determined to ensure that the Water Service is as open as possible about its development proposals and about the impact that they will have on local communities. I have asked Robert Martin, the chief executive of the Water Service, to consider how, under devolution, we can enhance our consultation arrangements with local representatives and, through them, with the public on issues such as this.

**Mr McCarthy:** I am delighted to hear the Minister say that his Department is going to take more notice of the local community. Killyleagh may well have extra capacity at present. We are aware though that new developments are taking place all the time in both Crossgar and Killyleagh, and, indeed, neighbouring areas. Apart from the apparent withholding of public information to residents of both areas, and in view of the minimalist savings per year, surely the Department should —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members must be aware that the purpose of the exercise is to ask questions.

**Mr McCarthy:** It is coming.

**Mr Speaker:** So is Christmas. Please put the question and give the Minister a chance to respond.

**Mr McCarthy:** Will the Minister agree to provide a modern sewerage system for Crossgar and Killyleagh, thereby fulfilling the wishes of the local community and, most importantly, the local representatives?

**Mr P Robinson:** I am not sure to what extent the local representatives use the sewerage system in Killyleagh or Crossgar, but if we take into account all the housing proposals for Killyleagh and Crossgar up to the year 2021, the Killyleagh works will be operating at approximately 70% of its capacity. There is still considerable room for further development. Indeed, Killyleagh could probably double in size, given the capacity of the works.

The Department is well satisfied that the standard of the Killyleagh works is satisfactory for the purposes of the area. There will be no additional problems in terms of the environment. No new structures are being erected as a result of this proposal, and although I was not there when the decision was taken, I do not believe that I

would have taken a different one. I might have gone about it differently and had more consultation, but I suspect, with respect to the hon Member, that this is the sensible decision both from the practical and financial points of view.

**Mr Taylor:** I am very disappointed that the Minister would have taken exactly the same decision to pump sewage from Crossgar into the Killyleagh sewerage works. Is he aware that the net saving will only be £15,000 for each of the next 20 years? Is he aware that the decision was taken on the basis of there being only 335 new houses in Killyleagh in the next 20 years, whereas applications have already been made for 1000 houses over the next 10 years and some have been granted? Is he aware that for Killyleagh a new tannery has already been given planning permission?

Finally, is he aware that the Killyleagh sewage plant is on the flood plain of the Dibney river? With the advent of global warming there is likely to be flooding there, and with the Crossgar sewage going into Killyleagh, the works there will be flooded several times per year. Environmentally it is bad for Killyleagh, and it restricts growth. Does the Minister therefore agree with the request of the Killyleagh Development Association that he should immediately review the decision of the former direct-rule Minister?

3.15 pm

**Mr P Robinson:** The immediate saving would be about £250,000 in capital costs, as well as the ongoing annual savings that have been referred to. With regard to capacity, if the right hon Gentleman had listened to my previous answer he would have heard me saying that I had taken into account all of the prospective applications up to 2021. Therefore I had taken into account the building programme to which he refers. Even with that building programme, and the building programme for Crossgar, it still only takes the capacity up to 70%. On the particular proposal in relation to Killyleagh, I am, of course, happy to receive any delegation. I have no note of any elected representatives asking to see me on this matter, but I am happy to speak to them about the issue and to put the various facts before them.

### Strategic Development Plan

4. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will undertake to ensure continuity of policy in relation to the implementation of the Department's draft strategic development document 'Shaping our Future'. (AQO 271/99)

**Mr P Robinson** I am happy to give the undertaking being sought by the Member for West Tyrone. The Strategic Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, which is the legislative basis for preparing the regional

development strategy, includes the provision which requires all Government Departments to have regard to the regional development strategy. Under the legislation, my Department is responsible for co-ordinating implementation of the strategy, and I have invited views on the need for new machinery at regional and sub-regional levels to implement the strategy and to provide clear leadership in ensuring effective and co-ordinated action. Once the regional development strategy is adopted as policy, it will be reviewed every five years to ensure that it continues to meet the development needs of the region.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank the Minister for the outline of the answer to my question. Given the whole problem of public transport in Northern Ireland, and, in particular, the poor state of our current railway system, how does the Minister propose to impress upon his ministerial Colleagues the need to find the £2 billion that is required to improve matters? Can the Minister outline how he foresees the negotiations going to try to obtain this £2 billion to allow a modern railway system to be put in place over the next 10 years?

**Mr P Robinson:** The transportation needs of Northern Ireland go beyond the railways but certainly include them. Roads and bus transport are included as well. In a public interview, I have indicated that I regard a figure of about £2 billion being necessary over the next 10 years. There are a number of possible ways that money could be raised. One of them is if the United Kingdom's Transport Minister proceeds, on the basis that the press are indicating, to initiate a strategy of expenditure in the region of £140 billion for the United Kingdom as a whole — half of which would come from the private sector. If that were to happen, then, using the Barnett formula, something in the region of £2 billion, believe it or not, would come to Northern Ireland over the next 10 years. This is, of course, providing that the Barnett formula is used, and that the money, on arrival in Northern Ireland, is not diverted to other uses.

As far as the negotiations in Northern Ireland are concerned, I have already outlined a case to the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on the needs. There are clear immediate needs for funding in the transport section of my Department, which I hope can be met. I have already spoken in detail with the Regional Development Committee; I have submitted papers to the office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, and I have taken every available opportunity, publicly and privately, to press the case for more funding for transportation.

**Mr McFarland:** The regional development strategy has many fine ideas but the financial cost is likely to be heavy. How does the Minister see public/private partnerships fitting in with his policy and is he considering, for example, a privately funded rapid rail

transit system for Greater Belfast to alleviate the present rail crisis, particularly on the Bangor-Belfast line?

**Mr P Robinson:** The Member is right. There is likely to be an identification of very considerable costs, costs not simply to the Department for Regional Development. The regional strategy deals with the whole swathe of Government and everyday life. Therefore in the implementation of that regional strategy there will be pressure on the budgets of a number of Departments. Regarding those matters which relate to the Department for Regional Development, we would identify transport as being an area where, clearly, significant improvement has to be made. The task force which I mentioned earlier will be looking at a number of options in relation to railway — I suppose the Member is interested specifically in the railway line from Bangor to Belfast.

I have no doubt that one aspect of its consideration is what the future for that railway line might be and how it might be improved.

### Regional Strategic Development Plan

5. **Mr C Murphy** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps have been taken to ensure that the regional strategic development plan has been equality proofed. (AQO 306/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The underlying objectives in the preparation of the draft regional strategic framework clearly included the issue of our divided society and the need for a balanced approach for future development. The draft published in December 1998 was prepared after extensive consultation within and outside Government. Equity considerations were addressed by an inter-departmental steering group including representation from the Central Community Relations Unit, which at that time was responsible for equality issues. The final regional development strategy will recognise the importance of strategic issues such as equality of opportunity. The spacial development elements of the strategy currently being worked up will seek to achieve balances between urban and rural and east and west so as to provide for equality of opportunity for everyone. The regional development strategy has been included in my Department's draft equality scheme, and equality impact assessments will be carried out on the regional development strategy and its main components, the spacial development strategy and the strategic planning guidelines. In addition, equality impact assessments will be undertaken on a number of regional planning policy statements, which will be produced within the framework established by the strategy.

**Mr C Murphy:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the importance of the regional development

strategy in that it will govern regional development in this part of Ireland for the next 25 years, and given the opportunity it therefore presents to attempt to address some of the unequal development that has taken place here over the decades, particularly on an east/west basis, why does the draft equality scheme for the Department propose to impact assess the regional development strategy in year five rather than in year one?

**Mr P Robinson:** First of all, I am happy that the draft regional strategic framework was given a warm welcome right across the Province, east and west, and received very supportive comments from councils of all political backgrounds. Regarding the equality scheme, the Member concerned is on the Regional Development Committee and will have a first-hand opportunity to deal with the equality scheme and any aspect of it which he believes is not appropriate.

### Trust Ports

7. **Mr Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development to introduce legislation to extend the powers of trust ports. (AQO 261/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I am currently developing proposals aimed at extending the powers of trust ports in Northern Ireland. This is a complex and sizeable task, however, and the intention is to bring forward proposals for consideration by the Assembly at the earliest possible date. I anticipate these proposals taking the form of both draft primary and subordinate legislation. In taking the task forward I am anxious to work in partnership with the trust ports and will be encouraging them to assist by reviewing their existing local legislation.

**Mr Bradley:** Does the Minister agree with the statement in 'Shaping our Future' that Warrenpoint port will have a significant role to play in the future economics of the eastern seaboard?

**Mr P Robinson:** It would be easy for me to say "Yes" and sit down. However, last week I visited Warrenpoint and was impressed with this compact port. The managers of the port also impressed me — they have overcome difficulties in recent years in a way that many other ports would admire. The loss of business, because of the removal of one of their main customers, was something that would hit any port hard, but they have managed to overcome this difficulty and to increase the usage of the port to a higher level than previously. I recognise that it is an important element of the regional strategic framework. Its importance is identified in the draft strategic plan and is recognised by my Department. It is also a very important element of the economy in that area.

**Mr Dallat:** Will the Minister assure the House that those appointed to trust ports are properly qualified for

the tasks they undertake? Will he also assure us that the appointments are properly advertised and that all aspects of the equality legislation are complied with?

**Mr P Robinson:** I know where the Member is coming from. There are two elements in relation to trust ports in the legislation that we are considering: one is to extend the commercial ability and powers of trust ports; and the other is to make them more accountable. I have to look at a number of options for making them more accountable. Some argue that greater council representation might be helpful in that respect, and, when considering the issue, I may look at how well Coleraine has worked out.

### Flags of Paramilitary Organisations

8. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he will take to ensure that flags of illegal paramilitary organisations are removed from the Department's property. (AQO 278/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I do not condone any unauthorised use of Roads Service Property. The Roads Service will remove any materials such as flags, secretarian symbols and graffiti that have been displayed illegally on its property and are a danger to road users. In other instances where there is no danger, and in spite of there being no legislative requirement to do so, we will seek to remove such material on the advice of the RUC and where there is strong local support. Experience has shown that acting without local support is likely to lead to a proliferation of such material and put at risk the safety of staff tasked with the removal work. There is also the question of cost. When the Roads Service budget cannot meet its essential maintenance obligations, it is difficult to justify using resources on other activities which do not cause a danger to road users.

**Mrs E Bell:** I thank the Minister for his answer. The question of local support is something that is not as clear as it might be. It is a source of disquiet among people who wake up in the morning to find flags on telegraph poles and the roads festooned with different colours of paint and bunting. Will the Minister assure me that his Department will be in liaison with other bodies such as the RUC and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive over this issue?

**Mr P Robinson:** People react in different ways to the flying of flags, whether in their areas or in other areas. When the Department receives a complaint on these matters it contacts the RUC and any other relevant body involved. However, I am sure that the hon Lady will agree with me that it would be far better if people were to show allegiance to their country by flying the Union flag rather than through the use of paramilitary symbols.



3.30 pm

**Mrs E Bell:** I certainly would.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** May I ask the Minister for Regional Development if the Union flag or the Ulster flag were to cause an obstruction — I cannot remember the exact words he used — would he remove it.

**Mr P Robinson:** The requirement relates to a danger to road users. It would be ludicrous if the Department were to ignore a danger to road users when it has a duty of care. It might put a flag further up a flagpole or lamp post. It certainly would not be in the position of leaving a danger to road users. I think that would be understood by the local community.

### **Omagh, Newtownstewart and Strabane Bypasses**

9. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the completion dates for stage 3 of the Omagh bypass, the Newtownstewart bypass and the Strabane bypass and to confirm that funding is not dependent upon the sale of Belfast harbour, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 293/99).

**Mr P Robinson:** Subject to successful completion of the necessary statutory procedures and the availability of funds, the schemes are scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2002.

The Chancellor's 1998 investment package for Northern Ireland provided additional funding for programmes including roads, schools and housing. These additional funds included an amount of £70 million from the expected proceeds from the sale of the port of Belfast. If the sale does not proceed, it is possible that there will be an impact on the roads programme. This will be a matter for consideration by Ministers at the appropriate time.

The development of these schemes will ease the flow of through traffic on the Londonderry to Ballygawley route and provide benefits to local communities through the removal of traffic from town centres.

**Mr Gibson:** I thank the Minister. By 2002 we will be looking for a much-improved trans-European route. Would he meet again with the sub-regional district councils of Strabane, Omagh, Cookstown, Dungannon and Enniskillen, since they supplied many documents relating to 'Shaping our Future'? His visit to ICBAN was appreciated, and since £20 million is involved on our side of the border, would he ensure that that £20 million is spent on our side of the border and is not devalued into punts?

**Mr P Robinson:** Of course, I am happy to meet district councils and deputations from district councils. Indeed, I have probably met deputations and been to

district councils in about two thirds of the Province already. I would be happy to meet with them. I also welcome the interest that councils west of the Bann have shown in terms of the regional strategic framework. That framework sets out the importance of Londonderry as the second city and recognises the importance of having proper road corridors to and from Londonderry. There are also very clear indicators in the framework of the importance of roads going in a southerly direction as well.

For all of those reasons, I think that if the framework is adopted, people on the main road corridors can look forward to considerable improvement on their roads. That should help in terms of the access to local communities and by having significant value in terms of the economic regeneration in those areas.

**Mr Speaker:** The time for questions to this Minister is up.

## **THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Enterprise Parks**

1. **Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of the Environment if he will introduce legislation to facilitate demands for the provision of enterprise parks in the vicinity of rural towns and villages. (AQO 260/99)

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster):** Proposals for enterprise parks in the vicinity of rural towns and villages would come from the private or the community sector. My Department deals with such proposals in accordance with normal planning procedures. Whenever possible, my Department would consider such proposals in the interests of economic regeneration of the rural community sympathetically.

**Mr Bradley:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I would ask those employed in drawing up area plans to take note of his views. Does the Minister agree that his Department will have to liaise with other Departments such as Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department for Regional Development and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development if a proper rural strategy is to be put in place?

**Mr Foster:** Lead responsibility for rural planning strategy now rests with the Department for Regional Development, although my Department is responsible for taking account of that strategy in its development planning and development control activities. The strategy has not, as it were, a monopoly on any Department. I agree with the Member's point that other Departments have important responsibilities in relation to rural areas as well. I also agree that discussion and co-operation between the relevant Departments is an



important element of devising and implementing any future strategy.

**Mr Savage:** I welcome the statements from the Minister. Small towns and villages have been allowed to expand and develop, yet no thought or consideration has been put into the planning of leisure and recreation facilities. Will the Department of the Environment look favourably on positive proposals coming forward and help relax planning controls?

**Mr Foster:** The area plan process provides for the identification of zones to be set aside for commercial and industrial purposes. There is no need for new legislation to provide for enterprise parks. Our planning policy provides for them. We know what our planning policies are, and we use them when assessing any particular application.

### Planning Legislation

2. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of the Environment if he will undertake to introduce legislation to curtail the trend towards demolition of houses to make room for apartment developments in South Belfast and elsewhere, and if he will make a statement.

(AQO 313/99)

**Mr Foster:** I am considering making more use of conservation area designations. This would prevent uncontrolled demolition in areas such as South Belfast. This, of course, would be subject to consultation with the Historic Buildings Council and district councils.

**Dr McDonnell:** I welcome the Minister's comments. I understand that there is an effort to reinforce planning legislation through these conservation areas to ensure that the wanton destruction of good quality homes in neighbourhoods does not continue. Is it possible to ensure that we begin to evolve a comprehensive plan that will develop the city to the north and east rather than to the south and west where it is overspilling continuously and will any funds be made available? I know from personal experience of the built heritage section of the Department that funds are very scant, and any useful move will require funding.

**Mr Foster:** Funding is a problem at this time. We are all aware that my Department is under-resourced in many ways. We have a commitment for grant aid to the value of £4 million for help with the built heritage but an annual allocation of only about £1.7 million to deal with it. So there is a moratorium at present. I am aware of the concern among many Members representing various parts of Northern Ireland, and South Belfast in particular, that the Planning Service appears not to respond to property speculation in their areas. The present-day issues are these: the population is increasing; people tend to set up house at a younger age than before; and, while high-density housing has a

contribution to make, some apartment developments are seen to have had a detrimental effect on the character of their areas. These are, I agree, complex issues and I hope to be able to address some of them in the near future.

**Dr Birnie:** Does the Minister agree, in the light of the fact that apartment development leads to a higher population density and use of cars, that there needs to be much closer co-operation between the Planning Service and the Roads Service when applications for development are being considered?

**Mr Foster:** I agree. It is absolutely necessary to co-operate with different Departments. As I said earlier, no one Department has a monopoly on provision. We work together. We need to work together, and we need to discuss these issues because there are problems. Of that there is no doubt. We will certainly be working together to try to alleviate the problems referred to.

**Mr S Wilson:** In the light of the comments that Mr Foster has made to the last two Members who spoke, will he explain the impact that this is likely to have on the target which his Department has set for providing at least 40% to 50% of the new homes required for the Greater Belfast area on brownfield sites within the city boundary?

**Mr Foster:** As I said in an earlier answer, these issues are complex, and I hope to be able to address some of them in the very near future. I accept the hon Member's point, but there are difficulties galore. My Department will take each area into consideration to ensure that we provide where we can and that difficult situations are assessed to take into consideration the points made.

**Ms Morrice:** Does the Minister agree that important parts of our built environment and heritage are being demolished because of a lack of legislation in this area? Has the Minister any intention of doing something in the meantime, such as spot listing, to ensure that our heritage is not destroyed in this way?

**Mr Foster:** Yes. Plans are afoot at this time to control the issues to which the Member referred. At one time we identified areas of townscape character, and a guidance note was published for each development. However, the areas of townscape character designation do not provide protection from demolition in the same way that a statutorily designated conservation area does. Unauthorised demolition in a conservation area is a criminal offence. The Department is now considering greater use of conservation-area designations to protect buildings from demolition. In addition, it is considering introducing legislation which would bring demolition within the meaning of development for the purposes of requiring planning permission. Currently, demolition

does not, in most instances, require planning permission, so we are taking steps to alleviate that.

**Mr Ford:** I welcome the Minister's response to Alasdair McDonnell and Jane Morrice on the virtues of preserving older buildings. Is the Minister aware of the recent death of Mr Hyndman Milliken, a constituent of mine, who played a major part in the renovation of the historic building we are in today?

**Mr Foster:** Yes. I was indeed saddened to learn of the recent passing of Mr Milliken, and I am sure I speak on behalf of all Members when I express our sympathy to his wife and family circle. I know he spent many long hours on the gold and silver gilding work in this Chamber during the recent refurbishment of the Building. The craftsmanship which we see around us on the window and door moulding and the ceiling is testament to his skill and ability. It is, indeed, a lasting tribute, and we regret his passing, which is a real loss both to his wife and family circle and to society in general.

### Road Safety Officers

3. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of the Environment how many road safety officers there are in Northern Ireland and how this figure compares per capita with the other regions in the United Kingdom. (AQO 300/99)

**Mr Foster:** At present, 11 road safety education officers are employed by the Department in Northern Ireland. This represents a ratio of one road safety education officer per 154,000 people. This compares unfavourably to the ratio of one officer per 90,000 people in Great Britain. A regional breakdown for Great Britain is not available.

**Ms Lewsley:** Considering the number of road traffic-calming measures that have already been taken in Northern Ireland, and those ongoing — many of them in large built-up communities — can the Minister tell us if his Department has any plans to increase the number of road safety officers and provide a more comprehensive education programme for our schools?

**Mr Foster:** We are all aware that road safety education officers provide extremely valuable practical support for teachers in schools across Northern Ireland. I am currently seeking additional resources to increase the number of road safety education officers to 18, in line with the per-capita average for Great Britain. I appreciate the support of the Assembly Environment Committee in trying to secure these additional resources.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** Does the Minister acknowledge that when the Environment Committee was dealing with matters for extra funding, they targeted this as the number-one priority in view of the many accidents and deaths on our roads? Does he agree

that many of the present number of road safety education officers are totally exhausted and that there is an urgent need to increase their number? Will he ensure that the £0.215 million necessary to employ an adequate numbers of these officers is activated immediately?

3.45 pm

**Mr Foster:** Yes, indeed. As part of wider public expenditure cuts, the number of road safety education officers in Northern Ireland was reduced progressively from 16 in 1991 to 11 in 1998. We are currently seeking additional resources to increase this figure. These officers are of great value to the community in general. It is something which is foremost in our minds. It may not be the absolute priority, but it certainly runs neck and neck with planning, which is a big problem so far as we are concerned. I agree with the hon Member that the number of road tragedies is appalling at this time. I might add that 80 road deaths to date this year compared to 54 at the end of May last year is not acceptable at all.

**Mr Dallat:** I welcome the additional number of road safety education officers and the Minister's own personal commitment to improvements in road safety. Can we expect him to bring before the House, at an early stage, a comprehensive plan for dealing with the overall problem of carnage on the roads which, over the last three decades, has claimed more lives than the troubles?

**Mr Foster:** Yes indeed, it is very much foremost in our minds. In conjunction with other groupings and the RUC we will be bringing out a road safety plan in the early autumn. This is a very important issue; something we have not overlooked; something which is vitally important to all because it affects people right across the community. The present death rate is totally and entirely unacceptable, and we cannot sit back and do nothing about it. However, no matter what resources we put in to improving the condition of the roads, the vital issue is the person behind the wheel. We must get the message across to these individuals. The figures are appalling.

### Waste Disposal (Cross-Border Bodies)

4. **Mr A Doherty** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that, in order to ensure the establishment of an integrated network of waste disposal installations, he will take account of and promote the work being undertaken by cross-border bodies such as the North-West Region Group, the Irish Central Border Area Network, the East Ireland Border Committee and others. (AQO 264/99)

**Mr Foster:** I am happy to provide this information. My Department has already supported the work of the North-West Region Cross-Border Group by providing

grant aid through the European structural funds towards the development of a waste-management strategy. Any cross-border co-operation must, of course, take account of the waste-management strategy for Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom management plan for the export and import of wastes. The United Kingdom management plan is currently under review. I will ensure that Northern Ireland's geography and the scope for cross-border initiatives are given due consideration in the review. The scope for improved waste management is also one of the issues identified for cross-border co-operation through the North/South Ministerial Council.

**Mr A Doherty** I thank the Minister for his reply. It is reassuring that he appreciates the contribution that the bodies referred to have already made, and are continuing to make, to the development and implementation of an effective waste-management strategy. In fact, in a number of ways, we are ahead of the game and very conscious of the need for partnership between all key sectors — something which is stressed quite often in the strategy document. I was prompted to ask this question because the waste-management strategy, excellent in many other ways, makes scarcely any reference to the relationships which must be developed between Northern Ireland partnerships and their relevant counterparts in the Republic of Ireland. The closest level of regional co-operation is essential, and for this reason I take comfort from the fact that the strategy gives district councils

“flexibility to form partnerships in accordance with their specific circumstances”.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I urge the Member to put his question.

**Mr A Doherty:** Owing to a lack information on the management strategy I felt that a slight preamble was necessary.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member's explanation is intriguing, but it is still out of order.

**Mr A Doherty:** I would be very happy to affirm a one-word answer from the Minister so long as it is a positive one. Can I be assured that the undertakings given in the waste-management document will be honoured with regard to cross-border co-operation on this important matter?

**Mr Foster:** I confirm that there is no hesitation about cross-border groupings within the two different jurisdictions. The grouping together of councils in border areas allows sensible co-operation to take place, meets EU requirements on waste management and enables economies of scale to be achieved.

I confirm that the waste plans required under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 can be developed for cross-border groupings of

councils, provided that they meet the requirements of the Northern Ireland waste-management strategy, which is a requirement of the European Landfill directive. The costs of waste management arise not from new waste-management strategy but from European directives on landfill sites.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member got more than the one word answer that he was looking for.

**Mr McHugh:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell us his plans for the cross-border element of waste management, recycling and the effects of pollution? Is there, or will there be, genuine co-operation and joint structures in place to deal with these issues on an all-island basis?

**Mr Foster:** I have just said that there is no hesitation whatsoever about cross-border co-operation within the two separate jurisdictions. I confirm again that the waste plans required under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 can be developed for cross-border groupings of councils, provided that they meet the requirements of the Northern Ireland waste-management strategy that we have issued.

**Mr Hussey:** I am sure that the Minister, with his background, is well aware of the heavy costs involved when dealing with waste disposal. Does the Minister agree that a greater percentage of landfill tax should be retained in Northern Ireland, rather than allowing it to go back to the central Exchequer, provided that it is spent on proper waste disposal facilities? Will he lobby for that proposal?

**Mr Foster:** I certainly welcome the hon Member's suggestion. We could use the finances, but that is beyond our remit, and we have no control over such matters.

## Mallusk Landfill Site

5. **Mr Dalton** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm his intention to hold a public inquiry in relation to planning application number U/1995/0046 by UK Waste Ltd for an extension of the landfill site at Cottonmount Quarry, Mallusk. (AQO 273/99)

11. **Mr McClelland** asked the Minister of the Environment how many objections, representations and queries the Department has received regarding the proposed landfill site at Mallusk, Co Antrim, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 308/99)

16. **Rev Dr William McCrea** asked the Minister of the Environment if he will undertake to reverse the decision of the Planning Service to approve the landfill site at Mallusk, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 314/99)



**Mr Foster:** Mr Speaker, with your permission, I shall take questions 5, 11 and 16 together.

**Mr S Wilson:** Is this a snub?

**Mr Foster:** Not really — you get them often, but not this time.

The planning application is currently awaiting my decision. I recently met objectors and Newtownabbey Borough Council, and I hope to meet the applicant company soon. About 100 objections were raised against the proposal. Before reaching a conclusion about the way forward, I shall visit the site. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to make a statement now.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** Bearing in mind that —

**Mr Speaker:** Apologies to Mr Dalton. He may ask a supplementary question before Dr McCrea's contribution.

**Mr Dalton:** On this occasion, I take precedence over Mr McCrea. Will the Minister confirm that it is in his Department's power to call a public inquiry, such as the one to which I referred earlier? Will he undertake to give me in writing a legal opinion that his Department has such power? If he decides that it is not his decision —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have to advise the Member and the House that it is not in order to ask for a legal opinion to be provided by a Minister. That is not a valid question to ask.

**Mr Dalton:** Will the Minister undertake to ask his Department to say whether such a public inquiry would be possible? If not, will the Minister undertake to issue a new notice of opinion, so that the applicant can call a public appeals commission hearing on the matter, which can then be dealt with by a third party body?

**Mr Foster:** There is provision to call for a public inquiry to take place, if necessary. I am aware of the calls for such an inquiry but, at present, I wish to reserve my position on the matter. As I said earlier, I have met different people, including hon Members, the Campaign against Landfill at Mallusk (CALM) and Newtownabbey Borough Council. I intend meeting the applicant, UK Waste Management Ltd shortly, and I shall consider carefully all representations received. I shall also visit the site before reaching a final decision.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** The residents of Mallusk have been campaigning under the name of CALM for an in-depth public inquiry on the proposed landfill site that will expose all the facts and myths to public scrutiny. Surely that is not much for any community to ask, considering the agony they have experienced with the vermin, smell and other problems. This is a modest and simple request that the Minister could direct to his

Department and announce to the Assembly. If he will not accept an inquiry, will he overturn the opinion of his Department and refuse to approve this development?

**Mr Foster:** A final decision has not yet been reached on this application. I have met the people from CALM, and we had a very affable meeting. I accepted and considered what they had to say, and we will continue to assess the matter. No hasty decision will be made, but I am not going to give a commitment to a public inquiry into the matter now.

**Mr J Wilson:** I am sure that, by now, the Minister is aware that the only people supporting the planning application are the site owners. Is he aware of the force of the argument against this site? Those against the application include the entire community at Mallusk, all elected representatives in the House and the councillors. Can he assure us that this will be an important consideration when he and his Department make up their minds about the future of the dumping site at Mallusk?

**Mr Foster:** I am fully aware of the people's great concern, and that will not be ignored. However, my Department has to look at the bigger picture. As I have said, we are still looking at this application, and as yet no decision has been made. Every representation that has been made to me and my Department will be carefully considered.

## Local Government Elections

7. **Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of the Environment to assure the Assembly that local government elections planned for next year will proceed unhindered, and if he will make a statement.  
(AQO 294/99)

**Mr Foster:** This is not a matter for my Department. It is, as I understand it, an excepted matter.

**Mr Speaker:** Where a Minister can rightly make such a response, there is no provision for asking a supplementary question.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Is the Minister running away from answering a question about the failure of his party to call an election on this issue?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. What the Minister has said is entirely correct, and as a result there can be no supplementary questions. It may well be the case, given that reply, that the Business Office cannot accept further questions on that issue.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If the matter is an excepted one, why was the question accepted? The questions were printed over a week ago, so surely there was plenty of time for Members to be informed of this in advance rather than having to wait to



have the question dismissed by the Minister in such an offhand way.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member should understand that that would have deprived him of the opportunity of making the very point that he has made. Questions are put down; they are published immediately; and the Marshalled List is published at a later stage.

### Planning Applications (Economic Development)

8. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he will take to ensure that major planning applications with an obvious economic development benefit in job creation and urban regeneration will be expedited swiftly through planning procedures.

(AQO 286/99)

**Mr Foster:** I acknowledge the Member's concern. The planning system is critical to the proper regulation of economic and social development. The Planning Service has established specialist teams to help speed up the processing of all major development proposals. It is currently allocating additional resources in order to determine planning applications more quickly. I will continue to draw attention to the resource requirements of the Planning Service in the context of the overall Northern Ireland budget.

4.00 pm

**Mr Ford:** I thank the Minister for his reply. In the past, he has acknowledged on a number of occasions that there are major delays in the planning process because of staff shortages in his Department. Does he agree that it is a disgrace that schemes with major potential benefits for economic development — such as the Belfast International Airport scheme, which is with his Department at the moment — are being lost because of terrible delays in implementing plans and getting any kind of decision from his Department?

**Mr Foster:** I am aware of this problem. Within the Department we are seeking ways and means of processing applications more quickly. However, for the Member's information, these things are not particularly easy. Planning is a long-drawn-out process because of the statutory constraints process, the complexities of the development proposals, the requirements for consultation, the extent of public representations received, and the need or otherwise for a public inquiry, as in the planning applications for landfill referred to earlier. Major development proposals with economic benefits often have significant environmental impact, which has to be properly considered before decisions can be taken.

**Mr Speaker:** It is now four o'clock. The overrun will have been caused by a series of quite legitimate points of order. Lest the precedent give advantage to the

Minister who comes third in the list for questioning, I shall continue to allow the full 30 minutes of questions.

### Beaches

9. **Mr Close** asked the Minister of the Environment if he will initiate a review of beaches to ensure that visitors to our coastal resorts will find them attractive and safe.

(AQO 285/99)

**Mr Foster:** My Department, through its Environment and Heritage Service, is responsible for monitoring and reporting to the European Commission on the quality of bathing water at the 16 beaches in Northern Ireland that fall within the scope of the European directive on bathing water quality (76/160/EEC). I am pleased to say that all 16 met the mandatory standards in the 1999 bathing season. In addition, eight of those beaches, as well as three marinas, have qualified this year for a European blue flag. In administering the blue-flag scheme, the Tidy Northern Ireland group includes other criteria such as facilities, cleanliness and safety. In addition, the Marine Conservation Society arranges an annual survey of beaches around the British Isles, including beaches not eligible for blue-flag status. Based on these results, I am satisfied that visitors will find Northern Ireland's beaches to be generally attractive and safe.

**Mr Close:** I thank the Minister for his reply. As we approach the holiday season and the weather improves, does he agree that we should have a blitz on our beaches to ensure that there is no litter, broken glass or tin cans? Go to any of our beaches and this is the type of thing I am particularly concerned about with young children.

**Mr Foster:** Any concerns about the cleanliness or facilities of individual public beaches should be referred to the relevant district council. Having said that, I would be happy to have my Department investigate any beach at which the quality of bathing water is of concern or where there are litter problems.

**Mr Speaker:** We have now come to the end of the time for questions. Is Mr Poots — *[Interruption]* I am afraid so, but you did get a question in earlier on, if I remember correctly. The time for questions is up. *[Interruption]* Indeed, but not even the Minister could respond at that speed.

## ALLOWANCES TO MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND OFFICE HOLDERS BILL

### Consideration Stage

*Debate resumed on Clause 3.*

**Mr Fee:** Some time ago, when I introduced the first Bill to be passed by the Assembly, I said that I was supping from a poisoned chalice. That poison is getting more virulent by the day.

The debate this morning was on amendment 9. The amendment was meant to allay concerns about the content and effect of clause 3.

We had some detailed and robust exchanges with the Finance and Personnel Committee — on a number of occasions they were held in public — and the Committee expressed very clearly its concerns about the flaws in clause 3. We very much appreciate the work of the Committee's Chairman and members.

It seems abundantly clear that there continues to be, on all sides of this Assembly, a deep, fundamental distaste for clause 3, so I propose to remind Members why it is there and leave it to your good judgement as to what you want to do with it.

Members will recall that under paragraph 40, clause 4 of the Northern Ireland Act of 1998 the Assembly Commission was charged with the task of ensuring that the Assembly was provided with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly's purposes. That was the legislation passed in 1998.

In February 1999 this Assembly, in shadow form, unanimously endorsed the principle that we should abide by the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB), warts and all, sight unseen. That was recommended to the Assembly by Mr Peter Robinson, and it was accepted unanimously. Subsequently, in March 1999, Command Paper 4188 was published with the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body. Clause 3, which the Assembly Commission felt duty-bound to bring forward to the Assembly for its decision, reflects paragraph 97, recommendation 27, of the review body's report:

"It recommends that those in receipt of an additional salary in respect of any office held in the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales or the Northern Ireland Assembly, who cease to hold that office, be entitled to a severance payment calculated in the same way as that available to Ministers and office holders in the Westminster Parliament."

I repeat those words because this morning there were charges that we had, in some way, departed from SSRB. We have not, yet there were severe charges laid against the Commission by Members of the Westminster

Parliament, who have never raised any objections to this particular recommendation in another House. Therefore, in defence of the Assembly Commission, I say that we have diligently, to the letter of what we were charged to do under the Act, and in accordance with SSRB, brought forward these proposals for deliberation by the Assembly.

I said in Committee, when Seamus Close raised concerns about clause 3, that I could not personally respond to him in any great detail because I shared his concerns. I, and the Commission, still do. Nonetheless, we have brought Members a recommendation; it is for deliberation, and it is up to them whether they wish to pursue it. I would like to think that we have left Members with an understanding that the Assembly Commission will continue to do, as far as it can, its duty to bring forward proposals, schemes and legislation where necessary for Members' deliberation even though those proposals, schemes, and so on may be difficult, unpopular and detailed. I think one can tell from my point of view that we are becoming increasingly agnostic on this clause, so for the purposes of ending this particular part of the debate, I want to give notice — I may be duty-bound to move amendment 9 — that I will not be moving any further amendments to this clause.

**Mr Speaker:** We must take the amendment to amendment 9 first — that is, amendment 13 standing in the name of Mr Leslie. Moved or not moved?

**Mr Leslie:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** Amendment 9: moved or not moved?

**Mr Fee:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** When an amendment has become the property of the Assembly by being debated, its withdrawal requires the leave of the Assembly. Does the Member have the leave of the Assembly? He has begged leave to withdraw the amendment.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will the Assembly have an opportunity to vote on clause 3?

**Mr Speaker:** Yes. Even if all the amendments in this group fall, there is still an amendment that clause 3 not stand part, and there can be a debate on that if the House wishes. This is purely a question of the amendments that were down under this grouping, and the lead amendment was amendment 9.

Mr Fee has begged leave of the Assembly to withdraw amendment 9. Is leave given?

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Mr Speaker:** I will need to go through the rest of the amendments formally, even though Mr Fee has given notice that he will not be pressing them. We will come

to the rest of the amendments when we vote on this, and he has given indication that he will not move them. We will therefore move to the motion that clause 3 stand part and the amendment in the name of Mr Molloy and Colleagues.

**Mr Molloy:** A Cheann Comhairle. As I said earlier, the Finance and Personnel Committee has concluded that the allowance to Members should be amended, omitting clause 3. The Committee was content that a person who ceases to be a Member should receive an adequate allowance to help them adjust to non-Assembly life, although I had many reservations about that on a personal basis. The Committee was also content that Members should receive financial assistance for help with outstanding costs. This, of course, would have to be properly monitored. It relates to cost and not a lump sum as in clause 4.

However, the Committee was concerned about the aim of clause 3. This would entitle office holders such as Ministers, Presiding Officers and other officers specified in the Standing Orders to the equivalent of three months' pay, and it would be paid when they ceased to hold office. The re-elected Assembly would then take that up over a set period. The Committee concluded that a Member should not be entitled to an allowance just because he had lost his official position, especially when the Member could also receive allowances on leaving the Assembly. The Committee therefore decided that clause 3 should be deleted from the Bill. On behalf of the Committee I recommend that the Assembly should vote against the motion that clause 3 stand part of the Bill. A Cheann Comhairle that concludes my remarks.

**Mr Weir:** I find myself in rather strange company given the reference at the start of this to — *[Laughter]* I should point out that I am not talking about the persons sitting on either side of me. I am referring to other Colleagues who were moving this amendment at the beginning of this debate. We must realise that we are not debating either this Bill or clause 3 in a vacuum. We are debating them against the background of growing public concern over the perceived wastage of money since the creation of the Assembly. There is a feeling that Assembly Members are like pigs getting their snouts into the trough. This has been fuelled to some extent by concerns over the growth in the number of Departments, and the additional expenditure involved was seen as unnecessary. There was an unfortunate impression given in the early days of the Assembly when one of our first items of business was a large pay rise for Members. That has created a great deal of public concern, and Members should be aware of that. When we are dealing with financial matters that concern the Assembly and its internal workings, we need to do that with an added sensitivity to that public perception. Where there is an opportunity for us to find some way to

prune expenditure and to show that money is not being given out unnecessarily, we should take it.

When the Committee looked at the Bill, it did not have any problems with the other items contained in it. It was seen to be perfectly reasonable as a resettlement grant for Members who had lost their seats or indeed a retirement or winding-up allowance. These were all seen to be in the natural course of events.

4.15 pm

However, there was a great deal of controversy about clause 3. There are allowances for Members who simply lose their seats — indeed, if a Minister were to lose his seat, he would obtain the same allowances as any other Member. However, clause 3, in effect, puts in an additional allowance for office holders who are removed from their post to become Back-Benchers once again. This seems to me and to many others as being, in effect, like a golden handshake.

When we are dealing with the public purse, however small the amount concerned, we need to be very careful. The Assembly should resist the paying of some additional allowance to office holders — simply because they have been in some way demoted. I find no logical reason for clause 3. There is no logical reason why we should be voting for this extra money. It has been said that we are following the example of the SSRB. While that should act as an example to us, we should not treat it as such holy script that we follow every single word of it. We must apply some common sense to this matter. Common sense clearly dictates that this is an unnecessary allowance, and one that will simply further the impression of the Assembly and Assembly Members as being self-gratifying, as people in it just for their own ends.

We need to look at the example that the Assembly is setting and to support the amendment to get rid of clause 3. The Bill without clause 3 would be perfectly adequate for the purposes for which it was intended, and I urge all Members to oppose clause 3 and the golden handshakes.

**Mr Close:** I get the sense that clause 3 is now holed below the waterline. I sincerely trust that that having happened, all Members will now clamber aboard the Good Ship Principle and be prepared to stand up and face the taxpayers — the voters who put them here.

When I first raised this issue in the Committee on 20 January, I said that the more I listened to the reasoning behind clause 3, the more I found myself disliking it, and the less able I felt I was to justify it. When you strip it all away, there really is no justification for that clause. When the question was posed more directly as to the purpose of clause 3, we were told, quite clearly and specifically, that it was to cushion the reduction in a large salary. To cushion the reduction in a large salary? I



do not have a problem with a Minister or an office holder having the salary to which he or she is entitled. We, collectively as an Assembly, want them to be seen to be doing that job and doing it to the best of their ability, and, therefore, attracting a commensurate salary. I do not have a problem with that. But in what other walk of life do you receive a cushioning of your salary — for example, if you are reduced a grade in the Civil Service? I do not think so. If you lose your job you can get a severance pay, but this is about cushioning a salary.

I pay tribute to the sponsor of the Bill, who, when he appeared in front of the Committee, made it absolutely plain, as he has done so again today, that he did have difficulties with it, that the argument was that the standing by the SSRB recommendations was in many respects the best “protection”, I think was the word used by others, for the Assembly.

When we look at the use of the word “protection”, who or what are we trying to protect ourselves from? Is saying that you need protection not some sort of a defensive mechanism? I want to be able to stand in front of the electorate, without the need for any defensive mechanisms, knowing that I can justify — that is the key word — whatever legislation I have voted for in relation to financial matters. Every Member, be he office holder or non-office holder, should be able to go out and hold his head high by way of justifying that which he supports.

There is no justification — none whatsoever — for the existence of clause 3, and I urge, once again, Members who have now come aboard the Good Ship Principle to stand by their principles and go out and face the taxpayer saying “We did not slavishly follow the recommendations of any outside organisation when we could not justify the expenditure of your money”. The best way to demonstrate that is to ensure that clause 3 is thrown out.

**Mr Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I am not going to go all over the arguments again; I simply want to make two points. First, I would like clarification from yourself. Mr Fee did not move a number of the amendments, but I presume that he was acting on behalf of the Commission. I am curious to know how he was able to decide not to move those amendments, because my party Colleague was not aware of any Commission decision to not move the amendments. I am happy that the amendments were not moved, and I want to stress that I am not making a personal attack on Mr Fee — indeed, the minutes of the meetings in January and February will show that I made the point that the Commission has a difficult job. The question, purely for my own reference, is by what authority he withdrew them?

Secondly, Mr Fee said that there was no departure from the SSRB recommendations. In fact, there are, from his own amendments. Again, I am happy with those amendments, in recognition of the arguments that we made.

**Mr Speaker:** For the benefit of Hansard, I ask the Member to come to the podium. It will be impossible to record his words unless he approaches a microphone.

**Mr Fee:** As I understand the precise procedure — and I could be acting under misapprehension — the Bill that I sponsored has the status of a private Member’s Bill. Therefore the Member is quite right: I took the decision without reference back to the Commission.

**Mr Maskey:** I am glad to hear that the majority of Members are opposed to clause 3 standing part of the Bill — for all of the reasons clearly outlined in the minutes of the meetings going back into January and February — on the basis that it would be improper to give people an increase in salary for being an office holder, and then give them a handshake when they leave that position. I am happy that most Members conclude that that would not be an appropriate piece of legislation.

**Mr Leslie:** I pointed out earlier what I regarded as being a series of inadequacies in the drafting of clause 3, and Mr Fee and I sought to correct those with our series of amendments. However, it has become clear in the course of the debate that the House has turned its face against this clause and, rather than go through the process of forcing each amendment to the vote, we have decided not to press them to the vote. The consequence of that is that clause 3, as it stands in the Bill, is, in my opinion, very inadequate — not least because it did not take cognisance of a period of dissolution and could have accidentally triggered the payment of allowances even when it was not intended to do so. With those amendments not going forward, it is appropriate to support this amendment so that the clause does not stand part of the Bill.

I would take this opportunity to correct one or two exaggerated claims about the size of these allowances that I have heard in the media. One quarter of a ministerial stipend comes to about £8,000. I have heard larger figures quoted, and I hope people can be accurate about these things in the future. A Chairman’s extra stipend is £10,000. The allowance payable under clause 3 would be £2,500. These are not excessive sums of money.

I repeat my earlier point that people lose office without notice. People in the private sector would definitely receive notice and, quite possibly, compensation related to the length of time for which the office had been held.



A number of interesting sentiments have been expressed in the debate. We heard very little from the DUP about its intention, expressed a few weeks ago, to amass a war chest. The methodology by which it might have done that is clearly not going to be available to it through this clause in any event. I wonder if we had pushed through the amendment, which I believe would have had sufficient support in the House, and opposed Mr Molloy's amendment, which we are debating at the moment, would the parties to my right have fully whipped their vote to ensure that Mr Molloy's amendment went through. Unfortunately, we are not going to be in a position to find out.

Finally, if in future, when commentators invite the House to amend any further recommendations made by the Senior Salaries Review Body, I will not be leading the riposte. I will look to others who have identified themselves in the course of the debate. I will support the amendment.

**Mr Hussey:** A lot of what I intended to say has already been said. The Chairman and members of the Finance and Personnel Committee will remember that I could not bring myself to support the inclusion of clause 3 and that, in fact, I abstained. I now find myself in the situation where I must express my support for the motion before the House. We entered this Chamber on an equal basis. Nobody was above anybody else — yourself included, Sir. We came in on a level footing and when we leave we should also leave on a level footing.

**Mr P Robinson:** I suppose, together with others, I should probably have commenced by declaring an interest. However, to the extent that I am speaking against what that perceived interest might be, I am sure I will be forgiven.

First, it is worth pointing out that I do not hold a ministerial salary. As part of an agreement reached by my party, ministerial salaries and all the financial benefits of office are put into what the previous Member referred to as the war chest, which is for the defeat of the First Minister's team at the earliest possible opportunity, if he does not run scared and try to get elections cancelled. The basis of the proposition was that we would never intend to take from public sources any funds by way of severance pay. It has never been in the party's mind and it simply would not have happened. We would have declined such funding. Nonetheless, the issue of principle does arise. I really do not know what Mr Leslie was talking about when he said that we will not know. We will know. We will be voting as to whether clause 3 stands part or not.

As things stand at the moment, the reality is that if this Bill were to be passed, severance pay would be given to Ministers when they went out of office. We will be voting against that. There is one very clear

reason why that should be so. The only people who find themselves in an awkward position through no fault of their own, are the Assembly Commission members, who have to carry out, to the letter of the law, the vote of the Assembly, a vote which everybody would recognise as sensible in terms of giving guidance to the Commission with regard to where Members stand in relation to pay and allowances.

4.30 pm

This is very different. If an Assembly Member were to lose his position in the Assembly then effectively he would be unemployed. I can see that in those circumstances there might be a justification for making some funds available as an equivalent to a redundancy payment for that person to find an alternative job — something that would not be easy for many Assembly Members. That is not because of any lack of ability on their part, rather it is because their faces may not fit easily into a number of organisations after they have become so publicly well known, or notorious.

This is not the position as far as office holders are concerned. If they lose the position that they are holding in the Assembly or in the Government, they fall back to being Assembly Members, with all of the rights and entitlements of every other Assembly Member. There is no hardship involved. I do not think, therefore, that it is hard to justify not giving them this additional benefit. In general, we should be cautious. We have a guiding principle set down from the earliest days about the SSRB report. That should be regarded as something of a ceiling rather than a requirement on every occasion, and we are still entitled as an Assembly to look sensibly at the operation of each aspect. I believe that in this case there is absolute justification for voting against clause 3 standing part.

It would be useful, Mr Speaker, if you were to advise us on the mechanism being used. As I understand it, the amendment that we are presently dealing with has been put down by a number of Members, if you like, as a mechanism to allow us to debate the issue, which we would not otherwise have had the opportunity to do. I am not sure whether they intend to withdraw that amendment and allow the full vote to take place on the clause stand part. Whichever they do, am I right in assuming that if their amendment does not succeed, it would be a case of the clause being put by way of a clause stand part and that we can vote against it at that stage?

**Mr Speaker:** I should perhaps give a word of explanation about the procedure to address the point that Mr Robinson makes. Following this debate dealing with all of the issues that relate to clause 3, I will move through each of the amendments that have been put. Two have been put in the name of Mr Molloy, as Chairman of the relevant Committee, a number in the

name of Mr Leslie and a number in the name of Mr Fee. I will move through each of those and ask if they are moved or not moved. From what has been said, one would expect that they would simply respond: "Not moved".

Amendment 3, standing in the name of Mr Molloy, Mr Weir, Mr Close and Mr Maskey, has in fact already been moved. If the Member in the lead wished to withdraw it and the other Members agreed, it could be withdrawn by leave of the Assembly. We would then vote on clause 3 stand part, and Members would vote as they choose. If the amendment were pressed at that stage and were successful then there would be no clause 3 to vote upon. It would have been removed so there would be no subsequent vote.

If, however, the amendment were not carried the vote would be that clause stand part and Members could then vote against that. Slightly peculiarly there could be one vote or two votes. There could indeed be only one vote if the Member decided, and the other Members agreed, to take leave of the Assembly to withdraw it. So it would be a matter of paying acute attention to precisely how it proceeds.

We would then proceed to amendment 12 which deals with clause 4. Then there are two other amendments which are consequential amendments in the event of clause 3 not standing part of the Bill at that stage.

I now ask Mr Molloy if he wishes to respond at this stage in respect of amendment 3.

**Mr Molloy:** A Cheann Comhairle, thank you very much. The question at issue is whether it is appropriate to pay such allowances to Members simply because they had a privileged position in the Assembly, and it is my view and that of the Committee of Finance and Personnel, that this allowance should not form part of the scheme. I have listened to Members' comments, and I welcome the fact that other Members have come to share the Committee's view. From the outset, it was fairly widely held among us.

As Mr Maskey pointed out earlier, the Assembly is different from Westminster in that over 50% of its Members are office holders and as such would be entitled to allowances if they lost or changed their positions. I should like to remind Mr Sammy Wilson that these amendments were put forward on 10 February 2000, a long time before he thought up his scheme of rotating Ministers, so they are not in reaction to anyone else's actions. I welcome the conversion to our Committee's position, which I also recommend as the position of my party.

A number of Members referred to the SSRB report and said that we should not deviate from it. However, if we did not have the opportunity to amend, clearly there would be no purpose in having a Committee Stage. The

whole idea behind it is that people can suggest amendments and changes on which Members of the Assembly have the right to vote.

A number of points were made by Mr Weir about wider public opinion, which, it is clear, is against these unnecessary allowances. Mr Close said that the SSRB report was no justification for paying these allowances, and if people need to have some justification, that speaks for itself. Mr Maskey said that there was no need for office holders to have a golden handshake when they leave their positions, for they would be continuing as Assembly Members and getting allowances. Mr Leslie spoke about clause 3, and he is in support of our amendment, since he is opposed to clause 3's being part of the Bill and I welcome that.

I recommend that we have a vote in support of removing clause 3 from the Bill.

**Mr Speaker:** We shall now proceed to the amendments relating to clause 3. I move perhaps slightly outside the Speaker's normal remit to remind you that amendment 8 was the subject of the first debate, not of the second.

Is amendment 1, standing in the name of Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee, moved or not moved?

**Mr Molloy:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** Is amendment 11 moved or not moved?

**Mr Fee:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** Is amendment 14 moved or not moved?

**Mr Leslie:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** Is amendment 10 moved or not moved?

**Mr Fee:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** Are amendments 4 and 15 moved or not moved?

**Mr Leslie:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** Is amendment 8 moved or not moved?

**Mr Fee:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member may wish to reconsider that. Amendment 8 is a technical consequential amendment, which may need to be passed. I am moving outside what the Speaker would normally do, but we are all learning.

**Mr Fee:** Sorry for my confusion.

*Amendment (No 8) made:* In clause 3, page 3, line 3, leave out “Act (Northern Ireland) 2000” and insert

“Determination 2000, made by the Secretary of State under section 48 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 by virtue of paragraph 9 of the Schedule to the Northern Ireland Act 2000.” — *[Mr Fee]*

**Mr Speaker:** Is amendment 2 moved or not moved?

**Mr Molloy:** Not moved.

**Mr Speaker:** Amendment No 3, whose effect would be that clause 3 would not stand part of the Bill: moved or not moved?

*Amendment made:* Leave out Clause 3, as amended.  
— *[Mr Maskey]*

**Mr Speaker:** The clause having been removed, there is no requirement to make a decision about whether it stand part.

#### **Clause 4 (Winding up allowance)**

**Mr Fee:** Amendment 12 is a further technical amendment to address the fact that the Pensions Bill will not be proceeded with as the Secretary of State introduced a pension scheme for Members by way of a determination while devolved government was suspended. The Pensions Bill contained a provision to make the Assembly Commission a rule-making authority. This provision is still required to allow the Commission to vary the limit on the amount of the winding-up allowances contained in clause 4 in line with changes to the office cost allowances. The winding-up allowance is set at one third of the office cost allowance.

*Amendment (No 12) made:* In page 3, after line 17, insert

“( ) The Commission shall be a rule-making authority for the purposes of the Statutory Rules (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 (NI12) and accordingly in Part I of the Schedule to that Order after the entry relating to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission there shall be inserted —

‘The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission’.” — *[Mr John Fee]*

*Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

#### **Clause 6 (Short title)**

*Amendment (No 5) made:* In page 3, line 23, leave out “and Office Holders”. — *[Mr Molloy]*

*Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Schedule agreed to.*

#### **Long title**

*Amendment (No 6) made:* In page 1, long title, leave out from “Assembly” to end. — *[Mr Molloy]*

*Long Title, as amended, agreed to:*

**Mr Speaker:** This concludes the Consideration Stage of the Bill. It stands referred to the Speaker for a decision upon competence and will return at an appropriate time.

**ASSEMBLY MEMBERS'  
PENSIONS SCHEME**

*Resolved:*

That the following Members are appointed as the Trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme: Mr John Dallat,

Mr John Kelly, Mr David McClarty, Mr Denis Watson and Mr Jim Wells. — *[Rev Robert Coulter]*

*The sitting was suspended at 4.45 pm.*







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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 20 June 2000

*The sitting begun and suspended on Monday 19 June 2000 was resumed at 10.31am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair).*

## POSTAL SERVICES (RURAL AREAS)

**Mr Dallat:** I beg to move the following motion:

This Assembly is seriously concerned by proposals drawn up under the Postal Services Bill, which will undermine economic prosperity and regeneration in rural areas.

I am sure that all Members are grateful for the opportunity to debate the legislation on post offices that is currently going through the Westminster Parliament. We need to explore how the proposed changes will affect rural communities in Northern Ireland. I welcome the Bill, but I am concerned about its impact on rural areas.

Post offices are vital to the industrial, economic and social fabric of our communities. This debate is very important because the proposed changes will have a fundamental impact on how we live. The argument, therefore, is not so much about change but about how the change will impact on society, and how the Government and this Assembly can use their influence to ensure that the most vulnerable members of society are not deprived of services that they depend on. The argument goes much further, of course, and I hope to develop some of the issues later.

Change is being forced on us by many factors, including pressure from the European Commission, which wants to liberalise postal services throughout the European Union. There are other challenges from the development of electronic communications. The number of faxes sent now exceeds the volume of conventional mail. In the United States, the number of e-mails now exceeds the number of letters. We must recognise the increasing changes and challenges posed by these new technologies. There is also a trend towards globalisation, which invariably creates a smaller number of global players and alliances. Customers' needs are changing. People are writing less personal mail; indeed, the use of handwriting is less in every sense.

The arguments made for change are very convincing, given the announcement yesterday that the Post Office lost £270 million in the past financial year. The Post

Office needs to be able to borrow and invest. It needs to be free from the unfair financial payments that it has to make to the Government, which are both problematic and excessive. There are many other arguments for change, but I shall not use up my time making them, as they are well documented by advocates of change who clearly do not have their first home in the countryside. Indeed, one could be forgiven for believing that their views of rural life have been formed by listening to 'The Archers'.

In addition, there are valid arguments for criticising the Government's decision to stop making social security payments through the Post Office and using banks instead. I believe that the Government are very much aware of their mistake and have, at the last minute, introduced the notion of a discretionary subsidy for post offices as a solution to the problems that will arise in the future. My concern is that the proposed changes do not take into account the impact they will have on rural areas, as profit making becomes the motivating factor.

There will be many communities in Northern Ireland in serious trouble if steps are not taken to give the Post Office opportunities to develop a changing role that will generate additional income. Many people do not have bank accounts, do not want them, and need cash for their transactions.

Neither can they afford the bank charges which will be picked up by them and not by the Government. Furthermore, they know that the track record of the big banks in Britain has been appalling for rural communities. Why expect better from our local banks when we cannot be sure what will happen in the future as they too become the victims of globalisation policies. During the last 10 years more than 4,000 branches have closed in rural areas in Britain, and it is predicted that another 4,000 will close in the next five years. Is that the type of structure which the Government can trust to meet the needs of their people — in particular, the needs of the most vulnerable in economic and social terms, such as the sick, the disabled and the elderly?

How does this square with the Government's commitment to tackling social exclusion and targeting social need? I look forward to a report later this week from the Cabinet Office's performance and innovation unit, which will set out details of proposals to save rural post offices, and I understand that making use of new technology is one of them. This would allow small post offices to transact a wide range of business, including the payment of most household bills and even the ordering of rail and bus tickets. In many parts of Northern Ireland that could be difficult, as the whole infrastructure of public transport has already been a casualty of rural neglect. Nevertheless, it has to be welcomed that the British Government have expressed

some interest in saving rural communities. They have recognised that the closure of rural post offices will have a devastating impact on the communities they serve, being, as they are, an integral part of the social fabric of those communities.

Unfortunately, a lack of research combined with belated ideas for saving these facilities has already had an effect. In the first place, the uncertainty hanging over many rural post offices has, in itself, caused them to close. If you want to get rid of something, create the notion that it is closing, and it will. This technique was successfully applied to rural schools in the past, with deadly effect. My point about the lack of consultation and the lack of knowledge of the local scene is illustrated by the suggestion that councils could become involved in subsidising small rural post offices. Can you imagine the impracticality of that in a rural council area where there are many small sub-post offices and a very small revenue budget to draw that subvention from? In any event, I do not believe that postmasters want discretionary subsidies. They know that by the time consent for such subsidies went through the various bands of civil servants they would, most likely, be bankrupt.

The most poignant question here is this: if there is to be a saving of £400 million, who is going to be the loser? Will one Department or agency save money while another Department pays it out in unemployment benefit to the thousands of people who will lose their jobs and businesses? In developing my arguments in favour of the protection of rural post offices, I am mindful that in many suburban and urban areas too many small sub-post offices provide vital services to the community. Often these are located in areas of high social deprivation, where the post office is much more than a post office. It is an advice centre, an outpost of many social security services and much more. These people are of equal concern, and the Government must be very mindful of that when they are examining ways of preserving small sub-post offices. Up to 90% of business in some post offices will be lost if the Government do not take positive action to save them. Apart from the loss of the services to the community, often including a high percentage of elderly people without cars and with no public transport, there are other considerations. Rural post offices create employment, and the present Government are committed, I believe, to creating jobs in rural areas — not to destroying them.

Small post offices often give a wider service to the community too. They may be part of a small mini-market providing daily supplies of essential items, such as bread and milk, or a pharmacy or some other vital service, still managing to survive in the rural environment, and it is reasonable to assume that if the post office element of the business is taken away, the remainder will close because it will no longer be viable.

In other words, there is a real possibility that all the sterling work done to regenerate rural communities could be lost when the proposals currently going through Westminster are implemented. That would be particularly bad news for Northern Ireland, where the political instability of the last three decades has had its own impact on rural life. That should concern the Government, and I hope that it does.

We are told that the Post Office will have a new legal status: it will be a public limited company owned by the Crown. We are assured that the changes will enable this new company to generate wealth by franchising its business. I am not complaining about that, but it is reasonable to ask the Government to legislate so that part of the profits be ring-fenced for genuine development of post office services in rural areas. In doing that, the Government might have the opportunity to target social need. That seems an obvious suggestion, but I have not read it anywhere in the various Hansards and other Government documents I have researched.

I have no doubt that many other ideas will emerge from this debate. It is urgent that there be serious discussions with An Post in the Republic, where there is a similar debate. The fears of sub-postmasters in Northern Ireland and the Republic are exactly the same. The apprehension felt by people in similar rural areas, North and South, is entirely the same, and there could be a common solution to this common problem.

Change is needed to address the current unsatisfactory arrangements between the two parts of Ireland. At the weekend, a businessman in Coleraine told me that it cost £12 to post a parcel locally for delivery in the Republic. That parcel would go to Scotland and back. At a post office just over the border in Donegal the cost was £1R5. That type of anomaly must be rectified, and the only way to do it is to develop a better working relationship which reflects the needs of the consumer, rather than some operational system which ignores reality. That could also help to save our post offices in a way that is tailored to life in rural communities in both parts of Ireland.

The proposal to give representation to users, as outlined in the Postal Services Bill, does not recognise Northern Ireland as a separate entity. It only offers representation on a panel in London. I hope that the Government will take note of this debate and that the Assembly is concerned about these proposals. I sincerely hope that the record of this debate, and the contributions made by all Members, will be read urgently by those with the ability, and the duty, to take on board the widely held concerns of the House. I ask particularly that a copy be sent post-haste to the Cabinet Office's performance and innovation unit.

The Post Office must consider its commercial viability, but a balance must be struck between



hard-nosed economics and the social needs of our communities. It must be realised that, while small rural post offices can never be as cost-effective as large ones, it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that the services of the Post Office continue to be provided in those areas. That will, without doubt, involve additional costs. That is where the Government play a vital role. Pensioners, the sick, the disabled and people on low incomes must be given a voice in this debate, as well as the people who may lose their jobs and businesses.

This debate is not about preventing change, but about the special problems that arise when an agency switches from being a social service to being a profit-making public limited company. The decision to make social security payments through banks from 2003, while not part of the Bill, is nevertheless a major part of the problem and worthy of consideration. I look forward to hearing Members' contributions.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I want to say a word about the timing of this debate. The Business Committee decided to allow two hours. The proposer was given 15 minutes, with a further 15 to wind up. Because of the number of Members who wish to speak, each Member will be given seven minutes. It may be necessary to review that at a later stage.

10.45 am

**Mr J Wilson:** I wish to associate myself with today's motion. Although there is much to commend in the Postal Services Bill currently before another place, the threat to the rural infrastructure in Northern Ireland is a real one. The principal threat is the Government's stated intention to pay benefits directly into recipients' bank accounts from 2003. Obviously, this will gravely affect many post offices, not those in city centres, but those in local communities, rural and semi-rural.

The Government must face the reality that many people still live a cash-based life. They do not have or wish to have bank accounts, and they are fearful of large institutions. Obtaining a bank account is not easy unless you are earning a wage, and benefits are meagre enough without recipients having to pay bank charges. The benefit payments business is crucial in sustaining many rural post offices which are often, alongside the church and the school, the hub of community life for many people, particularly the elderly.

Around 40% of a post office's business is derived from that source alone. The network has already contracted by nearly 15% over the last decade. If post offices are not appreciated by ordinary citizens, why do 20 million people in the United Kingdom choose to pick up benefits from them, when 80% could have them paid into their bank accounts? For many women in

particular, a giro book is their only source of financial independence from their husbands or partners.

I am not some old Labour diehard who resists creeping privatisation as a matter of ideology. The controlled commercialisation of the Post Office is to be welcomed if it succeeds in making it more competitive, although I suspect that we are dealing with a natural monopoly situation where there is little competition for most classes of mail. The amount of international competition is also small — the Post Office is not British Airways, if I may be allowed to make that comparison.

I appreciate that the Post Office is already looking at ways of diversifying, but I am concerned that many more rural post offices will be allowed to wither and die before Government gateway, the strategy for connecting the Government with citizens, and universal banking, the scheme to bring more people into the cashless economy come on stream. Sufficient thought has not been given to the implications of phasing out the payment of benefits through post offices. The Post Office network is in the process of being computerised. However, the machines being installed do not have the facility to provide a simple banking service. This is clearly a failure to provide joined-up Government.

Cost is a further problem. Independent research has calculated that the real cost of paying benefits through the banking network is actually slightly more than through the order-book system. It is not the cheap alternative that some people imagine. Remember the experience of cash machines. We were told that they would bring about huge savings, but now banks are trying to charge us for the cost of a system they originally said was cheaper than cheques and giros. How many banks are there and how many post offices, and what are the implications for public transport in rural areas with no bank? Is the bank network really going to fill the void when it is already contracting? I doubt it. Is my elderly mother really expected to bank via the Internet?

If someone is entitled to £79.50 a week, what use is a cash machine which only pays out in multiples of £20.00? People must have access to all their benefits when they need them — waiting until next week is not an option. These questions have not received satisfactory answers. I trust that the Assembly will keep a watching brief on the situation and make its views known until the practical issues have been fully addressed and the cost, in terms of the fabric of local communities, properly taken into account.

I support the motion.

**Mr Shannon:** I support the proposal. Post offices, as we all know — especially those coming from a very rural constituency like mine — are an integral part of

everyday village life. The long and the short of the plans to review the distribution of Government benefits is that their implementation will lead to the closure of many rural post offices right across the United Kingdom.

I was reading in the paper at the weekend that over 330 post offices closed in the United Kingdom last year — 100 more than the previous year's figure of 230. We are now faced with the possible closure of 650 post offices. In fact, the headlines in the paper talked about 8,000 closures. The impact on post offices across the United Kingdom, and especially in Northern Ireland, is becoming very apparent.

It represents the loss of a very valuable civic amenity, and it is the duty of Members in this Chamber to voice concern about such moves. In theory the procedural and logistical basis of these changes should be of advantage to a claimant, as all benefits would be transferred directly into his bank account. However, I fear that the real reason for this move is of somewhat more shallow origins — one more swath of blind financial cuts. The impact of these plans could be catastrophic for the future of our post offices and will cause many unnecessary problems for claimants. I believe that the loss of rural post offices will have a devastating effect on the rural economy and communities in the Province.

The implementation of plans to divert benefit claims directly to bank accounts will have negative repercussions for both the claimant and the post office. In many villages there are no banks; there never were any banks, so the villages depend on the local post offices. The impact will be very severe on people living in villages.

The primary reason for opposing such a move is that the future of many post offices and post office jobs, especially in rural areas, will be put in jeopardy. The bulk of Post Office business involves the distribution of various benefits, from the working families' tax credit to jobseeker's allowance. Without such a duty to fulfil, the financial viability of many post offices will be brought into question. This will inevitably lead to job losses on a grand scale, and will impact heavily on local communities. The farming communities have already had a hard time, and the closure of post offices will greatly increase their problems and concerns. It will strike at the very heart of the rural community.

In rural areas, post offices form the backbone of local society and the economy. They are a major part of the local community network and an integral part of everyday life. Many people, especially the elderly, look forward to their journeys to the post office, which gives them contact with the outside world. Such visits provide an early warning system for staff in the offices who can tell whether people are keeping well or have fallen ill. A post office is not just there to get people's money; it acts as a carer for elderly people in the community.

Many people in rural areas do not have bank accounts. Many do not have their own transport and have to depend on public transport to get about, so it is not always possible to go to where there is a bank. Many do not live anywhere near a bank and have little or no access to transport. Anyone who has an account has to travel a considerable distance to get his hands on his money. That is happening more than ever. Of the 650 post offices in Northern Ireland, it is rumoured that up to 60 or 70 could be forced to close if it is not financially viable to continue in business. That means some five or six in each constituency. Members who represent a rural constituency, as I do in Strangford, know that the closure of village post offices will have a dramatic effect on the communities and on the very core of society. The closure of businesses and the loss of jobs will be unavoidable. I hope that support for this proposal in the Chamber today will help to put an end to that.

It is impossible to say at this stage whether the closures will be distributed evenly across the Province, but it is fair to say that in many areas, especially the villages, there will be a dramatic effect. Perhaps, there could be five or six closures in the rural communities, with not so many in the towns. That would affect tens of communities and thousands of citizens and will leave them worse off. The proposed changes will result in a crucial aspect of local community life being ripped out, and they will restrict the freedom of citizens throughout the Province. On that principle alone they must be strongly opposed.

**Mr McHugh:** Go raibh maith agat. I too oppose this Bill. To reform the postal services and increase profits for the Government, it is proposed to pay all benefits directly into bank accounts by 2003 and to end the system of paying money directly over the counter by 2005. The repercussions will be serious, especially in rural areas. Urban areas will be affected as well because they are made up of many small communities, similar to those in the rural areas of Fermanagh, south Tyrone and other counties. Older people use the services of their local post offices to collect their money. They need these services.

We oppose the Bill on another count. A local post office is one of the many services that are being drained from rural areas, making them places where people no longer want to live, and that is a critical issue. People begin to wonder whether it is worth rearing a family in an area that is losing its schools, post offices and shops and where all the services are being centralised in the larger towns and cities. Such losses have a great destabilising effect on people.

The loss of services and jobs and the closure of sub-post offices in small villages will be on a large scale. The figure of 600 has been mentioned. The

number of post offices will decrease significantly unless they can diversify into shops or supermarkets where they can survive to serve the local community. That has not happened yet; they have to stand alone for various reasons. There are planning issues when they try to extend their premises. They face increased rates bills. All these factors mitigate against people trying to do something about their predicament. We must try to find ways to support them.

The degeneration of rural areas and small villages is the result of these closures. The cost of travel in rural areas is another issue, especially for old-age pensioners, many of whom will have to pay taxi fares. That money comes out of their benefits, which may be between £65 and £70, but they may have to pay £5 a week in taxi fares to collect that money. That should not be allowed to happen. The Government gave pensioners a measly 75p rise in their pension last year, and those pensioners may well now face a future where they will lose a lot of their money because of the changes and bank charges. Banks charge for their services, and as anyone using them now knows, they are very costly. People will make mistakes and could end up with a net loss.

Many small towns have no banks. Corporate planning at present means that many banks are moving out of villages. In the next few years they will all disappear into the larger towns, leaving even less of a service for the people who need to get to a bank on a daily or weekly basis.

The Government are cutting costs, and others will have to take up the loss of that. It is the ordinary people, especially those in rural and border areas, who will end up having to pay. We need to protect these areas because of the amount of work that has gone into them in recent years. A great deal of money has been spent by community groups on developing their areas as places to live. They have made a tremendous effort to survive, build up and improve these areas, and we must help them to protect them.

11.00 am

Most of the councils in these areas, including my own local, are against this move, but often their views are not taken into account. Perhaps there is consultation on a small scale, but it is very seldom acted upon. They are usually dismissed with a wave of the hand, and it is a fait accompli.

In particular, there will be an adverse impact on local communities, small urban villages and rural and border areas. In such areas, virtually the same arguments for retaining postal services apply regardless of whether they are urban or rural. We need to support people in trying to keep services in their areas, rather than go along with Government planning. One could argue that this is planning at the highest level — perhaps they

want these areas to degenerate so much that people will move to the cities as they originally planned. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr McCarthy:** I wish to add my concerns to those already expressed about the proposals contained in the Postal Services Bill. The proposals in that Bill will have serious repercussions for everyone, but particularly, as has been mentioned, for our senior citizens. The proposals will have a massive impact on the support given to our rural and village life by the activities carried out so diligently over many years by those working in the post offices.

No one would argue with any organisation is moving with modern technology and becoming more efficient, and this must also apply to the Post Office, which is now computerising all its branches. If a customer is to get a more efficient service, this must surely be welcomed. However, particularly in rural areas, the post office is the lifeblood of the community where, in many cases, it is also the local shop. Those coming to use the post office buy their provisions, the daily paper and other goods. Even those in rural areas who now make the journey to a supermarket once a week to do a large shop for the family, still use the local shop and post office on a regular basis.

A post office makes at least one third of its income from the administration of pensions, child benefit, income support, and so on. This percentage is higher in a rural area. The Government say that they will persist with plans to have all types of benefits paid directly into bank accounts from 2003. Banks are busy places that are out to make money. They have little time to answer social questions, particularly from senior citizens. As other Members have pointed out, many villages do not have banks, and that means extra travel for the people there.

If the Government move ahead with these plans, post offices stand to lose much of the vital income they depend on to survive. These plans will cut off their lifeblood and lead to many small closures. If these proposals go ahead, there will not be a single post office left in my area, the Ards Peninsula, or other rural areas in five years' time.

This will have a disastrous effect on rural life. When the village post office closes, the shop attached to it struggles to survive and probably has to close eventually. Other facilities in the village begin to struggle, and it becomes a less attractive place to live. The numbers in the local school fall and it starts to become unviable. And so the spiral of rural decline continues. We have seen it happen before — even without post offices closing.

I have a letter from George Howarth, dated 13 March, written during his spell as Social Development



Minister, which is not that long ago, in which he gives the following commitment:

“There is a continued commitment by Ministers that benefit recipients will continue to be able to collect their benefits in cash at post offices if they wish”.

I hope that the present Minister for Social Development will give a similar commitment, for such is needed, to reassure those postmasters and postmistresses whose post offices depend on income derived from administering benefits. I have suspicions about the Minister’s statement for he went on to say, with regard to the continuing use of the Post Office network, that his Department has given the commitment that the Social Security Agency will use the Post Office to much the same extent as it does now until March 2003. Thereafter, customers will have the choice of having their benefit paid into any account which the Post Office makes available or into a commercial bank. He said that he was glad to acknowledge the essential role which post offices, and particularly those serving rural communities, have played in social security matters.

I am also mindful of the needs of elderly and disabled customers and have a strong desire to see that the arrangements made for payments take account of the needs of those groups in the community that are most at risk. A post office can be much more than a place to cash giro or collect a pension. People go to post offices for advice on benefits, to talk over problems and to exchange information. Indeed, people see the post office as a one-stop-shop for advice and information. It is almost a fifth emergency service. If the person behind the counter cannot help, or does not know the answer to a problem, he can point the customer to the man or woman who can.

We must look at ways of helping the Post Office develop this side of its work. Staff training in giving this “one-stop-shop” type of advice is vital and can provide a much needed service to help the lifeblood of our rural community. The post office is vital to rural life. Our economy depends on it, and we have a social responsibility to maintain it. I do hope that our present Minister for Social Development will give a commitment similar to the one that the last Minister gave.

I support the motion.

**Mr C Wilson:** I rise to add the support of the Northern Ireland Unionist Party to the motion standing in Mr Dallat’s name.

Rural areas and small villages and hamlets form a large part of the constituencies of all Assembly Members, and the Assembly is quite correct to express its serious concern about these proposals. This will help those who are running small, rural and village post offices.

All those who have spoken seem to be concerned about the impact that this will have on the rural and

semi-rural communities. Indeed, it has been well put that the people who will suffer most from the proposed changes will be the most vulnerable in our society — the elderly. Elderly people do depend upon the local post offices to transact their financial affairs. Indeed, in my area of Strangford — and I am sure that it is not unique — one has to travel from Portaferry to Donaghadee on the east coast of the Ards peninsula to use a bank. We can only imagine the difficulties that will be created in the small villages and hamlets if the Post Office reorganises in a way that removes local post offices from the hearts of the communities.

Several Members have also touched on another very important aspect of this. A post office is more than a place to go to cash giro or other benefit cheques. It is somewhere where elderly people go to seek advice. Small village shops, which double up as sub-post offices, attract large numbers of people into the shop once or twice a week whom they might not attract otherwise.

The Bill will have a major impact on rural areas at a time when so many of the community groups, councils, and other Government agencies are actively involved in trying to regenerate some of the areas that are in difficulty. I support the motion and hope that the Assembly’s unanimous endorsing of it will send out a message of hope and confidence to those who are facing difficulty in small rural post offices.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** I support the motion and would like to thank Mr Dallat for bringing it to the Floor of the House for discussion. I have listened with interest to what has been said, particularly by those who represent rural areas. However, there are a number of points I would like to make.

Elderly people are elderly people regardless of where they live. They tend to have a similar culture, and they have all depended on post offices. Post offices have existed for as long as anyone cares to remember. We talk about rural areas, and I understand that post offices occupy a significant position there. However, if you live in Belfast, post offices are similarly significant because, in terms of distance, everything is relative. Urban dwellers are used to facilities being close to them. They are familiar with the people who work in the post office, and not with those who work in the banks. If it were so easy for people to use banks, a lot of elderly people living in rural areas would use banks and not post offices.

Anyone coming to my constituency on a Monday or a Thursday morning will see queues of people outside the post offices. They might be quite surprised by the length of those queues, whether for pensions or for child benefit. The post office has a significant part to play in all our lives, so this is not just a rural problem.

When a post office is robbed in Belfast, it closes down. Anyone representing a Belfast constituency in



which a post office is robbed will be “inundated”, as Jim Rodgers would say in Belfast City Council, by people ringing and writing to complain about having to travel. It may not be so great a distance in comparison to that in rural constituencies but, in relative terms, it is quite a disruption for people to have to move from one post office to another. I want to put that marker down.

Mr J Wilson made the point earlier — unfortunately he is not here — that he is not opposed to privatisation or stuck in old Labour dogma. Perhaps I am, but the matter concerns me, and I am sure that some of the rural people would want to focus on the implications of privatisation.

In 1999, postal service regulations attempted to give greater commercial freedom to enable the Post Office to run its business on a five-year strategic plan. Does anyone know the real cost of posting a letter in a rural area? It is approximately 87p. In Belfast, it is 1p. The people who live in Belfast are subsidising those in the rural areas, and that is how it should be because we need to have equality, and we need to ensure that everybody living in the country can get a letter.

So it is not just a simple matter. There is a cost involved, and we are all paying equally. My point is that if AT&T, which is operated by a Dutch company, had the freedom to operate the postal service here, would it deliver letters to rural areas? No, because that would not make money. That is why post offices are important. It is important to ensure that we do not allow full privatisation, but that we enable them to compete against their German and Dutch rivals.

While we are very critical of this legislation we should also be critical of the people bringing it forward, and that is the Labour Government, not Post Office Counters Ltd (POCL). I do not know of anywhere in the Province, or in the United Kingdom, where POCL wants to close offices. I have already pointed out that when there are robberies and offices are closed, people work very hard to get things up and running again quickly.

11.15 am

As elected representatives, we should recognise that the Post Office has never wanted to leave any area without those services. The Post Office recognises the need for those services, but it is the Labour Government who are trying to push this through. I recognise the problems in rural areas, but I want some of the rural people to recognise that this problem goes beyond Post Office Counters to other things. We should be keeping our eye on the ball and not just focusing specifically on Post Office Counters.

I want to make a further point regarding banks. Not long ago, in March or April, we had an announcement from a major English bank that it was closing down all its banks in rural towns and villages. There were

protests from staff about this. We were told that the reason was rationalisation. Can you imagine what would happen, particularly in rural areas, if we decided to close down post offices — everybody would then use banks. If the banks then said that they could make a bit more money by closing some of the banks down, customers might have to travel five or six or 10 miles to the nearest bank — this is what will happen. The banks operate completely and utterly on profit, nothing else. They do not take society into consideration or their effect on jobs. We need to be careful about what we say and do.

Finally, we need to recognise that this Bill is about more than Post Office Counters. We need to ensure we do not sell off the crown jewels. Sorry about that, Sinn Féin, but the Post Office is one of the crown jewels. We got rid of British Telecom, and it is making profits. Let us not get rid of the Post Office; let us make sure we keep it and enable it to compete with the Germans and the Dutch, as England did the other night.

**Mr J Kelly:** Before or after?

**Mr B Hutchinson:** It depends on how you look at it, but the match was won. We want to equip the Post Office with that commercial opportunity and we want to ensure that we do not allow people, in any way, to destroy the post offices in our rural or urban communities.

**Mr Beggs:** I also support the rural sub-post offices and urban sub-post offices referred to by Billy Hutchinson. Sub-post offices are vital to local communities. They provide a local focal point and often ensure the viability of the village shop or the corner shop in urban areas. We have to appreciate the context in which this discussion is taking place. Many changes are occurring in the post office network. Currently 30% to 40% of post office income is related to benefit payment. Many claimants are now choosing alternative methods of payment such as automatic transfer. The income of sub-post offices is declining.

We must also appreciate that the Postal Services Bill is a reserved matter that our debating it here will not change it. It is important that the Assembly appreciates the views of the Prime Minister, who commands a Labour majority in the House of Commons. In April the Prime Minister said

“Half a million more people each year choose to get their pension or child benefit through their bank accounts. That will carry on so inevitably the post offices are faced with a process of change.”

**Mr Weir:** Does the hon Member agree that there is widespread concern across the United Kingdom about the closure of post offices? A petition organised by the Women’s Institute earlier this year raised over three million signatures from people across the United Kingdom complaining of the prospect of post offices and sub-post offices being closed.

**Mr Beggs:** I fully accept that this is an issue which affects every rural and urban community in the United Kingdom, and this process of change will carry on. The question is how will we deal with it. The Prime Minister said

“The best way is to make sure that people can still get their benefits in cash, if they want to do so, but that we work with the post offices to provide a new range of services for the future.”

If we are to instigate any action from the Assembly as opposed to a lot of conciliatory words and friendly statements, we have to address our thoughts to what is happening at United Kingdom level. There are basically two problems. First, people are choosing to put their money through ACT so post office incomes are declining. Secondly, there is on the horizon the tendering for the payment of services. The payment of benefits from the Post Office itself could be at risk within a couple of years. Certainly if the post offices were to lose that, it would bring an immediate closure of many local services.

It is clear that the Post Office provides the widest possible method of access to money in Northern Ireland and any other part of the United Kingdom. This is particularly important to the rural community. The level of access that the Post Office presents should be a major consideration when the Government next award the benefits contract. People should not have to pay for travel to the centre of towns to collect their benefits, if that is the only means that is available to them, or for that matter to collect their money from some form of banking service.

Tony Blair, during Prime Minister's Questions, said that the Government would work with post offices to provide a new range of services for the future. Those are highly significant words. The post office network contains a high quality ISDN communication link, and, in development terms, Northern Ireland is ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom. This asset could enable additional Government information and services to be accessible to the public from the convenience of their sub-post offices. Of course the Government should be paying for that service, and that money could keep sub-post offices viable.

I call on the Assembly to ensure that savings which central Government are making are reinvested in sub-post offices. They could be used to provide easier access to information technology and learning in the rural setting or simply to provide more open and accountable government through convenient methods of accessing that information. The Government have pledged to increase the use of information technology and to make it accessible to all.

It has been estimated that by using electronic transfer for the payment of benefits we could save over £600 million and that some fraud could be avoided. If

that is the case, there are substantial savings to be made and, if so, the Government should be passing those on to the sub-post offices. If these savings were used to provide additional services to local post offices, their long-term viability would be much more secure.

As was mentioned earlier, another major problem facing post offices is robberies by criminal gangs, by paramilitaries and by those who are freelancing from paramilitaries. In a letter written at the end of last year Raymond McCrea, the area manager in Northern Ireland, advised me that in July last year there were seven such robberies, seven in August, five in September and six in October. As one Member said, those robberies frequently result in the closure of those sub-post offices because it becomes increasingly difficult to recruit people to work in them.

I urge the Assembly to support the motion, to support the essential services that sub-post offices provide and will provide to seek alternative means of funding to ensure their viability.

**Mr McMenamin:** The present plans to repeal the Post Office Act 1969 and replace it with the Postal Services Bill will effectively kill off many rural post offices unless there is substantial financial support for them. The offer of a rate rebate of 50%, and in some cases up to 100%, is chicken feed compared to what is needed. It does not recognise the worth of sustaining post offices to serve rural areas and, in particular, the elderly and the less mobile. This is an issue which should concern us all.

As recently as this week I received a letter from Strabane and District Community Network, which represents over 32 community and voluntary organisations informing and supporting up to 80 groups in that area, expressing grave concern that benefit payments will be being made directly into bank accounts by 2003. The payment of benefits over the counter will have ceased by 2005. This will, without doubt, have a devastating effect on our rural post offices. The letter went on to say that many communities do not have banks, something that has been said many times today, and that many recipients do not have bank accounts.

The post office is a focal point in many areas, and if cash is not available locally people will have to travel to urban areas. There they will shop outside their rural areas, and that will have a serious knock-on effect on rural businesses — for example, the butcher, the grocer and the newsagent. The letter ended by urging elected representatives to do their utmost to save rural post offices.

Given the hardship that farmers have suffered over the past years, this Bill, if it goes through, will be nothing but a slap in the face for rural communities. The suggestion that district councils could add the cost of

small post offices to the rates bills would merely rob Peter to pay Paul and is not practical. My constituency, West Tyrone, has a rural population of over 80% and it does not take a mathematician to work out that these measures will affect four out of five of my constituents.

Over the past 30 years of sustained political instability, rural post offices have kept their doors open and provided an essential service. It would be most unfortunate if now, in more favourable times, they were sacrificed on the altar of profit making. The Post Office should not become another tool driven by profit with little or no concern for the people it was set up to serve. I support the motion.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** I support this motion which shows the Assembly's support for retaining Post Office Counters' presence across Northern Ireland. The Post Office reform Bill deals with many issues, but its main implication will be for the survival of our post offices. It is only right and proper that we voice our concerns. It is amazing that it has taken Postman Pat and his black and white cat to unite the House, and we appear to be united on this.

11.30 am

The Member for East Antrim, Mr Beggs, rightly said that the House has absolutely no competence in this matter. Nonetheless, it is essential that we make our concerns known. As public representatives, we have a duty to watch the public purse and ensure that accounts are properly sanctioned and scrutinised. However, it is also our duty to respond to the public's demands, and it is clear that the public across Northern Ireland wishes to retain a postal service.

In the United Kingdom, about 75 million items go through post offices every day. Every year, about half the United Kingdom's population visit post offices. That massive statistic alone shows the support that there is for post offices and the devastating impact that their removal would have on vulnerable, remote communities that have been attacked and robbed.

Let us make no mistake about this Bill. It intends to do one thing — set the course for privatisation. The Government say that they have other intentions: they want to convert a statutory corporation to a plc, and they want to make it more cost-effective. These are admirable aims to a degree, but it is not the Government's responsibility to run companies. Do they want to privatise the postal service and run it as a private company? That is not the Government's job, yet that is what the Bill is seeking to do. This Bill represents a great struggle between the private sector and the public service. It is important that the Government recognise that the two sectors are very different and do not try to pay lip-service to one while failing the other. This will happen if the

Government proceed with this Bill, which is unclear and carries a mishmash of ideas.

Members may ask why I say this is about privatisation. In December 1998 the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, one Peter Mandelson, when introducing the White Paper preceding this Bill, said

"I should make it clear that we certainly do not rule out the possibility of introducing private shareholding into the Post Office. At present wholesale privatisation would not be a realistic option."

The ambition at that time was to achieve privatisation, and I believe that it remains so under Stephen Byers.

In the early 1990s John Major's Government failed to privatise the postal services, and it would be a shame if the Labour Government now proceeded with a Bill they opposed themselves when in Opposition.

With regard to the cost of privatisation, the Member for North Belfast outlined some of the problems and increasing costs resulting from subsidisation. He quoted the statistic that in real terms it costs about 87p to post a letter in a rural area while in Belfast or London, it costs less than 1p. In some parts of my constituency, such as Rathlin Island, the real cost of sending a letter is £10, but I can do that for 19p. If the postal services were to be privatised, serving the rural community and the outlying areas of Great Britain and Northern Ireland would not be a priority for the private company but would be much further down the pecking order. One of the best reasons for retaining our postal services is the standardised cost of sending post across the whole of the country.

This Bill proposes a regulator, but one cannot serve two masters. If this Bill goes through, the Post Office must bow not only to Government demands but also to those of an independent regulator. As I said earlier, one cannot satisfy one master and pay lip-service to the other without their coming into conflict eventually. It is the Government's duty to ensure that the needs and demands of the public are met. It is not the Government's duty to privatise this essential service — a service which ensures that post gets to the public across the United Kingdom at the same price.

For Northern Ireland this Bill means that there will be 615 fewer post offices in about two years' time and that 1,500 jobs will be lost. The facts speak for themselves. Yesterday the Post Office published, for the first time in 25 years, a fall into the red of over £250 million — an indication that the Bill is bad news for the Post Office and for the public.

**Mr J Kelly:** A LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. It was timely of Assembly Member Dallat to bring it to our attention.

I want to talk about rural regeneration. We have heard a lot about rural regeneration, both from the



farming community and from other communities who live in rural areas. The farming community in particular has pointed out the fact that rural communities are being bled and that no attempt is being made to regenerate them. The post office in a rural community is the main artery to its heart.. If you remove that artery, you will cause the heart to stop.

Members have talked today about the neighbourly connection between the post office and the rural community. Coming as I do from a rural community, I can say that for many old-age pensioners the post office has become a focal point, a place where they can exchange news, where they can talk to their neighbour — and it may be the only chance that they have to talk to their neighbour during the course of the week. Some people are able to walk to the post office, and others use a bicycle to get there, but there is no doubt that a local post office is an inseparable part of the rural community. It would be wrong to divest old-age pensioners of a post office and expect them to use a cash dispenser, which some of us who are in full possession of our faculties sometimes cannot use, let alone an elderly person. We should not expect the older generation to adapt to that kind of technology, not to mention all the costs that would be involved.

It has been pointed out that the minimum sum that may be withdrawn would, for many old-age pensioners, be too much to take out at one time. There is also the question of shopping locally. These people use their post office not only as a focal point for meeting others, but also as a place to do their shopping — where they can get their few bits and pieces to carry them through the rest of the week.

Mr Billy Hutchinson made a good point, and we can be very parochial in terms of rurality. There is a point to be made for city people also and for those who live in vulnerable areas. They too should have a local post office.

I support this motion and its timing. The retention of local post offices will not only maintain the idea of rurality but it may also be a springboard for rural regeneration. A LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Mr O'Neill:** I too want to thank Assemblyman Dallat for bringing this motion before the House. I congratulate him on his authoritative research and on the way that he presented it — he did so well that he has left many of us with very little to add. However, there are a couple of points that I would like to emphasise.

Members have already clearly made the distinction between service and profit as they examined the problem of local post offices, and it is on that very point of principle that we should be judging what we should offer as advice from the House. The concept of service is very clear: post offices provide a service to everybody, rural and urban — and I think that even Billy Hutchinson

will forgive me if I emphasise the importance of the service in rural areas. It is in the rural area rather than the urban area that the problem strikes home.

Rural areas, such as my constituency of South Down, have reeled from centralised thinking. We have reeled from centralised thinking on planning, where people have difficulty even building a house for members of their family on their farmstead. We have reeled from centralised thinking on roads: no new stretch of road has been built in South Down in living memory. We have reeled from centralised thinking on hospital services, as illustrated by the argument over the Downe Hospital in Downpatrick.

Centralised thinkers are not necessarily urban dwellers, but they tend to have an urban mindset. They tend to arrive in a rural area, look at it, and say “That’s a nice place; we’ll go for a walk with our green wellies on” or “That’s a nice place for a weekend home”. They pay scant regard to the difficulties faced by the population who actually have to live, bring up families and survive in rural areas.

This continual erosion of services to people in rural areas and to the quality of their lives combined with the insecurity that people feel about this will inevitably force people to move out. Recently a medical person in my area retired and said that he was going to move closer to Belfast for his health and safety. That sort of thing will increase as services continue to be reduced.

Why am I so concerned about the post office? Well, next to the primary school in a hamlet or a village, the post office is at the heart of a rural community. In terms of commercial and community activity, there is a network, an interdependence, between a local post office and the surrounding businesses in the hamlet or village. People who collect their benefits and pensions purchase goods there. If they have to go to another location, business will be taken away from that particular hamlet or village. That is the reason for the erosion of services in the rural community.

People should be heartened by the support, from all sides, for John Dallat’s motion. It shows the concern that there is about the erosion of services in rural areas. I hope that there will be unanimous support for the motion.

**Mr Morrow:** I was struck by Mr O'Neill’s comment that centralists and centralism are the curse of those dwelling in the rural areas of Northern Ireland. I could not agree with him more. In recent years we have watched, with utter dismay, as they have tried to turn rural dwellers into urban dwellers. Those of us who live in rural Northern Ireland will never be urbanised, and we defend our right to have services retained in our rural communities.



I am speaking in favour of the motion, and I thank the Member for bringing it before the Assembly. It is very timely. This morning's discussions clearly illustrate the widespread concerns that exist about the implementation of the Postal Services Bill. I believe that the Bill is designed more for inner city and town dwellers and that it has very little to offer those of us who live in rural parts of the United Kingdom.

11.45 am

It goes without saying that many rural post offices will be forced to close. Significantly, when we talk about rural post offices, the impression may be given that these are remote offices tucked away under a mountain somewhere, used by a dozen people, but it extends much wider than that. Our towns and villages are going to feel the impact of the Postal Services Bill. In some cases, the principal towns of a district council area are feeling the impact of what is happening to their post offices.

It has been said that the local primary school is the heartbeat of a rural community. I agree entirely. In the same vein, the rural post office is a vital link within that community. We have watched in dismay as rural primary schools have closed one after another. In the Dungannon District Council area, 10 or 12 rural primary schools have closed in the past 15 to 18 years. Now it is the turn of the rural post office. We can see a pattern developing. Very soon, rural communities will be denuded of all life.

The Postal Services Bill will have a devastating effect on rural communities. It will impact not only on rural Northern Ireland, but on our villages and towns. The Assembly should resist this with all its might. Rural Northern Ireland is already under pressure. Stringent planning regulations are turning our countryside into a wilderness. It is vital that those who live in rural Northern Ireland are permitted to do so. The post office is vital to the whole rural community infrastructure.

In recent years there has been an influx of large retail stores into Northern Ireland. In many cases they have picked off the prime sites on the periphery of our towns. What do we find then? Our sub-post offices are cleverly moved into these large stores. Tony Blair's New Labour has shown little regard for rural communities. It has been said that the only apparent interest this Labour Government has in the countryside is in abolishing fox-hunting and introducing homosexual studies to the few remaining rural schools.

The Government plan to pay pensions, welfare benefits and child allowances directly into recipients' bank accounts from 2003. Of course, when this decision was taken, little consideration was given to the fact that rural Northern Ireland does not have adequate banking services. Many of our villages have, at best, poor

part-time banking facilities. I am convinced that the postal service has been designed for an urban Britain, with very little consideration given to rural communities and to Northern Ireland in particular. We are fast moving towards a cashless society, if we have not already arrived. The important role that the rural post office plays in society today cannot be overestimated. I represent a rural community whose inhabitants are going to be further penalised for being rural dwellers.

I support the motion.

**Ms Gildernew:** Go raibh maith agat. I also support the motion. Like my Colleague, Gerry McHugh, I am appalled by the steps taken by the British Government to have welfare benefits paid into bank accounts. The only people who will benefit from this are the banks, as everyone will now need a bank account in order to access their money. I am concerned about exorbitant fees, including charges for every transaction made. Furthermore, how do the Government hope to get round the fact that a person getting less than £80 may be able to access only £60? Many cash dispensers only pay out £20 notes. It is not acceptable to have difficulty in accessing a quarter of one's weekly benefit. It will cause additional hardship to many people who are already on or under the breadline. Those who are disadvantaged, in both urban and rural society, should not be denied the choice of how to access their money. Is this how we target social need? It will have a tremendous impact on rural communities.

In the village of the Moy in my constituency, there is a vibrant post office, which is open six days a week and a small bank that is open only one morning a week. The Bill will create havoc for the elderly and the mobility-impaired community in the village and its rural hinterlands. In one morning, could that little bank serve hundreds of pensioners, disabled people, the unemployed and parents collecting family allowance? I do not think so. By the time all those people are queued into the Moy, it will be more like the Red Square than the Moy Square.

The situation gets worse. At least the Moy has a bank, albeit for half a day. What about the hundreds of villages across the North with no bank, when the journey for people to the nearest town to access their money is the equivalent of a three-day camel ride on the joke that is rural public transport. Do the civil servants in Whitehall who come up with these stupid proposals have any idea how difficult it is to get from A to B in rural areas, especially with a walking frame, in a wheelchair, or with a pushchair and two or three children?

The Bill will also have an enormous detrimental effect on shops in small villages which depend on customers who use post offices coming into their shops. Who, after travelling 10 miles to the nearest town, with perhaps up to eight hours to wait for the next bus back,

will return to their village and spend their money, when they can shop for bargains in the supermarket beside the bank in town? This will take more money away from small businesses and lead to the demise of the rural community. We cannot allow the urbanisation of our rural communities.

Once again, policy that has been dreamed up in London is forced on us. The measure is totally unacceptable to a rural community under siege from the curse of rationalisation. If it is successful, we shall continue to see school and hospital closures, and the further streamlining of services. Sinn Féin therefore supports the motion. We oppose that aspect of the Postal Services Bill.

**Mr Bradley:** How often have we heard about the rural crisis? Every Minister, from the Minister with direct responsibility for rural affairs to those with peripheral interests, has had ample opportunity to express concerns and fears for rural life. The Ulster Farmers' Union, the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association, every rural correspondent of every agricultural magazine and newspaper, and our rural district councils, have spent hours, weeks, months — probably now years — discussing the unacceptable state of the rural economy, and trying to regenerate our rural heartlands. The Assembly is the combined voice of all the aforementioned organisations and groups, and we have heard the support for the motion from right across the political divide, from both rural and urban representatives. The proposed closure of rural post offices is a strategy that was planned in plush offices in London, without considering rural residents who depend on the service.

We have all seen the advertisement "Send a letter today", but what does it mean to someone in the Mourne, the Sperrins, the Glens and other rural areas? It will mean taking a taxi at a fare of £8 return, taking two hours off — three if you are elderly — and making your way through traffic, towns and villages to send your letter today. I do not think that the post office can run with that advertisement. In my area of South Down, two post offices, at Ballinran and Annacloy, are closing because nobody wants the franchise. Why is that? Because of the uncertainty. The whole issue is up in the air and no one is prepared to take on the risk involved — a risk that is not lessened by these proposals. It is a case of profits versus people, and it our duty to support the people, especially the rural people who sent many of us to the Assembly. I support the motion and I thank my Colleague, John Dallat, for bringing it to the House. Rural people will be grateful for any success that the Assembly may have in amending the proposed legislation from Westminster.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** This debate is very important, and I thank the Member for bringing it to the

House. It certainly affects the constituencies of many Members. Indeed, a Member for North Belfast acknowledged the fact earlier that there is an important relationship involved in this issue whether it be in Belfast or in a rural community. It is certainly with anger and frustration that the community is forced to witness, and is expected to witness, the destruction and demolition of what was, I suppose, a national institution — the local post office network.

Local post offices have served the community with extreme professionalism and dedication, and their destruction would be a retrograde step. In fact, it could be regarded as a criminal act by the Government, a Government that have overthrown principle. When the Labour Party went to the people, the one matter that they did not present to the electorate across the United Kingdom was the mutilation of the postal services. Had it done so, it certainly would not have received a mandate for such action. Many people in the rural communities are going to reap the fruits of this New Labour practice and policy, and they will find them very hard to swallow. We are putting down a marker today that that is totally unacceptable.

The present situation acknowledges that this Administration is divorced from the community. Mr Blair and his Cabinet seem to be divorcing themselves from the community more and more. It was clearly evident when he thought he would use the conference of the Women's Institute for his own political ends. He found that the ladies gave him something more than he deserved — probably what he did deserve — due recognition for what he was doing. The Government seem to be totally insensitive to the needs of ordinary people, because this situation will impact upon the elderly, the disabled, and the many low-income families that find it impossible, with so little affordable transport available, to get to post offices in the major towns.

Therefore it is important for Members to raise their voices today on behalf of the post office service because it has rendered, and is rendering, a very valuable service to the community. For many people, the post office is more than just a post office. It is, as other Members have mentioned, a centre for advice, a banking facility, and a centre for social life. It is where many elderly people go to meet folk. We cannot expect them to stand in a queue in a bank. One stands in the queue in the bank waiting to hear "Next, please", and the person in front is practically ordered out. It comes down to financial benefit rather than anything else.

Also, we must bear in mind that many elderly people have never used banks and have a fear of using banks. There is a cost in using practically any service in a bank. When one opens an account, all these costs can be seen. For many elderly people, it would not even be financially feasible. Instead of assisting them in getting

their money, it would make them pay to get the money due to them. They get little enough money. The increase in pensions was miserable and miserly — it was Scrooge at his worst.

I believe that the postal service is vital to the whole community. This House would do the community a great service by ensuring that our voices are raised in demanding that the many post offices in little villages and scattered across the rural community be kept open. The Government must insure that they are able to survive. Therefore, I have great pleasure in supporting the resolution before the House today.

**Ms Morrice:** I support the motion and want to reinforce all that has been said about the value of post offices. There is no doubt that we all know and love the post offices.

Whether they are in rural or urban areas, I think they are a valuable part of our community, and they are very much needed, particularly in rural areas.

12.00

With the reduction of banking services in rural areas we must look to rely on the post offices. Why should post offices not pick up the work in cases where banking services are being reduced. Post offices are very well placed to do such work, and people find post offices easier, more comfortable places to meet and do business. A post office is not just a post office. It is a place where people meet, where there are banking services and a shop. Post offices keep in touch with the people, and I think that is the important message which should go out from here today. We must back the Post Office; we must not allow the service to be reduced. We are very concerned that this is a first step towards privatisation.

The Post Office has been referred to as the working person's bank. There are many areas — in rural Scotland, for example — where the Post Office has aligned itself with the transport service and offers transport services to people living in remote and rural areas. These are new, innovative ideas that we could feed into the whole debate on the Post Office. It is important that the Assembly has discussed this issue this morning, and we should make sure that the message goes out to London, to Belfast, to the Post Office and everywhere that we are backing the service, and we want to keep it.

**Mr M Robinson:** Along with many other Members I support the motion. Small post offices are undoubtedly being threatened by Government plans contained in the Postal Services Bill that was presented in House of Commons on 17 January 2000. The main thrust of this plan was to switch benefit payments from over-the-counter cash payments to automated payments into bank accounts. According to the Government's own

figures this will deprive 40% of post offices of 40% of their income, so large-scale closures will be inevitable. Ironically, such a move would almost certainly lead people down a blind alley, since rural bank branches are disappearing at such a rapid rate that it will become more and more impractical for people to be able to access their benefits from them.

I am sure that Members do not need to be reminded of the recent outcry following the large-scale closures of rural banks by Barclays Bank — a fact that has already been referred to by the Member for North Belfast. This policy is being pushed through without any plausible alternatives being offered to help post offices remain open. The Cabinet Office's performance and innovation unit was tasked to report, by the end of February, on the future of post offices and to identify ways in which the lost business could be replaced. To my knowledge, no such report has yet been forthcoming. If the Government do not come up with a convincing plan to secure the future of post offices, then the Assembly should send the message out that in order to defend their local post office, rural people must reject automated credit transfer and insist on cash payments for pensions and benefits.

The Government's plans for benefit payments will thereby be unworkable. Far from eroding the role and usefulness of rural post offices, the Government should think creatively and radically to find ways, through greater deregulation if necessary, to empower them further. This should start with safeguarding the role of post offices which are able to provide local people with the convenience of benefit payments in cash in their own locality, instead of their having to visit a bank branch miles away in the nearest town.

In addition, the commercial viability of post offices could be boosted by enabling them to offer additional income-earning facilities and administrative services such as equipping them with Internet technology to provide direct access to Government information regarding jobs, social benefits and health. In this way the Government could help rural post offices become a one-stop shop and ensure they remain a social pivot for local communities.

The Countryside Alliance is a national organisation which has campaigned vigorously for the retention of post offices because of their vital role in the viability of rural communities. Last year it asked key rural business and community groups about the Government's performance on rural issues, and the findings were interesting: only 3% said that the Government had done "a very good job", while 17% said that they had "performed very badly". When asked how well or badly the Government understand the value of the village post office to the community, 58% said "very badly"; and only 18% said "well" or "very well". Finally, 66% of



rural postmasters believed that the Government understand the problems of the countryside “very badly”, and a mere 13% thought that the Government understand them “well” or “fairly well”.

The performance and innovations unit’s report on the rural economy, which was published in December 1999, barely mentioned post offices and showed no understanding of their vital role as a rural service or social centre. We therefore have no reason to believe that the Government have any ideas on protecting these condemned post offices from the effects of their policy.

The Postal Services Bill will lead to the closure of rural post offices which, in many cases, are the social and economic centre of rural communities. That is why I support the motion.

**Mr Hussey:** I support the motion and agree with the comments that have been made. Most Members will remember when British Telecom was an integral part of the Post Office. For financial reasons, it was decided to remove that responsibility from the Post Office and flog it off to provide cash for use elsewhere. The Postal Services Bill is part of the same process. To adopt an expression that has been used in different circumstances, it is “salami-slicing” the financially viable elements of an excellent service, thereby rendering the service less capable of survival on its own. The community, especially the rural community, cannot afford not to have postal services in all areas.

It has been said, rightly, that it is a matter not only of the postal service, but the ethos that goes with it. In many cases, a local post office is the element that maintains the viability of the local village shop or small shop in a rural community.

I support the motion and all the sentiments that have been expressed in the House today. I have no doubt that this motion will be agreed. Since this is a reserved matter, perhaps at some stage the Assembly should lobby Westminster.

**Mr Dallat:** I am grateful for all of the positive contributions. The Assembly should take pride in its morning’s work. In a show of common interest, we have expressed the views of people in the community who are deeply concerned about the proposals that are currently going through Westminster.

The point was well made that the Post Office needs commercial freedom to compete, but not at the expense of ending a universal service to all areas, including rural areas. The Bill is about more than Post Office Counters. As has been said, it is a complex Bill, and I have no problem in saying that I do not want to sell the Crown jewels. The Post Office is a reserved matter, but the Assembly will be asked for representation on the body Post Office Users’ National Council (POUNC), which meets in London. It does not have a representative body

in Northern Ireland, which illustrates the contempt in which we are held.

The point about tendering has been well made, and it was a major concern made to me by our friends in the Republic. They have managed to fight off tendering so far, but they accept that eventually they may lose. So the post office, as we know it, could well disappear.

There were some very positive suggestions, particularly in relation to electronic transfer opportunities and how they can be developed for the special use of rural dwellers. I look forward to tomorrow and the suggestions that might be made by the Government in that respect.

The farming community was also mentioned. They are the backbone of the rural community, and their backs are against the walls. The last thing they need is for their post offices to be taken away.

Several Members referred to economic regeneration and described the post office as the main artery — indeed, the heart — of the local community. I could not agree more.

The Bill was described as a struggle between the private sector and public service. The point was well made that the role of the Government is not to be involved in the private sector but to provide the universal services which people require — particularly the most vulnerable in our community, among whom I include the elderly.

It was pointed out that, under another arrangement, a letter to the rural community would cost 87p, and I was horrified to find that it would cost me £10 if I were to write to someone on Rathlin Island. Those figures help to illustrate people’s concerns.

Centralist thinking is an issue. People making these decisions, as I said in my opening remarks, have been influenced too much by ‘The Archers’, rather than by the real people who live in our world. The rural post office is not the little hut at the top of the mountain — it could well be located in sizeable towns. I believe that a head of steam is building up because the Bill could affect a lot of people.

The Assembly has done a good morning’s work, and the good thing is that we did it together, with every Member’s contribution well researched and equally important. I was touched by the fact that everyone spoke with genuine feeling and with deeply held emotion. The only variance we have had — and I do not think that it was serious — was the rural verses the urban argument. I take on board everything that Billy Hutchinson said. The only real difference between a rural dweller and an urban dweller in Northern Ireland is that one may have a garden while the other has a window box. We are all rural people at heart, and I can assure my city friends that there is total and absolute solidarity.



Many of the people most affected by the changes could well come from the side streets of Belfast, whether north, south, east or west. The Assembly should be very proud of its work today. I want to sum up by thanking everyone for taking part in the debate, for researching the material so well, and for illustrating to the outside world that the Assembly does have a function, which is to articulate the common views of all the people in Northern Ireland.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

This Assembly is seriously concerned by proposals drawn up under the Postal Service Bill, which will undermine economic prosperity and regeneration in rural areas.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.14 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —*

## ABORTION

*2.00 pm*

**Mr Speaker:** Given the substantial number of Members who want to participate in the debate this afternoon, I have had to introduce some time limits. Mr Wells will have 15 minutes to move the motion, and 15 minutes at the end to wind up.

There is one amendment on the Marshalled List which I have accepted for debate. Ms McWilliams will have 10 minutes to move the amendment and 10 minutes to wind up at the end. All other Members will have seven minutes, and we will have as many contributors as possible. The House will adjourn at 6.00 pm in any case.

**Mr Wells:** I beg to move

That this Assembly is opposed to the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland.

Tuesday 20 June will be a very bad day for 530 unborn children in Great Britain because, today, their lives will be aborted.

Every 24 hours in hospitals in England, Scotland and Wales an average of 530 human beings are legally killed and disposed of under powers granted by the 1967 Abortion Act. By the time this debate concludes at 6.00 pm, another 88 children will have been killed through abortion. In hospitals throughout Britain, teams of surgeons will be trying to save the lives of unborn children in one ward, while down the corridor in the same hospitals, other teams will be destroying the lives of unborn children. Since the 1967 Act became law, 5.3 million abortions have been carried out in Great Britain — more than the populations of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic combined, and almost the same number as the number of Jews who were murdered in Hitler's death camps.

The main purpose of my motion is to ensure that this legalised carnage is not permitted in Northern Ireland by way of an extension of the 1967 Act to this part of the United Kingdom, and I am moving it today in support of the right to life of the unborn child, knowing that both communities are perhaps more united on this issue than on any other.

On leaving Northern Ireland, Dr Mo Mowlam said that her biggest regret was that she had failed to find an appropriate time to extend the Abortion Act here. It is my hope that her wish will never be granted. Human development is a continuous process, which starts at the moment of conception, when a unique human being is created. Within two weeks of conception a child's head

is distinct, and he has the basic functions of liver, brain and lungs. After 50 days he has fingers and toes, and by 11 weeks he can make facial expressions and even smile. By 20 weeks he has well-developed eyelids and fingernails, and 75% of the babies born between that time and 25 weeks survive. The chilling fact under the 1967 Abortion Act is that any of these babies can be killed, and legally. I said earlier that there have been 5·3 million abortions in Great Britain since 1967. The sad reality is that 98·6% of these children were perfectly healthy human beings carried by perfectly healthy mothers.

The vast majority of abortions have been carried out on the grounds of a perceived risk to the physical and mental health of the woman. However, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has said

“there is no such danger in the majority of these cases, as the reason for termination is purely a social one”.

When David Steel introduced his Bill in 1966 he claimed

“It was not the intention of the promoters of the Bill to leave a wide open door for abortion on request”.

It was claimed that the Bill would merely clarify the law, enabling doctors to abort in borderline or difficult cases without the fear of prosecution. What has happened under the Abortion Act 1967 in the rest of the United Kingdom has in effect been abortion on demand. A Gallup opinion poll carried out in 1988 involved the interviewing of 746 gynaecologists — 40% of those practising at the time — and found that 85% had either worked or were working in NHS hospitals where abortion on demand was practised. As private clinics were opened, staffed by doctors prepared to operate on anyone ready to pay the fee, Britain became the abortion capital of the world.

Fortunately, the situation in Northern Ireland is quite different. The Abortion Act 1967 was never introduced here, and we do not have abortion on demand in the Province. Our law is a combination of statute — including the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 1945 — and the 1939 case involving Dr Bourne. In Northern Ireland an abortion can take place only if one of the following conditions is satisfied: first, where the continuation of the pregnancy would lead to serious medical or psychological problems which would jeopardise the woman's life; secondly, where there is mental subnormality in the case of the mother; thirdly, where there is proven contact with rubella or, as it is generally known, German measles; or, fourthly, where there is a substantial genetic risk of having a mentally handicapped child.

As a result of this more restrictive legislation in Northern Ireland, the number of abortions carried out in the Province is quite low. There were, for instance, 77 in

the year 1997-98. In addition to this, women can travel from Northern Ireland to England for an abortion. The total number carrying out this journey peaked in 1990, when 1,855 women went to Liverpool or London. This declined substantially to 1,572 in 1997. It is estimated that, in total, 45,000 women from Northern Ireland have had abortions in Britain since the passing of the Abortion Act 1967. What is quite clear from these figures is that the number of Northern Ireland women having abortions since the passing of the Act is much lower because it has not been enacted here.

If the Abortion Act 1967 had been introduced in the Province 33 years ago we could have expected some 140,000 abortions, yet the number is less than a third of that. We have quite detailed information on the reasons for women from Northern Ireland travelling to the rest of the United Kingdom for abortions. In a parliamentary written answer to a Mr Blunt, a Conservative Member of Parliament, Miss Hewitt, Director of the Office of National Statistics, gave details of the abortions carried out on women from Northern Ireland in the period 1993-97. The total number of abortions in that period was exactly 8,000, and for 7,725 of those the reason given was the threat to the physical or mental health of the woman.

In the rest of the United Kingdom that is generally regarded as abortion on demand. There were few genuine medical reasons for those abortions; they were carried out for social reasons. Undoubtedly there will be those who highlight the difficult cases. Using the small number of difficult cases as examples, they will argue that it is right to have abortion on demand for any woman in Northern Ireland.

Time does not permit me to deal with all the issues at this point, though I hope, by means of intervention and summation, to deal with as many as I can. The point that will always be raised in this type of debate is that abortion may be required to save the life of the mother. As I pointed out earlier, the law in Northern Ireland currently allows abortion in those situations. I must emphasise that this is an extremely rare occurrence. There have been 5·3 million abortions in Great Britain since 1967. In just over 200 of those cases — 0·004% — the abortion was carried out to save the life of the mother. That is a tiny fraction.

In the Irish Republic a study was carried out on 21 deaths which occurred among 74,000 pregnant women in the National Maternity Hospital in Dublin. It was found that not one of those 21 mothers' lives would have been saved by abortion.

There are those who will argue that the introduction of the 1967 Act will prevent what are known as backstreet abortions. The evidence indicates that that is not correct. From 1968 until 1988 the police in Great Britain recorded 968 offences of the procurement of an

illegal abortion. The corresponding figure for Northern Ireland, where the 1967 Act did not apply, was five. In the Irish Republic, where there is no abortion on demand, the equivalent figure was two.

Claims with regard to the number of people dying from illegal abortions have been widely exaggerated by the pro-choice campaign. In 1982, for instance, in Portugal, it was claimed that 2,000 people had died as a result of illegal abortions. Yet when the statistics were examined more closely they revealed that the number of women aged between 15 and 45 who died from any cause in Portugal that year was 1,887. Clearly those statistics were absolute nonsense.

There are those who will argue that it is important to have abortion in order to allow for the termination of a pregnancy should there be a likelihood of a handicapped child being born. In those situations, I believe, abortion is an attack on the most vulnerable. I do not believe that those children are inferior, or of any less value, than the able-bodied.

Yesterday I had the privilege of attending a reception that Assembly Member Roy Beggs organised for Mencap. Anyone who attended will, I am sure, agree that the highlight of the event was a speech made by Hilary Gammon, a young lady with learning difficulties. Anyone who listened to her contribution could not fail to be impressed by what she said. Hilary works for North Down Borough Council and lives a very full and fulfilled life. Many people who have disabled children or children with learning difficulties will testify to the fact that, as a result of having those children, their lives have been enriched. I have very little time for those who say that, because a child is likely to be born handicapped, he or she should automatically be aborted.

The pro-choice lobby would say that every child should be a wanted child, and there are many who would agree with that, but the evidence indicates that abortion on demand does not achieve that. A study carried out in southern California discovered that 91% of battered children referred to clinics were the result of planned or wanted pregnancies. A study of the child protection register carried out by the NSPCC from 1973 until 1990 showed a three fold increase in child abuse during that period. If abortion on demand meant that every child was a wanted child, why has there been a trebling in the number of abused children in the United Kingdom? Why is that happening? Abortion does not seem to be working in that case.

2.15 pm

Many will raise the very difficult issue — and I accept that it is a difficult moral issue — of pregnancies caused by rape or incest. The 1938 Bourne judgement permits abortions to be carried out in Northern Ireland in those very difficult circumstances. No one can

possibly underestimate the trauma of a pregnancy brought about by rape. However, such a tragedy cannot be undone by the killing of one of the innocent victims of the violent act. When put together, all the difficult cases in Northern Ireland still add up to very few individual children.

The sad reality is that there are far more parents on the register of those seeking adoption than there are those difficult cases. There are homes for these children who would otherwise be aborted. We can all testify to having friends and relatives who have adopted children and have provided excellent homes and very fulfilled upbringings for them, so this idea that you go for abortion in these difficult cases frankly holds no water.

There are other victims associated with abortion beyond the 5.3 million children who have been denied the right to life. There is a psychological impact on the mothers. Ten per cent of those who have had abortions have subsequently had long-term psychological problems. In addition, there are moral problems for many people involved in the Health Service in Northern Ireland who would find it difficult to carry out, or assist in the carrying out of, abortions. Their views also have to be taken into consideration.

Time is rapidly running out. I hope to deal with the Women's Coalition's amendment by means of an intervention at some stage, but I ask the House to give this motion its full support.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member will, of course, have the opportunity to deal with all the comments made in the course of the debate, including the debate on the amendment, in his winding-up speech immediately before the vote.

**Ms McWilliams:** I beg to move the following amendment: Delete all after "Assembly" and add

"refers the question of the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 and related issues to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee and requests that the Committee make a report to the Assembly on the matter within six months."

We tabled this amendment today because we do not want a heated, emotional, disturbing debate for the next four hours. We want this discussion to take place with as much access to information and advice as possible.

The situation in Northern Ireland is a mess and desperately needs to be reviewed. Are Members going to address this issue as they would deal with any other issue that comes before the House? Can they in all honesty say that four hours is enough time to come to a considered opinion on what should be happening in Northern Ireland?

I want to deal with the complexities that exist in the area of reproductive health. It clearly needs a comprehensive inquiry. We need a range of advice from

gynaecologists and from those working in obstetrics, in public health, in primary and secondary schools, in education and in sex education. We also need the people from both the Alliance for Choice and Pro-Life to come before the Committee. All deserve to have their opinions heard. Many of you will never have heard from that range of professionals, non-governmental organisations and groups. Here is an opportunity to hear from them, to invite them to come, as you do in all other Committees, to answer your questions, ask for clarification and seek information in any hearing. The Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee would be the best one to do that.

It sometimes takes a great deal of courage in Northern Ireland, as it does anywhere, to say that we do not know it all. We do not have all the answers. We did not have them when we were dealing with the constitutional issues. We only got to the agreement after agonising hours and hours and hours of talking and listening to those who even today are against the agreement and for the agreement, as is their democratic right. We should take time to do that with this issue also.

I am asking Members to have the courage to vote for our amendment. Let them say that they do not know it all, that they are prepared to get that information and advice, contrary, challenging and confrontational as it may be to their beliefs. It is important that they take the opportunity to listen.

When the Assembly was set up I believed that we would craft anything we did well and that we would take time to reflect on the realities of life for all the people in Northern Ireland before we formed our policies. We have said many times that we want a responsive democracy, that we want legislation on policies that do not create, in David Trimble's words, "a cold house" in Northern Ireland. We would prefer it to be a welcoming house, which acknowledges our diversity. How many times on this Floor have I heard people talk about the pluralism of Northern Ireland, the diversity of Northern Ireland, the different backgrounds that we come from, our different religious perspectives —

**Mr Roche:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is this a debate about the Belfast Agreement or about abortion?

**Mr Speaker:** I have to say that some Members have found all sorts of ingenious ways of bringing the Belfast Agreement into debate, as Mr Roche is very well aware.

**Ms McWilliams:** All I would say to Mr Roche is that we dealt with a very cold house here on many issues, and it is neither fair nor right to try to exclude people who have different views from him or me on this issue. I was using that as a very pertinent example.

Ethics will come into this debate today. Currently abortion is dealt with as a criminal justice matter, and it

is a justice issue — there is no doubt about it. However, it is also a care issue, and the ethic of care is something that we should deal very carefully with.

Let me say something very briefly about the legislation here. Members may think that we are dealing with the Abortion Act 1967, but under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the 1967 Act is not listed as a reserved matter. There is a reference to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, which amended the previous legislation, so we are really having a debate on outdated legislation. The Northern Ireland Act is very specific as to the legislation to which it refers.

If Members support our amendment asking that the matter be referred to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, they will not be promoting abortion. They will be asking for a considered opinion on the situation in Northern Ireland, and most Members probably do not know what that situation is. We are not asking that this matter be referred simply to let the Health Committee end up with all the problems. No one in this Chamber should ever ask for that to happen. We are not relinquishing our responsibility; we are not transferring our responsibility; we are taking our responsibility very seriously.

We will have a debate about the illegality, or the legality, of what we currently have, but that will not lead us to a discussion on the causes. I am delighted that schools have recently taken on board a very, very tough issue for teachers, the issue of sex education. There was a debate in both the Catholic and state schools on how they were going to introduce this to their pupils at the appropriate age. I know that in Catholic schools it is dealt with under the heading 'Education for Love'. Much of this information are facts which those children never had before. It also leads young boys and girls to understand the meaning of a responsible, mature adolescent relationship. As we know, it is the lack of that information in the past which led to the tragedies many of us are discussing.

I will speak briefly about the current legal situation and here I would like to take issue with Mr Wells. Under our law for non-consensual sex, in terms of both rape and incest, termination should be permitted, but that is not the case. Indeed, it may be something that both the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights have to look at.

Termination is an impossible situation for all mothers. All of us who work with disability groups, Mencap and many others, will always support those groups. In Northern Ireland, doctors making difficult decisions every day about foetal abnormalities are performing illegally. We must consider this fact in our investigations.



We also need to address the question of technology and how it is overtaking us. How will a system based on judicial interpretations of a Victorian statute of 1861 stand in the face of changes in medical technology? Undoubtedly, it is the more recent piece of legislation of 1990 that the Northern Ireland Act refers to. Currently, judicial rulings are based on very hard and tough cases. If we want to leave it with the judges, so be it. The judicial rulings state that where there is a probable risk of an adverse effect to the physical and mental health of pregnant women, terminations are permitted, and so it goes. We are united in confusion. The whole area is shrouded in confusion. To get out of that confusion, it is very clear to me that we need to refer this to the appropriate Committee.

**Mr Speaker:** May I remind Members that remarks should be addressed through the Chair rather than directly to other Members. That is especially important in a debate of this kind.

**The Chairman of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee (Dr Hendron):** I would like to congratulate Mr Wells on bringing this motion before the Assembly. I have studied the amendment put forward by Prof Monica McWilliams. My Committee will discuss this issue or any other issue that we feel is important. Of that, there is no doubt. This issue will not be resolved today, irrespective of what happens, and I am sure our Committee will have plenty of opportunities to discuss it. I support the motion.

Not long ago an all-party delegation went to see John Major when he was Prime Minister. The DUP was represented by the Rev William McCrea. Seamus Mallon and myself and also the Conservative and Labour parties were represented. We made it clear to the then Prime Minister that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland were implacably opposed to the extension of that Act. Jim Wells made reference to Mo Mowlan, and I agree with what he said. There are of course very deep rooted, social economic and personal reasons why people seek abortion. From my position as a doctor over many years, I am indeed familiar with the massive psychological trauma to a young girl from an unplanned pregnancy. I do understand the many hundreds who go to England from all parts of this island. As has been said, the beginning of life for each human being is fertilisation, when the father's sperm fertilises the mother's egg. It is a momentous event in the beginning of a completely new human being, unique in its own right from fertilisation; 23 chromosomes in the sperm, 23 in the egg, that is 46 chromosomes.

2.30 pm

It is important to remember that the baby is genetically complete at that point. Nothing is added after that, other than nutrition and oxygen. It is genetically complete. Of course, there are major

environmental influences, both intrauterine and after birth. Many of the characteristics of the individual are determined at conception, such as colour of hair, eyes and skin, et cetera. Growth is controlled by the child's own genetic code: DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, as you would know, Mr Speaker. A single thread of human DNA contains information equivalent to half-a-million pages of five hundred words each. Between 21 and 25 days, the heart starts to beat. Fingers and toes are formed shortly afterwards.

Consider the methods of abortion that are used. I could go on about vacuum aspiration at 12-14 weeks, where parts of the human body are actually sucked out, but time is running out.

As regards a woman's right to choose, I have nothing but the highest respect and understanding for women and young girls who have unplanned pregnancies. It is not for us, or anyone else, to condemn them. We should try to help them, but abortion violates a human being's right to life. Human rights are universal. Unborn children are the most vulnerable human beings in our society.

As Jim Wells said, all the evidence suggests that providing abortions for people with psychiatric problems does more harm than good. Only five per cent of legal abortions are done on psychiatric grounds. That is a fact of life. Intellectual honesty is important, for the medical profession and beyond.

I will come to my final point. I appreciate that you have given me seven minutes, and my watch tells me I have a little while yet. I refer the Assembly to the Home Secretary's consultation document 'Supporting Families'. A copy of this was given to each member of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee on Wednesday. This is the first report of its kind issued by any British Government Minister. The Assembly and the Executive would do well to copy it. In my last minute, I will quote from it —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I advise the Member that I allocated seven minutes for each contribution.

**Dr Hendron:** Thirty seconds to go. I strongly recommend those interested in teenage pregnancy to read —

**Several Members:** Three minutes.

**Dr Hendron:** I have three minutes? Do I have time or not?

**Mr Speaker:** You have two more minutes, whether or not that is sufficient.

**Dr Hendron:** There were a lot of people speaking around me, you understand.

I commend this report to the House. It is fascinating reading and contains many suggestions. The problem lies with teenage parenthood. There is a group in

Lurgan and Craigavon that has taken these matters on board:

“Unwanted and under-age pregnancies, whether planned or unplanned, have a high personal, social and economic cost and can blight the life chances of younger teenagers ... Many young teenagers show a worrying level of ignorance about the ‘facts of life’.”

It goes on to talk about contraception — extremely important:

“Under 16 year olds are often very ignorant about sexual matters and this is a crucial risk factor for early teenage pregnancy ... Research suggests that boys who become fathers in their early teenage years are likely to have lived with neither or only one of their natural parents.”

The most important point of all is that

“because of the links between teenage pregnancy and social exclusion, the Prime Minister has asked the Social Exclusion Unit to work on this as its next priority. Its remit is to devise an integrated strategy to cut rates of teenage parenthood, particularly under-age parenthood, towards the European Union average.”

In the Family Planning Association document, Mrs Whitaker attacks the DUP for not developing a strategy for reducing unplanned pregnancy. I say to her that it is the Assembly and the Executive that must take action in that regard.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Seven minutes is all we have, but even that was not enough.

**Mrs Carson:** For the record, I must state that abortion is not a satisfactory way to avoid unwanted pregnancies. It should never be seen as the way out.

The debate on the controversial issue of abortion and its effects on women in Northern Ireland is of importance to the whole community — women in particular. It is ironic that a man, who will never have to go through childbirth or face the personal consequences of unwanted pregnancy, is proposing the motion.

The 1967 legislation was made by men for women and any future changes need to be made in consultation with the women of Northern Ireland.

The Assembly may pass the motion, but how is this motion going to persuade women that abortion is not an option? Abortion is here whether we agree with it or not. Abortions are already being carried out in Northern Ireland. In 1997-98, 77 medical abortions were carried out and in a survey 11% of GPs stated that they had experience of seeing women who had been involved in an amateur abortion. The morning-after pill is also an issue. How would the proposer of the motion suggest controlling that form of abortion?

The 1967 Act does not give women carte blanche to obtain abortion on demand. The Act clearly states that a lawful abortion can only be obtained when two registered medical practitioners agree that the continuance of a pregnancy would have a detrimental,

physical or mental impact on the woman, or that the child, if it were born, would be seriously handicapped.

It is simplistic to say that if the 1967 Abortion Act were introduced all pregnant women would wish to have an abortion. In Holland, where abortion is freely available, only six out of every 1,000 women procure one. That is the lowest abortion rate in the world. Why are such low numbers seeking abortions in Holland when it is freely available? In Holland they promote an ethic of personal responsibility with regard to sexual activity. Dutch teenagers, because of this culture of responsibility, tend to avoid sexual activity until they are older. This makes Dutch teenage pregnancy rates the lowest in Europe with only four pregnancies per 1,000 for women aged 15 to 19.

Compare this to Northern Ireland, which has about 29 pregnancies per 1000 women aged 15 to 19. If a woman from Northern Ireland wishes to have an abortion and she has enough money, all she has to do is look in ‘Yellow Pages’ where a number of English clinics providing that service are listed.

Almost 2,000 women from Northern Ireland travel to Great Britain every year to use abortion services. One fifth are under 20 years of age. The fact that around 400 girls under the age of 20 are obtaining abortions every year highlights the wider social problems. A large proportion of children under the age of 15 are engaging in sexual activity resulting in unwanted pregnancies. In our schools sexual health must be promoted in a way that encompasses spiritual and emotional health as well as physical health and well-being. There is an obvious need for a sensitive and compassionate programme for sex education that must include parents, teachers and children.

The responsibility for an abortion, or a termination, lies primarily with the woman and not with the state. If the Assembly takes the simple, moral high ground and agrees this motion, it will do nothing to help those 2,000 women who travel to Great Britain every year for an abortion. This attitude will do nothing to tackle the problem of teenage pregnancy. Once again, the real issue, preventing unwanted pregnancies, will be swept under the carpet.

The amendment, if passed, will put pressure on the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, and a six-month debate in the Committee is not the way to address the abortion problem. In the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee there are problems by the score to be addressed — acute services, children’s issues, and mental health to name but a few. I ask all in the Assembly today to consider the wider implications of the necessity for having some form of legalized abortion. Simply passing this motion is to be blind to the wider problems. We must have comprehensive sex education in our schools placing

value on loving human relationships. We must make an effort to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies, and we must have a co-ordinated approach by all interested groups, agencies and parties to tackle the problem in a realistic way. I appeal above all for our politicians to have an understanding of those women who have to make a difficult decision. Those women should not have to leave home or have to leave Northern Ireland, and they should not be made to feel like criminals having to hide their identities. Nor should they be ostracised by society.

I cannot support the motion.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Every party approaching this debate will be able to testify to the intensity of emotion and conviction that arises when the issue of abortion is addressed. Elected representatives strive to the limits of their ability and experience to interpret constituency opinion and public will. We all come to it, as the previous Member indicated, with our own attitudes, perceptions and indeed prejudices. For that reason, the amendment is worthy of support. We need a very calm and reflective discussion — we have a collective responsibility. We must attempt to achieve a very difficult balance between the right of any person, man or woman, to have control over what happens to their bodies and those who profess sincerely held convictions on the questions of pro-life or pro-choice.

There can hardly be any dispute that an overwhelming majority of our community are opposed to the concept of abortion on demand and to the current practice in Britain of the creative interpretation of sections of the existing legislation, which achieves the same outcome.

That is one reason for Sinn Féin's being opposed to the extension of this legislation to the North. Sinn Féin is supporting the amendment put forward by the Women's Coalition because it believes that this issue should be addressed in a much more considered and reflective fashion. This is an issue that invites harangues, emotional rants and playing to the gallery. However, we need a much more considered and honest debate that considers all of the issues that arise from this very difficult and complex issue.

We must address the reality that up to 7,000 women from this island travel to access abortion services elsewhere. Most of us know someone who has had such an abortion. In some cases the person will thank that she made an informed decision. As elected representatives with constituency clinics, we will also have met women who have had an abortion, but who were responding to intolerable personal, social and emotional pressures. For those women, abortion was not a free or informed option — it was not even a preferred option. We will also have become aware of the trauma that is so often a consequence of such situations. Sinn Féin believes that

this issue should be addressed in a comprehensive manner, involving a multi-agency response that develops effective services for sexual health and sex education, fuller access to child support provision and specific support for single parents.

It is my party's view that provision in the North is very inconsistent. Emergency contraception, the morning-after pill, for instance, may or may not be prescribed by doctors' surgeries.

2.45 pm

Some doctors prescribe emergency contraception for patients who do not normally use their practice, while others will not prescribe it at all. Accident and emergency departments are not required to provide emergency contraception, and many do not. Inconsistency in the application of resources is an issue that should be addressed. Those of us who are committed to dealing with the matter humanely actively support calls for sex education and resources for childcare and counselling.

It is Sinn Féin's policy to accept the need for abortion if a woman's life or mental health is at risk or in grave danger, and also in cases of rape or sexual abuse. We strongly support the demand for full information and non-directive counselling. Opinion polls in the North have consistently demonstrated support for that position.

The current legal and health provisions enforced in the North should be radically re-examined and structured to deliver a service that will meet those criteria. The Committee on Health, Social Services and Public Safety should be asking whether it has developed policies, within legislative parameters, that adequately respond to the community's needs. Clearly, it has not done so. Abortions are carried out in the North in very limited circumstances. Reference has been made to cases of severe foetal abnormality. The invisible multitudes of women who travel to other countries for abortions are prevented by our culture from discussing their experience. Abortion is very much a part of Irish life, and it is an indictment of our society that so many women from our community choose abortion. However, the issue remains unresolved.

The miserable history of backstreet abortions, and the statistics for those who travel to other countries seeking abortions, tell us plainly that we have not yet responded to the issue in a satisfactory way. I urge the House to support the amendment to the motion.

**Mr Close:** There are few issues that will be debated in the House about which I will feel more strongly or passionately than the issue that we are discussing this afternoon. Abortion strikes at the heart of society. It deals with the beginning of human life, but tragically it is also about the snuffing out of human life, even before birth. Abortion kills human beings. Abortion kills the



unborn child. It does not matter whether it is six days, six hours, six minutes, or six seconds after conception. In my book, human life begins at conception. That human life which began then — not one hour, two hours, or a week later, but at the moment of conception — is killed by abortion. There is nothing arbitrary about that; it is a fact. It is a fact of life but, tragically, it is also a fact of death.

The tragedy in society today is that abortion has become almost respectable in some people's eyes. It is accepted in many circles and demanded by those who ought to know better. In Northern Ireland we have the crazy situation of people fighting for limited hours of work, shorter working weeks, the right to work, the equality agenda, and so on, but also fighting for the right to abortion. They would deny the greatest right of all — the right of life to the unborn child. They are either misguided or hypocrites. They would not give the unborn child the opportunity of life. They spew forth their murderous arguments without a care in the world for the lives that they would destroy. Worst of all, there are members of the medical profession who advocate and pontificate about this form of killing. They are a disgrace to their profession, a profession that is supposed to cherish life and heal it, not kill it.

Strong and emotional arguments are advanced to justify abortion. There often seem to be strong reasons for such justification, for example, in cases of rape, or when the father is not the husband, when the girl is unmarried or when the parents do not have the emotional, physical or material resources to cope with another child.

I am the first to concede that anyone who has not faced these problems personally cannot begin to appreciate the intensity of the human dilemma that an unwanted pregnancy can generate. However, strong reasons are not necessarily good reasons. Strong reasons could be given to mitigate virtually every crime that is committed, but that does not make the crime right or justify it. In Northern Ireland, terrorists are threatening to go back to their murderous ways, and they advance arguments to justify that, but murder and butchery are always wrong.

No human problem in society, whether in Northern Ireland or anywhere else, can be solved by killing another human being. Abortion is violent. Abortion is negative. It rests on the dangerous principle that the small and the weak are inferior and that some human beings are disposable. In a society that has made great steps in coping with both physically and mentally handicapped people, the demand for abortion runs in parallel.

There is blatant abuse of ultrasonic scanning by the medical profession to pinpoint babies suffering from spina bifida, mongolism and other disorders. Aborted

babies are killed before advantage can be taken of the advances made by medical science. Many people in our so-called compassionate society now regard these handicaps as unacceptable. What is the cure? The cure is disposal. The cure is murder. In what other circumstances do doctors prescribe death as the treatment and murder as the cure? It is another tragic example of man's inhumanity to man.

What about the pro-abortion lobby? What are the arguments? How does it justify these demands? The most common argument is that it is the mother's right to choose. The unborn child is, after all, part of her body. However, as Dr Hendron said, that argument fails to recognise that the unborn child is genetically distinct from its mother. It has its own sets of limbs and organs. Its mother's blood does not circulate through the child as it does through her hand, foot, liver or any other part of her body. The mother and the child can die independently of the other. Therefore, the child is not part of her in the strict sense of the word. If the unborn child were part of the mother, the mother would be incomplete before conception and she would be incomplete after the child's birth, which is clearly nonsense.

Simply because the child is defenceless and depends on the mother's womb for security and protection does not make the unborn child any less human. It does not make it any less wrong to kill that unborn child. A woman has as little right to kill an unborn child as she has to kill a one or two-year-old child. No such right exists. She has rights over her own body, but the unborn child is another body.

The pro-abortion lobby argues that an unborn child is not a child but a foetus. That lobby obscures truth and reality with medical terms and fancy language. It avoids calling a spade a spade. A foetus is seen as less human and less real than an "unborn child".

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am afraid that the time is up.

**Mr Boyd:** I support the motion introduced by the hon Member for South Down, Jim Wells, opposing the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland. I oppose the Women's Coalition amendment because I believe that the majority of Members have considered the issue very carefully.

The Northern Ireland Unionist Party is committed to the biblical principle of the sanctity of human life. The basis of Christian morality is that human life is sacred. We have pledged to protect the life of the unborn child. Following the Abortion Act 1967, five million abortions have taken place in Great Britain, where one baby is killed by abortion every three minutes. That is 500 every day, seven days a week. To put it bluntly, it is a massacre of the innocents that all too often leaves mothers mentally or physically scarred for life.



Birth does not mark the beginning of a new life. A new life begins in the womb. At conception all the hereditary characteristics of the new human being are established, eye colour and sex, for example. Birth brings about a change in the baby's environment, not a change in the nature of the baby. The right to life is an inalienable right of which an innocent human being may not be deprived. All human life is of equal value. The life of the child in the womb is neither more nor less important than the life of the mother but equally so. There is, therefore, no moral objection to measures aimed solely at curing a life-threatening condition in an expectant mother, even if this may indirectly lead to the child's death.

The ethical treatments available in such circumstances do not involve deliberately killing the baby. Serious medical problems which may arise later in pregnancy, when the child is capable of surviving outside the womb, may justify early delivery so long as appropriate steps are taken to save the life of the baby.

Abortion is typically carried out by the dismemberment, poisoning or the premature expulsion of the unborn child. It is usually an invasive procedure for the mother which, even in the best hospital conditions, carries risks to her physical health and often causes her psychological harm. Fathers and other family members may also suffer after an abortion. The ethics of health-care professionals who take part in abortions are compromised and society as a whole is harmed by the tolerance of violence against the unborn child.

In 1996 there were nearly 190,000 abortions in England, Scotland and Wales. A further 1,600 women from Northern Ireland had abortions in England in the same year. In 1996 only 1% of abortions were carried out because there was a substantial risk of the child being seriously handicapped. Only 0.002% were carried out to save the life of the woman. When the 1967 Abortion Act was passed many felt it was necessary to deal with a small number of women in particular situations. The Act has, however, led virtually to abortion on demand.

Amendments under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 brought in a new upper time limit for most abortions of 24 weeks, and up to birth if mental or physical handicap is suspected. Yet at 18 days a baby's heart is beating, by eight weeks all her body systems are established, at 11 weeks she is breathing. She can also swallow, and her fingernails are present. By 13 weeks her taste buds are developed, and at 16 weeks she has eyelashes.

Abortion of the disabled is doubly discriminatory: it is a reminder of the inhumanity of abortion — the attacking the most vulnerable, those most in need of protection — and an affront to all members of the community here who are disabled. It sends a message

that they are inferior to and of less value than the able-bodied. There can be many physical complications with abortion including perforation, rupture of the uterus, pelvic infection, miscarriage in later pregnancies, infertility and death of the mother.

At a major conference in New Delhi in 1992 it was stated that legal abortion has killed 200,000 women worldwide. The Royal College of General Practitioners carried out a study over a 14-year period on attitudes to abortion which found that women obtaining abortions were twice as likely to develop self-destructive behaviour, such as taking drug overdoses, as those who decided not to abort. They also had a 10 % increased chance of problems such as anxiety and neurosis.

Medical research also shows a link between abortion and breast cancer. Twenty-six studies out of 32 worldwide show an increased risk of breast cancer after an induced abortion. In the United States 12 out of 13 studies show the link.

I must refer now to the press release yesterday from the Family Planning Association for Northern Ireland. I take exception to its rather condescending tone when it says

"Women are being failed by their political representatives. Like it or not MLAs have a duty to work on behalf of all their constituents."

Such attacks on elected representatives do nothing to resolve the issue. I am confident that my view on abortion is one that is held by the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland. The case against an extension of the 1967 Abortion Act is overwhelming and the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland would oppose it. Once the sanctity of life is denied the value of every human life is in question. The growing pressure for euthanasia is witness to this. It is essential, therefore, to maintain the sanctity of life as a first priority.

The people of Northern Ireland are hoping and praying for a new era of peace, but we must not let our desire for peace blind us to the death threat to our unborn babies. After over 30 years of terror and violence, the last thing Northern Ireland needs is legislation that will shed infinitely more lives than even the worst terrorist atrocities. I support the motion.

3.00 pm

**Mr Ervine:** The Member who introduced the motion set the scene clearly for me when he described the foetus as "he", "he", "he". Of course, we have just had the balance restored when the foetus was described as "she", "she", "she".

Abortion is an extreme symptom of the failures in society. Convince me that we offer adequate sex education? Convince me that we help people to not only the reproductive system but the relationships they will

have throughout their lives with members of the opposite sex.

Mrs Carson eloquently stated that the Dutch seem to be somewhat ahead of us on this matter. They made abortion freely available, and when they did so, what happened? Did lots of women dive at the opportunity of having the most brutal form of contraception — abortion? Indeed they did not. Actually, the figures dropped. As has been said, they have the lowest figures in Europe and possibly even in the world.

The Dutch matched their action with bombarding children with information about how the rest of their lives would have to be lived. They took control of their destiny and understood the importance of decisions they might make as children and how those decisions might affect them in the future. We have not done that. We have not remotely thought of doing it.

Those who are pro-life have a point — and I am not pro-abortion; I am pro-choice. They have, lying more deeply at their core, a desire for chastity and decency. I suppose these are reasonable aspirations, but just simply trying to get someone to cross her legs or keep his zip up does not seem to work.

There is an awful stinking, painful route that is travelled by people in our society — not just by women but by people. They are not women; they are people; they are equals; and, indeed, they are the majority. We sit here making decisions about their lives without one iota of the pain, sorrow or suffering that whatever decision they make about abortion will blight the rest of their lives as they see it then. When they put their hands out like scales and try to make their decision, the moral arguments we create do not help because there is right and wrong in each hand, or on each side. In many ways, they do not view it in terms of right or wrong or of society's moral values.

Essentially, it becomes imperative for them. It is something they must do. The human being is faced with trauma and difficulty, and then we heap upon her a degree of admonishment, bitterness and hatred. What I am hearing is that they are murderers. When we talk about murderers, what about Belgrade, which was recently pattern-bombed. What about Baghdad, which was pattern-bombed, or Dresden, which was pattern-bombed in order to send a message loud and clear to Germany? Or what about when we devastated it?

We, the politicians, are the moral people who talk seriously about the ethics of the medical profession. Is this a joke, or what? Politicians who have consistently failed to bring peace to this society are admonishing those people who are trying to bring a better quality of life to our community. It seems alien and incredible to me.

The arguments can all be emotional and I suppose I am getting emotional too, but the reality is that we all

have choices to make as human beings. We would be better to make those choices with proper information. Perhaps then, people would not end up taking an awful route because they were not properly equipped.

I hear much said about the foetus, and I understand the arguments. Our party had to have two party conferences to enable me to make a speech like this. In the last two years, 21 women have died as a result of domestic violence. The safe houses that society has provided are packed to overcapacity as we speak, and not one word is said about that. This male-dominated society is treating the majority like something it walked in on its heel, and that is not acceptable.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

In 1982, when this issue was raised previously, it is my understanding — I dare say I will be corrected if I am wrong — that one Member opposed the motion. More than one Member will oppose the motion today, and when it comes up again, as it surely will, more Members will oppose it. People are discriminated against by that evil, awful Britain who killed 5 million, the Britain with whom you want to be associated both politically and socially, that murderous, evil Britain that will extend the Act. The Act will be extended eventually and our people will be treated as equals. They will be given the same opportunity to have an abortion if they need one, and, consequently, one hopes that the number of abortions will decrease rather than increase. What we are constantly doing is heaping pain and more pain on people who are incapable of taking that pain. There are many thousands of nameless people who have gone along that painful route. They will be listening today and, unfortunately, unless we get our act together, there will be many thousands who will follow them. And what will we do? Will our moral arguments make popes and moderators end up in the same camp?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** This debate is about the preciousness and sanctity of life. By that I mean the life of the mother as well as the life of the child. I know that many hon Members may not agree with what I will say today, for I take the traditional Protestant line on this issue. I disagree with many Roman Catholics in this House. I believe that the priority must always be given to the mother whose life must come first in all circumstances — that is the traditional Protestant view and always has been.

We need to dwell on one question today. Should the life of the babe in the womb, at whatever stage, be protected, safeguarded and preserved? It is interesting to note that all those who have spoken in favour of the amendment and in favour of abortion never mentioned the child — they never mentioned the child. They had much to say about the mother, but they made no mention of the child. Should the child in the womb be protected, safeguarded and preserved, or should it be

destroyed — at times wantonly and ruthlessly? It is not enough for people to say that they do not like hearing a description of what happens during an abortion. Such descriptions are based on well-established facts. If the baby were outside the mother's womb, say in an incubator, and a member of the general public or of the medical profession came along and deliberately slaughtered it, such a person would be in breach of the law and would be tried for murder. Do those who are arguing for abortion say "No. Those who kill a child when it is outside the womb should be subject to the same laws as those who kill a child inside the womb"? They cannot have it both ways. Yet, because the child is inside its mother's womb, we are told it can be slaughtered.

A mother has a voice and can use that voice to defend her case. The women in this House have spoken today and have made their points loudly and clearly. Other women would take a different view and make their points equally loudly and clearly. But who will speak for the child, who cannot lobby or be represented, whose voice cannot be heard? Yet that child will be the victim of a barbarous deed.

As a public representative, I shall speak for the child today, the child who feels, who can recognise its mother's voice and know pain, who is a member of the human family and who has been given the unique gift of human life. We cannot get away from that. There may be some in this House who would like to do so, but who should consider it very seriously indeed. Some people misjudge the passion in our hearts today when we discuss this. There is no apology needed when people have deeply held views and express them sincerely and with passion.

Today we should listen to the silent cries of those who cannot speak for themselves. No matter how we vote at the end of this debate, we should all realise that we are on most serious and solemn ground. The Bible is the most ancient of all books, and I am old-fashioned enough to believe that it is what it claims to be — the Word of God. That will come as no surprise to any Member. In the Book of Psalms, which is part of the Hebrew scriptures, covering both Judaism and Christianity, it says

"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, that I was made in secret, *and* curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there* was none of them."

That is the most beautiful description of life and its secrets. That is why I plead with hon Members today not to take upon themselves the destruction of God's own handiwork. We should not take it upon ourselves to terminate that God-breathed vitality, nor should we lift our hand against the circumstances of special sanctimony.

Clearly there are circumstances where physical or health problems must be considered. That is the traditional view of the Protestant Church. As I have already emphasised, the priority is the mother, whose life must come first in such physical circumstances. It has been argued that we should do this and that. In closing, I say that many will speak and say "Let the children die", but I wish to raise my voice with others in the House and say: "Let the children live".

3.15 pm

**Mr Davis:** Mr Ervine referred to the last debate that took place here on this subject. For the record, it was on 29 February 1984. When the Division was called, there were 20 votes for and 1 against. I quote the late George Seawright, who spoke in that debate. At the time, there was great trouble throughout the Province with murders being committed daily. He said

"In Northern Ireland political circles we have heard much of discrimination, we have heard much about biased legislation, and we have heard much about political philosophies that do not accept the rights of minorities, but I can think of no minority group more tragic than those innocent infants within the womb who this year, like every other year, and perhaps in future years, will be put to death simply because someone, with very twisted logic, believes that a parent has the right to put her own child to death".

Many other Members said similar things on that day.

I am glad that the Assembly is tackling the abortion issue. It reflects well on Members to address difficult issues as well as those with which we can agree relatively easily. The abortion issue is probably the most difficult one of all. I am glad that my party, along with others, has extended a free vote. It would be wrong for abortion to become a party political issue in Northern Ireland.

Debates on the abortion issue usually revolve round the so-called hard cases — rape, in particular. However, since the introduction of the Abortion Act 1967, only 2% of abortions have been performed as a result of rape, severe handicap or a real threat to the life of the mother. Abortion is available to women in Northern Ireland in those circumstances. Today, we are discussing unlimited abortion on demand. The Lane Committee of 1974 concluded that that was the effect of the Abortion Act 1967, which is limited only by the 24-week rule.

Unfortunately, the abortion debate is often reduced to questions on when life begins. I have not read the stories of the German Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but I agree with what he said:

"To raise the question whether we are here concerned already with a human being or not is merely to confuse the issue. The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being."

To allow that intention to be taken away on an *à la carte* basis would be wrong. For all their differences, people of all religions agree with that view, whether they are Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or Muslim.



There are far too many unwanted pregnancies in Northern Ireland. We have the highest birth rate of any region in the European Union, but abortion is not the answer. Fewer than 3% of abortions in England and Wales are performed on women who have five children or more. We must encourage the proper use of family planning, and we should value our children more.

I am not a medical expert, but I am concerned by what I have read about the effects of abortion on the mental and physical health of women. Women who have had abortions find it much more difficult to have children in later life. Of course, keeping the Abortion Act 1967 off the Northern Ireland statute book will not prevent women from seeking abortions across the water, but it is a major deterrent.

The number of women recorded as having travelled to England for abortions has fallen, even as abortion has become less of a taboo. The number travelling is far fewer proportionally than the number of abortions carried out in England and Wales, which are not such different societies from ours in Northern Ireland. There can be no doubt that we have a problem, but my favoured solution is for more funding for unwanted pregnancy counselling, rather than an extension to Northern Ireland of the Abortion Act 1967. That would create an abortion culture, resulting in more abortions in the long term. For all those reasons I support the motion.

**Mr O'Connor:** I rise to support the motion standing in the name of Jim Wells. I do so because I believe that abortion is fundamentally wrong and against all the principles in which I believe. I oppose the amendment, Mr Speaker. We talk about pro-life and pro-choice. Why do we not talk about pro-death and pro-murder? That is what abortion is.

There are a few facts I would like to share with the House today. Mr Wells and others gave us facts and figures about the number of people going to England for abortion on demand. I do not want to see that happening in this country. We have heard about the terrible crimes of rape and incest, but an abortion will not undo those crimes. It will not take away the fact that a crime has been committed. To punish an unborn child because of that crime is morally wrong.

In Britain in 1996, out of 190,000 abortions only three were carried out to save the life of the mother. We have to think about the child in question here. Dr Paisley quite rightly referred to it as a child, other people tend to refer to it as a group of cells or a foetus to try to dehumanise it. That child is an individual growing in its mother's womb — it is not a part of the mother. Many people say "Oh, it is the woman's body; she should be allowed to choose what happens". Mr Deputy Speaker, if I were to give you a lift home today and decided to run my car into a brick wall, would I have a

right to do that because it was my car? Or would I have a moral responsibility to protect you? I feel that it is the latter.

Another issue I want to come back to is rape. In the United States the Supreme Court allowed an abortion in the case of *Roe versus Wade*. A woman known as Jane Roe, whose real name was Norma McCorvey, admitted that her claim of rape was a total fabrication. She was a woman intent on procuring an abortion. This is another danger of extending this Act to Northern Ireland.

**Mr Cobain:** Is the Member saying that in order to obtain an abortion women will be claiming rape? What a disgraceful thing to say!

**Mr O'Connor:** The Member is deliberately misrepresenting what I said. There is the potential for the situation to be abused. We have had calls for clarification of the abortion law from the former Ministers, Mo Mowlam and John McFall. Clarification of the abortion law would mean permissive abortion in Northern Ireland. That is quite clearly what it means. To say that handicapped children should be aborted is totally wrong. Who is to say that a handicapped child is less valuable or less loving than any other child? Certainly not I.

I would like to quote from the feminist author Mary Meekin, who stated in the 'Human Life Review' in 1983

"Honesty requires us to say that it is unjust that a woman may carry her child through rape or incest; it is far greater injustice to kill the child".

This is a rare situation in which injustice cannot be avoided, and the best thing that can be done is to reduce it. The first injustice lasts for nine months of a life that can be relieved both psychologically and financially.

The second injustice ends a life. There is no remedy for that. Yesterday and this morning I received what could probably be described as junk mail from Voice for Choice, from the family planning people and from Alliance for Choice — that is not the Alliance Party, I hasten to add — all saying how wrong it was for this motion to be brought forward. I am glad it was brought forward. This matter needs to be aired, and I hope that the motion gets the full support of the House. There will be some dissenters, but I know where I stand on human rights. The human rights of an unborn child are as important as the rights of any one of us. I urge the House to support the motion.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** There are people on every side of this issue who hold deep and genuine views. There are also those who dismiss my right to come to the House today and express my views. They do so because I am merely a man and for that reason, they think, I have no right to speak on matters that affect women. I was not commissioned to come to the House



by the men of Mid Ulster. I come on behalf of all my constituents, whether male or female. I have been lobbied by many ladies' organisations on this issue. I make no apology for my views, which I hold passionately. I know that I represent the vast majority of my constituents. I shall vote for my Friend Mr Wells's motion.

As a public representative it is my duty to give a lead to the people of this Province. The people of Ulster need their leaders to speak clearly on the issues of life and death. Should this legislation be extended to Northern Ireland, it would be a travesty of justice and democracy. The vast majority of people, across the community, do not want it. By having this debate, we are putting down a marker, and I thank my hon Friend for giving us this opportunity.

We have heard many voices raised on behalf of those who desire abortion on demand. My party Leader, Dr Paisley, posed a pertinent question: who will speak for the unborn child who has been silenced by murder? There are charges laid against us. We have heard them today. For example, it was said that this debate should not take place because it would simply be a heated debate. I have been here since the debate started, and I have heard people speak passionately, but I have not heard a heated debate. This place is all about debate. It is a debating Chamber. It should deal with the important issues, and what issue could be more important than the life or death of a child? I speak as the father of five children.

We are told that this debate should go upstairs. Why? Is this not the place for debate? Is this not the place where the decisions are made? We are told that we have no knowledge. Have we no knowledge of this Act that was passed in England in 1967? Are we not able to see what the effects of it have been?

3.30 pm

There are those involved in this debate who do not want us to see what abortion actually is. You are walking on very dangerous ground if you happen to talk about the suction of a child from its mother's womb or about tearing a child apart or about the dismembering of its body, but that is what actually happens, yet they do not want you to know that. They do not want you to know about the pain of the child, or the cry of a child, which is being taken from its mother's womb where it was put by God. But man has decided that no, the child will not stay there. For some reason, it must be destroyed.

Another aspect of the tragedy is the talk about the child's being unwanted. Why is it unwanted? Is it because it does not suit its parents' social life? Is the child unwanted because it will disrupt their plans for the future? So, for them to have their way, this unwanted child has to be removed, so they murder him. Make no

mistake about it; call it whatever fancy name you want; the child is murdered! Indeed, that is what has happened to five million children.

I see a Member shaking her head. She is disgusted I suppose. What fancy name would you call it, I wonder? I hear people saying that men have no sensitivity for women's needs. I have been a pastor of the same congregation for 32 years —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Please address your remarks to the Chair, not to Ms Morrice.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** I am happy to do so, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I have been a pastor for 32 years to the same congregation, the majority of whom are women. I have never been charged with being insensitive to the needs of those ladies, and thank God for the many children that are therein. However, I do remember a child being born once. You see, it was a mongol, and the doctor had suggested getting rid of it. I remember when the parents were told that they had a mongol child. I sat in the hospital overnight with that child, who is now 21 years old. Not an "it", "he" is 21 years old. That child has given the sweetest love to his mother and father for 21 years. It is not right that, because he is regarded as disabled, he is less entitled to life than any of us in this Chamber. So I listen to the charge. I cannot stop them from going to England, but I can stop them from receiving my blessing to murder their children.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am indebted to the many people, female individuals and groups who lobbied our party in respect of this debate. These responses illustrate that we need to open the door to honest and reasoned debate on what is a tragic dilemma for women. This is a dilemma that is not being addressed, nor indeed will it be resolved, by the DUP motion.

Using legislation that was enacted to deal with one set of social circumstances to deal with another set of social circumstances is illogical, especially if one considers that abortion is legally available in the North in certain circumstances. It must be stated though that accessibility to such services is very limited. However, there is no escaping the fact that around 7,000 Irish women, from the North and the South, travel abroad each year to get abortions. Travelling abroad to other jurisdictions has, therefore, become a safety valve for Irish women. The alternative for women who have chosen this course is a return to back-street abortions and all that that entails. It is unfortunate, but understandable, that there is such polarisation on the issue of abortion, with what have become the pro-life and pro-choice camps. People, particularly women, who have taken sides are motivated by a deep concern for

the value of human life, even if they have different political perspectives.

Many people who are anti-abortion would consider abortion as an option in the case of rape or where the life of the mother is threatened. By the same token, many of those who are pro-choice, favouring the legislation, do not believe that abortion is the answer to the complex problems facing women in today's society. There is also the view that abortion is, primarily, violence against women and a capitulation to the norms of patriarchy. However, those who subscribe to that view would oppose any form of legal sanction against it, because they recognise the need, so far unmet, for more adequate and widespread change in society at large, which would make abortion unnecessary.

As politicians, our response to the tragic situations where women are put into absolutist positions might be to work towards removing the conditions of shame, economic circumstances and lack of education which place women in situations where they have no choice except abortion. Many women are forced to make such stark choices because motherhood, unlike fatherhood, is not easily combined with other aspects of daily living. If we are obligated to upholding the rights of women and children, we must work towards creating a society where those women who choose to have children can do so without economic penalties and with support through nursery and childcare facilities and the recognition of the fundamental role of parenting. This may not end abortions, but it would do more to decrease their incidence than criminal sanctions.

Sinn Féin has debated this issue for many years, and it will continue to debate it because the issue of abortion presents us all with emotional, social and political questions. Our party position is that we oppose abortion on demand or abortion as a form of birth control. We accept the need for abortion where a woman's life or mental health is at risk or in grave danger and in cases of rape and sexual abuse. We believe that full information and non-directive pregnancy counselling, embodying all choices, should be freely available. We totally oppose those attitudes and forces in society that compel women to have abortions or criminalise them for making such decisions.

As a party, we acknowledge the complex nature of the abortion issue. We have attempted to deal with the matter in open and honest debate. Modern technology has created genetically cloned sheep; life is no longer arbitrary but planned; medical science has advanced dramatically; and people go to outer space. Women, however, are expected to bring children into the world irrespective of whether they have the means to clothe or feed them, whether their physical or mental health is broken, whether they have been victims of a violent sexual attack, whether they are suffering from AIDS or

their children are suffering from, or will be born with, HIV, and irrespective of whether the children will die, before they are one year old, from starvation, disease or a neutron bomb that preserves buildings but wipes out human beings.

Life, and the right to life, is not only about biological reproduction; it is about the future child. This happens in an emotional and a social context. Life is a gift entrusted to women and men. It must never be reduced to a knee-jerk reaction. The tragic dilemma of abortion, which sees women boarding boats and planes, often in isolation and fear, is an indictment on us all.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Can you please bring your remarks to a close.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat. This should never be an exercise in political point scoring. My party therefore urges all Members to support the amendment by the Women's Coalition.

**Mrs E Bell:** This afternoon we have heard a number of speeches, and their substance was based primarily on personal conscience rather than party attitudes. I would like to put forward my personal perspective.

I speak as a woman who has lost children and who was told that she could not bear any more. I was then told that I could not adopt children because I was in a mixed marriage and did not have a stable faith in the home. I have two healthy nephews, although they have difficult problems. One was born with no back passage and a deficient kidney, and the other was born with Down's syndrome. They had no real security of future life, and their parents were advised to abort or to turn off their life support machines. They refused to do either, and those children are now living with difficulty but are surrounded with love and protected by us all. And I would not be without them for a moment. However, abortion, though personally unthinkable, is a complex issue for all of us as legislators and politicians. Alliance has always been a party of freedom of conscience, a party which recognises that although there is strong personal opinion against an issue as sensitive as abortion, individual circumstances must also be taken into account before decisions are made and legislation is drawn up.

We as a party are not in favour of imposing our opinions or prejudices before the needs of the public. Legislation should be drawn up to allow for all eventualities. The criteria of the 1967 Abortion Act are clear enough. Amendments could be looked at for a number of matters. The one which I have a problem with is the period of 24 weeks, which is considered as unsafe in some areas. But abortion on demand is not an option under this legislation.

I do not know how Mr Wells can be so certain of his facts when he talks about how most women have their abortion under category C, and how he thinks —

**Mr Wells:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs E Bell:** I will not give way. I am sure Mr Wells can say what he wants to say during his summing up.

Mr Wells said that most abortions are carried out under category C, which covers cases where a pregnancy has not reached its twenty-fourth week and where the continuance of the pregnancy would involve greater risk than if the pregnancy were terminated or injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman. Obviously Mr Wells has never had to prove for himself, but I know women who tried yet found it impossible to satisfy those criteria. His facts are sometimes a bit out of kilter.

At the moment, as others have said, abortion is governed by the 1861 Offences against the Person Act. As we are now in the twenty-first century, do we not deserve better than nineteenth century legislation? Currently we export the problem. Every year, thousands of women travel to England at great expense in terms of time, money and emotion.

3.45 pm

Let there be no doubt about the fact that, in spite of Mr McCrea's comments, women do not lightly choose to terminate any pregnancy. They do it because they feel they must for a number of reasons such as those already mentioned — rape, assault and age. Often these women receive little or no counselling until they arrive in England, because many of the organisations set up to help women with these problems, and perhaps to help prevent unwanted pregnancies, have suffered intimidation and abuse as a result of their efforts to help people in distress.

Suffering the pressures of travel and worrying about the expense that they have incurred, are we really to believe that these women are in the best situation and circumstances to think about and decide on the proper course of action? Are we really to believe that we are best serving their interests by keeping abortion largely illegal here? Because England is so close it is easy for us to keep abortions both illegal and uncommon, but it does not stop abortions from happening, and neither will this motion. All it will do is keep consciences clear.

It is time for us to do more than quieten our consciences. As my Colleague stated earlier, abortion kills. We all know that, but we must look at all of the issues and realise the ramifications of any decision. As politicians and legislators, we must examine the issue, listen to the needs of women and consult the medical profession. This is best done over time and in Committee. We do not seek to justify murder but to allow for the reality of abortion.

After mature thought — not emotional, impassioned and political outbursts — the Committee would be best equipped to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Let us bear that point in mind. We can make recommendations to the Secretary of State only if all in the Chamber can agree. He or she can then take our wishes into consideration and act upon them. As things stand, we have no power in respect of this issue and, in a sense, it matters not a whit what we say today. Power rests at Westminster, and so this debate could be said to be about sound bites, however impassioned, rather than about the needs of women. Because of the complexity and sensitivity of this issue we need informed and objective advice. I support the amendment.

Abortion is too important an issue to be decided on after four hours of debate. All we are doing is posturing for the media, scoring political points and trying to create the best sound bites. The women —

**Mr Wells:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon Lady for North Down to mislead the House? This is not a political motion. There is a free vote for all Members from the DUP. This is not a DUP motion. This is a motion that I have tabled. I seek the support of everyone, and I am not doing so in a party political context.

**Mrs E Bell:** I am fully aware of that, but the Member cannot deny that there are people who have been scoring political points and trying to create the best sound bite. I believe my remarks to be in order.

Women, people and, certainly, the children — born and unborn — in Northern Ireland deserve better. Life is precious. Surveys carried out in 1993 and 1994 showed that three out of four people in Northern Ireland are in favour of abortion —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Please draw your remarks to a close.

**Mrs E Bell:** OK. Let us take the time to act with the courage that Prof McWilliams talked about. Let us do more than make speeches during one afternoon in this Building. Let us discuss the issue over time with consultation and expert advice and support. Let us act responsibly and serve with objectivity the people who elected us.

I support the amendment.

**Ms Morrice:** I support the amendment. In tabling this amendment the Women's Coalition is not promoting abortion; we are trying to ensure that there is a mature and responsible debate to enable the Assembly to make a well-informed decision about the diverse reproductive health needs of women. The effects of the DUP motion —

**Mr Wells:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon Lady to perpetuate the myth



that this is a DUP motion? It is a personal motion that I have tabled.

**Ms Morrice:** The effect of Mr Wells's motion will be to close down the debate, and this health issue is too important for that to happen. A show of hands would not do this debate justice. Our amendment will enable all elements to be examined, and we believe it should be supported.

In fact, it is our belief that we share, to a certain extent, a common aim with the proposer of the motion. We also want to see the abortion rate for Northern Ireland reduced. However, banning abortion will not prevent it from happening. We have heard the figures: more than 1,500 women travel from Northern Ireland to England each year to procure terminations. Also, worryingly, a survey conducted by Dr Colin Francome in 1994 found that 11% of Northern Ireland's general practitioners had encountered the after-effects of amateur, otherwise known as "backstreet", abortions.

The main effect of banning abortion is to put women's lives at risk. There have been five known deaths in Northern Ireland as a result of backstreet abortions since 1967. There were no such deaths in Britain in the same period. Additionally, very few of those women who travel to Britain have six-week post-op appointments with their GPs or counselling of any sort. This is so important for their physical and mental health. It may also have ramifications for their future fertility and their emotional well-being.

What makes matters worse is that outdated laws, dating from 1861, 1929 and 1945, govern the legal situation in Northern Ireland. The courts have since offered various interpretations of these laws, but when doctors carry out abortions in Northern Ireland — and, as we have heard, they are carried out under certain circumstances — they do not know whether they may be subject to criminal proceedings. At the very least we need to clarify the legal situation.

How do we go about reducing the abortion rate? We could look at the experience of other countries, and it is very interesting that two Members have already mentioned one country in particular. Joan Carson and David Ervine referred to the Netherlands, and it is true that there are countries where progressive health and family policies are cornerstones. We must address the fact that more of our children are now entering adolescence at the lowest age ever, sometimes around eight. Therefore good, age-appropriate sex education is an important part of the equation as well as free, and freely accessible, contraception.

We have heard that the lowest documented abortion rates are in the Netherlands and Belgium. These are countries that rely on contraception and sex education to maintain low fertility. What our amendment proposes is

that we examine what the needs of women in Northern Ireland actually are. We have an unacceptably high abortion rate, and we need to find out why and determine what steps to take, whether that be at policy level, legal level or both. There is no doubt that this is a very difficult and a very delicate subject about which everyone has an opinion, and we have heard all shades this afternoon. I have listened to the opinions expressed before me today, and I shall listen to those after me. It is inappropriate to accuse as criminals, the many thousands of women, young and old, who have had abortions. The Women's Coalition has established a working group on reproductive rights, and the group reflects the range of views of coalition members. The group's work has brought challenges from all perspectives. We will conclude the work soon, and I do not want to pre-empt its conclusions here. Suffice it to say that it takes time, effort, and a lot of research and patience to reach a position on this complex issue. A four-hour divisive debate in the Assembly cannot, and will not, do the subject justice.

Let us give the Secretary of State a steer on this matter. Let us vote to refer this complex issue to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee. I urge Members to vote for the amendment and against the motion. Thank you.

**Mr McFarland:** Abortion is a serious moral issue. At one level it is a choice between killing a foetus and letting an unborn child live. On the surface, it is an easy choice.

Deeply religious people believe killing is wrong in any circumstance, and I respect their right to that view. However, the issue of taking another life is not that simple. We employ an army to defend our country and kill the enemy, if that is necessary. That is a moral dilemma.

Similarly, if your wife and children are about to be slaughtered by a mad axe-murderer and you have a gun in your hand, do you shoot, or do you stand idly by? It would be a moral dilemma but perhaps not for long.

There is an interesting conundrum connected with the stance against abortion, particularly in America, where many of those who vehemently oppose what they see as the murder of unborn babies have no qualms about shooting dead a doctor who carries out abortions. The morality of killing is not an easy issue, and in some cases it is surrounded by hypocrisy.

Other scenarios raise disturbing moral issues. There is the married couple who, in their forties, have a little too much wine on an Italian holiday and realise that a new arrival would cause chaos to their working life and existing family. More seriously, there is the fourteen-year old school girl raped by an AIDS carrying hoodlum. The assault brings with it the possibility that



she may become HIV positive. That would be worrying enough for the girl, without her going on to produce a HIV positive child — a constant reminder of the trauma she had undergone. Then there is the discovery, through a scan, that a baby is severely disabled, and the medical advice indicates that the child is likely to have pain and little quality of life. Is it right to bring such a child into the world?

Most of us do not have to face these dilemmas, and it is extremely difficult for those who do. The subject of abortion, particularly in Northern Ireland, sends politicians scurrying for what they perceive to be the moral high ground. That is a comfort zone in which they can avoid having to address the issue seriously, and it is occupied by many here today.

Abortion is lawful in Northern Ireland. It is grounded in the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861, together with Northern Ireland high court decisions between 1991 and 1995 about individuals unable to prove consent by reason of diminished mental competence or age, minors and wards of court who wished to terminate their pregnancies.

Termination of pregnancy is lawful in Northern Ireland under the following conditions: where there is a probable risk of an adverse effect to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman; where there is a probable risk of an adverse effect to the physical or mental well-being of the mother; and where there is a probable risk to the life of the pregnant woman.

There is no provision for lawful termination on the grounds of foetal abnormality, although there are clear indications that such terminations take place here. There is also no provision for termination on the grounds of rape or incest, although opinion-poll evidence suggests that strong popular support exists for such a move.

Figures in 1998 show that around 1,530 women living in Northern Ireland addresses had abortions in Great Britain. Many others are likely not to have given their addresses, so the real annual figure is probably nearer 2,000. This is the political comfort zone which I spoke of. Some might say that we do not need to examine this issue, that those who get pregnant can nip over on the plane and be back the next day, so our conscience is clear. The bad news for those in the comfort zone is that they will not be there for much longer. We in Northern Ireland are about to be overtaken by two waves, which will force us to address this issue properly.

4.00 pm

First, there are to be legal challenges in the area of human rights. These challenges will deal with privacy rights, the right of the woman to choose whether or not to terminate a pregnancy and gender equality.

Prohibiting abortion has an impact on the life of a woman that cannot be equally imposed on a man.

Secondly, there have been rapid advances in biotechnology and developments in prenatal, genetic diagnostic techniques allowing early identification of genetic abnormalities. In addition, new embryonic stem-cell technology may offer therapies for many degenerative diseases. Such methods require interference with early embryos and fetuses. There is likely to be immense pressure for the law to be changed at Westminster, and here, to allow advantage to be taken of such medical advances.

Those who are fundamental in their beliefs take a clear view on the issue of abortion. I believe that it is a complex issue and that a substantial amount of study is required before those who take a less idealistic view can take an informed decision.

This would be a suitable subject for examination by the Health Committee, which could then report to the Assembly, but it would take a substantial amount of time. It is too early for the Committee to be addressing such a serious issue. The Committee needs to bed down with less potentially divisive topics. We need to address the issue of abortion in detail, but not now.

**Mr A Maginness:** Assembly Member Jane Morrice says that the effect of the motion today is to close down the debate on abortion. In fact, it does nothing of the sort, and I am disappointed that an amendment has been moved, because that amendment does nothing to deal with the substance of this motion which is abortion on demand. That is what this debate is all about. It is not about abortion per se; it is about abortion on demand.

The Abortion Act 1967 effectively created a climate of medical opinion and of legal opinion that made abortion on demand possible. I do not believe that Mr David Steel or Mr Roy Jenkins, as they were then, both of whom were the architects of that Act, co-authors as it were, intended, or fully intended, that abortion on demand should be introduced to Great Britain. But the fact is that it was, and we know that from our empirical observations, and we know that from the Lane Committee, which declared that this Act had produced exactly that. The Act gives doctors freedom, perhaps too much freedom, to put their interpretations on the concepts of health. One can think of the 1948 World Health Organization's definition of health, which says that it is a state of physical, mental and social well-being and does not merely mean the absence of disease or infirmity. With that definition a doctor can put a wider interpretation on the physical and mental-health concept than those who take a strictly medical view. And that is, in effect, what has been happening in Britain over the past 40 years.

Doctors have widely interpreted the power afforded to them, diagnostically and otherwise, by this Act. That has led to abortion on demand, and it is that which the House is asked to deal with today — not abortion, but abortion on demand.

Does the House believe that we should endorse abortion on demand? I believe that we should not, and Mr Wells, who moved the motion, has done a good service to the House and to the community by saying clearly that we do not. Producing an amendment which does not tackle this is evading the issue. I wish to see the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee and, at a later stage, the House dealing with it, and the Committee is in no way constricted by the passing of this motion from dealing with the matter anyway.

**Mr Ervine:** Will the Member show me where the motion states that this is about abortion on demand?

**Mr A Maginness:** It is not just implicit but explicit in the motion, and if the Member cannot see that, he is totally — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Ervine:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Member constantly uses the words “explicit” and “implicit” with reference to the motion. We are not stupid; we can read what the motion says.

**Mr A Maginness:** If the Member is being deliberately obtuse, I cannot help that.

Although the Abortion Act 1967 is bad, the amendment by way of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 is even worse, for it gives us a 24-week limit — and that is probably the longest in Europe. Holland is the only comparable country. Abortions are effectively legal when performed in the second trimester, and surely that is appalling. In most other jurisdictions, one is confined to the limits of the first trimester at least.

The additional removal of time limits on the grounds of foetal handicap and in relation to the life of the pregnant woman or to grave and permanent injury to her physical and mental health also does much to erode the protection of the unborn. I hope that this motion also effectively refers to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.

**Mr Wells:** That is an important point. We attempted to table an amendment to the motion to include that, but unfortunately it was too late, and the Speaker ruled it out of order. The intention, however, is to prevent abortion on demand in any form in Northern Ireland, be it under the 1967 Act, the 1990 Act, or any amendment to either.

**Mr A Maginness:** I thank the Member for that intervention. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, which amended the Abortion Act 1967,

effectively presents the House with the 1967 Act as amended. A further amendment by Mr Wells would not in those circumstances be necessary.

We are concerned on the issue of abortion with competing rights, those of the mother, those of the father and those of the unborn child. Those are three competing sets of rights, and we in this jurisdiction, as in any other jurisdiction, shall have to devise ways and means of reconciling them. It is wrong simply to say that there is only one party in this difficult situation that has a right, that being the mother. There are two other sets of rights, and they must also be weighed in the balance. One cannot simply deal with one set of rights exclusively.

There is a strong case to be made for the unborn under article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to life, so the rights of the unborn can in fact be safeguarded under that European Convention. To date, legal challenge has failed in relation to that aspect, but given legal developments and the advances in medical science, that may soon be achieved with the European Court.

Once again we find ourselves debating something in this Chamber which, strictly speaking, does not come under our purview as an Assembly. More and more we will come to see that devolution is, unfortunately, very limited. We have seen that in the Appropriation debate and in other debates already. We must move eventually to maximise the power that we can have within this jurisdiction to organise our own lives. This is one area where, in fact, we should be able to exercise that right and that authority. I support the motion.

**Mr Carrick:** As a public representative, I am very happy to speak on behalf of the unborn child. Irrespective of what has been said earlier in the debate, I trust that my remarks will not be construed as political or ill-informed. This debate on abortion has been going on for many years. It is not just confined to this four-hour session. The contributions already made by Members show informed opinion about the subject.

I do not underestimate the serious moral, medical and social issues involved. Since the introduction of the Abortion Act 1967 in England, Scotland and Wales it is reported that 180,000 babies have been killed each year by abortion. Prof McWilliams has already referred to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. During the Committee Stage of that Bill, pro-abortion MP Emma Nicholson declared

“The Committee should step away immediately from the fiction that the 1967 Act does not provide abortion on request — of course it does.”

She said

“General Practitioners in my constituency and elsewhere tell that it is virtually impossible for a doctor to refuse an abortion order under the working of the 1967 Act.”

These words are from Hansard of 24 April 1990. The issue at stake when discussing abortion is of course the termination of the life of an unborn child. Abortion is the destruction of human life. Abortion is the unlawful killing of children, which of course is murder. The Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929, on which the current law in Northern Ireland is based, recognises four special circumstances where abortion may be carried out. Those have already been referred to on one or two occasions, and I will not repeat them.

There are built into the legislation the necessary safeguards to cover the special extenuating circumstances that have already been mentioned. Indeed, there are probably those who would have moral difficulties in accepting those exceptions. However, I am of the view that there is no need for an extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland.

4.15 pm

The right-to-choose lobby in the pro-abortion camp cannot sustain its argument if a mother's action is to kill another human being — her unborn child. The right to life cannot be replaced by the right to choose to kill. The thought of such a philosophy is absurd and revolting in the extreme.

Abortion is a war on youth. It is the wanton and deliberate killing of the youngest and most defenceless of all young people — unborn children. It is also war on women — a war that is disguised as the promotion of their rights. Abortion has devastating physical and mental effects on mothers, a condition which is now recognised as post-abortion syndrome.

When we talk of abortion we are talking about humans — unborn children. Sometimes there is an unenlightened view that an unborn child is something less than human, or subhuman. Yet a child is a living being right from the time of conception. I lament that the child in the womb is not regarded as having any rights. It is both ironic and tragic that animals which, according to the Bible, we are entitled to kill and eat are afforded greater rights and protection than human beings whom the Lord says we must not kill. The Bible, which, as a Protestant, I accept as the authoritative, infallible word of God, and which I regard as my only rule of faith and practice, teaches plainly that the unborn child is viewed by God as an individual, a human being with a soul and with all the properties that we attribute to an adult, except those of full physical and mental development. For instance, Jeremiah, the prophet, was informed by God

“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

One cannot rationalise, explain away or excuse murder. It is not saintly to promote legalisation for abortion. It is more like an unblushing apology for mass murder. Greater access to abortion in our country will surely lead to a litany of broken hearts, ruined lives, butchered babies and the descent of the judgement of God. That price is too high.

I support Mr Wells's motion.

**Mr J Kelly:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As has already been said, Sinn Féin has been debating this issue for many years and will continue to do so. I was struck by Dr Paisley's reasoned contribution when he said that the life of the mother comes first, and that her physical and mental circumstances should be considered. That is not far from the Sinn Féin position on this vexing and emotive issue.

A LeasCheann Comhairle. The right to life is fundamental, and debate on this matter should be approached with compassion and not with any idea of criminality. Women who find themselves in circumstances that are beyond their control should not be treated as criminals.

Compassion should underlie our views in this debate. I was apprehensive when I saw this motion put down. I am not sure whether this is a proper forum for discussing an issue that goes to the heart of our humanity, both male and female. It is an issue that questions our attitude to life in a fundamental way. It asks where life begins and when, and in what circumstances, it should be terminated. It brings into play all our emotions about life. It raises the vexed issue of the handicapped and those who are perceived to be handicapped from conception in their mother's womb. I agree with the Members who have said that one can have nothing but admiration for the way the mothers of handicapped children care for them. They did not know that their children would be handicapped, but when they found out they were able to deal with it in a humane, human and motherly fashion.

I want to take up Seamus Close's point about the medical profession. I have twin grandchildren who were born in the Antrim Hospital three months prematurely. They were smaller than the glass in my hand. For two months doctors and nurses in the maternity unit worked round the clock to preserve those two lives. That in itself was a lesson — for me and, I think, for all the rest of us — that there are people in the medical profession who are conscious of their oath to preserve, maintain and care for life. There are others who take advantage of the circumstances that women find themselves in to abuse their profession by offering abortion on demand. Alban Maginness said that this debate is about abortion on demand. I hope that that is not so. I hope that it is



about our attempting to take a compassionate, longer view of this vexed issue.

We saw what happened in the Twenty-six Counties, the Free State, and the mess that it found itself in with the way in which it went about the abortion referendum after the “X” case. It still has not resolved that in spite of all the laws, the barristers, the solicitors and the doctors. It still has not found a way out of the dilemma. Abortion is an emotive issue that affects not just Ireland but England, Europe and America. We have had the contradiction of pro-life people murdering abortion supporters. That highlights the contradiction — *[Interruption]*

Mr Wells, your intervention —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr J Kelly:** — almost makes me want to oppose anything you or your party colleagues have said. We are talking about an emotional situation. Let us do it in a reasoned way without your stupid and asinine interventions.

As I said, a LeasCheann Comhairle, this is an issue that has aroused emotions throughout the world. We have had pro-life people taking the lives of those they consider to be on the abortion side. Those are the contradictions and emotions that this debate can let loose. That is why I support the amendment. We should take a reasoned, compassionate and unemotional approach to the essence of life: the unborn.

**Dr Birnie:** It has been stressed repeatedly that this is a very serious subject, perhaps one of the most weighty that the Assembly can consider. It is not an issue which is directly within our legislative competence, although this could change in the future. By supporting the motion and, by implication, opposing the extension of the 1967 Act provisions from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, I do not wish to demonise those who support wider access to abortion or those who have, regrettably, felt forced to have an abortion. Nevertheless, I believe that the 1967 Act, as modified in 1990, was wrong in principle for Great Britain and would also be wrong for Northern Ireland if we chose to adopt it.

There are several reasons for supporting the motion, and the first relates to the perennial question, which has been referred to several times this afternoon: when does life begin? Like many in the House I believe that a combination of the precautionary principle, that is erring on the side of caution, Judaeo-Christian tradition and the insights of modern medical science point to life’s beginning at conception. Even if one does not take that view, it remains clear that the practice of the 1967 and 1990 Abortion Acts allows for the destruction of foetuses which are highly developed in human terms.

Secondly, the 1967 Act, whatever its authors intended, provides for abortion on demand. This is not a matter for controversy. Statistics indicate that, in most cases, abortions have been carried out for social and economic reasons — in many cases, for reasons of convenience.

Thirdly, despite claims to the contrary, the majority of opinion in Northern Ireland is against liberalisation of the law. This was recently confirmed in a Queen’s University poll, which was published in the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ on 22 February 2000.

Fourthly, while there may be cases, the so-called hard cases, where abortion is the lesser of two evils, these represent only a very small percentage — perhaps up to 3% — of all abortions currently taking place in Great Britain, and existing law in Northern Ireland (and this has been referred to by other Members) permits abortion in these cases. The cry has gone up, to some degree, for clarification of the law. The same cry for clarification was also made by the principal author of the 1967 Westminster Abortion Act — David, Lord Steel.

Finally, several Members have claimed that our current position on abortion is hypocritical, that we export the problem and salve our consciences. In 1998 almost 1,600 women from Northern Ireland travelled to Great Britain to have an abortion. I regret that. There is an onus on society — particularly on those of us who oppose abortion in principle — to develop fully compassionate alternatives. This would include, for example, better counselling services. I have little doubt that if the provisions of the 1967 Act applied in Northern Ireland, the 1,600 abortions of Northern Ireland origin would be multiplied by two or three, with a consequent increase in human misery. Therefore I support the motion and reject the amendment.

4.30 pm

**Mr Gallagher:** I agree with the Member who said that the debate was about a weighty and powerful issue. I welcome the debate on this issue.

The Health Committee of the Assembly can do much valuable work, particularly in those areas which deal with providing care and support for pregnant mothers. We can provide support, especially in cases where mothers experience difficult pregnancies through medical reasons, and, for example, where they suffer from poverty and inadequate resources.

However, the motion is explicit: it asks us whether or not we support the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act. Respect for life is an important principle for most of us, and for most Christians, and extends to respect for the life of the unborn. Some of the arguments that we have heard earlier today concentrated on the rights of the mother, and the danger to the physical and mental health of the mother of an unwanted pregnancy. The mother’s



rights must be respected and protected, and her right to life means she is entitled to any treatment necessary to protect her life, even if as a result, the foetus is lost.

However, the abortion debate is not about life-saving treatment for the mother. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists reported on unplanned pregnancy in 1972. Referring to the life-saving treatment, it said

“It is becoming increasingly recognised that there is no such danger of injury in the majority of these cases, as the indication is purely a social one”.

The hundreds of thousands of abortions every year since the legalising of abortion are performed for what is termed social reasons. This is not to suggest that an unwanted pregnancy is a trivial matter for the mother, but her distress and her rights must be weighed against the fundamental right to life of all, including the unborn. We must remember that direct killing of the innocent is always wrong and that no motive, however good, can justify an action which, in itself, is wrong.

The figures for 1996, which are the latest available, showed the number of abortions as 177,225. Under one category — risk to life of mother — 138 abortions were carried out. Under category B, to prevent grave, permanent injury to the mother, there were 2,471 abortions. Under category F, to secure the mother's life, there were three abortions. These figures show that only a small percentage of abortions are being carried out for serious medical reasons.

An Act which was claimed to have been designed to protect mothers from backstreet abortionists, and was to be used to ensure safe abortions for mothers whose lives were endangered by pregnancy, is now interpreted in such a way as to make abortion available virtually on demand. There have been very worthwhile contributions during the past couple of hours.

We have heard references to the new beginning that we are embarking upon in this society, and it has been said that we do not have all the answers to this difficult question, that we need an inquiry. I have no difficulty with that. I have no doubt that it would be helpful.

Other Members have told us that, rather than take a vote on this today, we should take a longer view and get some clarification. However, one thing is crystal clear now: if we are serious about creating a just society, we must uphold the fundamental principle of the right to life. That means not just opposing abortion, but working to create a society in which all life is valued and in which that is reflected in how we look after the needs of the most vulnerable, especially the children and the unborn children.

**Mr Poots:** This is certainly a very appropriate debate. Judging by the number of people listening to it in the Strangers' Gallery and the number of people who

have put their names down to speak, it is obvious that it is a debate that touches people's deepest emotions and their feelings about how things should be done in our country.

I welcome Mr Wells's bringing this motion before the House and thank him for the way in which he moved it. I had intended to go through many of the details, but much of that has been covered already, so I will concentrate on responding to some of the points that have been raised by other Members.

First, I would like to deal with the issue of abortion on demand. People have said that, legally, we do not have abortion on demand. Well, we may not have it *de jure*, but we do have it *de facto*. The simple fact is that the 5.25 million people who had abortions in the United Kingdom over the past 33 years were not raped and their lives were not at grave risk. Many of them had an abortion because a child did not suit their social or career aspirations. A whole host of reasons, but not medical reasons, were put forward so those people could have abortions.

This is something which comes right home to me. I cannot accept that abortion is right or proper. Consider eastern Europe in the Communist era, where abortion was a common practice. In Russia, for example, 70% of pregnancies ended in abortion, and each woman had on average five abortions. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Communism, countries such as Poland and Croatia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia have seen a fall in the number of abortions. They have more respect for life and for the life of the unborn child.

I have heard the Women's Coalition representative speak many times, particularly on the issue of child abuse, and I respect the arguments that she puts forward on that issue. She articulates them very well. However, in this situation, she is proposing the abuse of the unborn child. What choice does that child have? Pro-choice is pro-death. That may sound emotive, but it is a fact: pro-choice is pro-death. The child has no choice; he is aborted if his mother so chooses, and that is completely and utterly wrong.

Seventy per cent of children born between 20 and 25 weeks will live, given the proper care. Yet we allow those children to be aborted. Some hospitals are working to keep children alive, while other hospitals are killing them.

Whether the child is inside or outside the womb, it is still a child. I have heard different so-called women's rights activists — I question this description because 50% of the children who are aborted would have grown up to be women — saying that if a child were taken out of its mother's womb, it could not live. However, if a child were born after a full-term pregnancy and left to its own devices at the age of one day, two days, a week,

or a month, it could not live. It needs the care of an adult, preferably its mother and father. So that argument cannot be sustained.

I am more concerned about the lives of the children than anything else. The one exception is that the mother's life must come first, but this is already allowed for in law. If we were to introduce the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland, the child's life would become of little or no consequence.

Medical evidence has proven that abortion increases the chance of breast cancer by 50%. This is another issue that presents a clear problem for women, and yet we have women's activists promoting abortion, something that will eventually lead to more women dying of breast cancer. Women must look at this issue realistically and act in their best interests as well as those of the children.

The good Protestants, Roman Catholics and dissenters in the Assembly will back the motion because it is one that protects life and the right to life. Some of those who are opposed to the motion were happy enough to be the apologists for murder in our Province over the past number of years, and so it is not surprising that they are content to allow unborn children to be murdered. The use of the word "murder" in this situation may sound like emotive language, but that is what it is. The child is sucked out of the mother's womb against its will, it is dismembered and destroyed. Surely that child has a right to life.

I have heard the arguments about aborting children with mental handicaps. I have a brother who is severely mentally handicapped, and I never once heard my mother say that she wished she did not have him. Many of us can benefit from having a child who has a form of handicap, and it is wrong that that child's life should be destroyed because of it.

**Mr Bradley:** I agree with the belief from teachings, expressed by so many Members today, that human life must be recognised and respected from conception. The right to life must not be denied to those unable to defend themselves or to those yet unable to make a case for being allowed to live. Is it not a contradiction for some to champion the cause of civil and human rights 99% of the time and then, conveniently, switch to defend the denial of life to a human yet unborn?

In supporting the motion, I endorse the belief that abortion must never be used as a means of birth control or as a measure to deny life to a child created by God — the same God that most of us believe in and follow in a variety of ways. I have demonstrated respect for life throughout my political career, and I am pleased to be given the opportunity, through Mr Wells's motion, to continue to do so.

**Mr Berry:** It is with great pleasure that I support this motion, and I commend my Colleague Mr Jim Wells for tabling it.

4.45 pm

The motion raises many important issues. It is not about rights. That is the lie constantly pedalled by pro-abortionists. The reality that they prefer not to consider is that what they want aborted is a person. They reject that principle and refuse to use the terms child, baby, or unborn baby. They begin by denigrating the unborn baby, slandering it and calling it names to make abortion more acceptable. By reducing the unborn baby to nothing more than the equivalent of a boil, they hope to remove the shock and vileness of what they are advocating.

Even Claire Rayner agrees that abortion is messy, distressing, bad and difficult, which explains post-abortion syndrome. By reducing the unborn to a thing, pro-abortionists can salve their consciences. It is not an issue of religious prejudice over freedom, as pro-abortionists would like. They must begin by rejecting the fundamental principles of Christianity. They deny that God has set down principles by which we should live. It is not simply an issue of Christian principle versus nothing. Pro-abortionists have a religious dogma — a hatred of certainty, a hatred of the law of God, and a hatred of the image of God, which is the religious philosophy of Christianity.

Pro-abortionists like to remind us of how many women have to travel to England to seek abortions. They fail to point out that the overwhelming bulk of abortions are for purely social reasons. Very few are because the mother's life is at risk. The issue is about cramping women's personal style. It is about their perceived loss of freedom to do all the things that they want. They see the child as an enemy who must be eliminated. That is why they have abortions. Pro-abortionists want the rest of society to participate in public wickedness. They deliberately fail to acknowledge that by insisting on legalising abortion, they want everyone else to support sin.

The obligates of abortion want the opportunity to practise their vileness, not abroad, but at home at our front door. This is a moral issue of great magnitude. Abortion is but a step to other issues. The pro-abortionists conveniently ignore the hard facts about what happens next. They ignore the fact that the arguments that they use in support of abortion are the same as those used to justify infanticide.

This issue is not about confusion in our law. Pro-abortionists like to pretend that the current legislation is very confusing and that no one is sure of the correct position, not even doctors. That is what pro-abortionists would like us to believe, but it is

because the law is clear that they say that, and that is nothing more than a red herring. Were the law to allow abortion on demand, which is the reality in England, they would not have had to falsify the position deliberately. The law is quite simple. There are circumstances when abortion is allowed, and circumstances when it is not.

The pro-abortionists have led a very dirty campaign. One old chestnut, which has succeeded in the past, is about the danger of back-street abortions. They claimed that mothers wanted abortions so badly that they went to the back streets and then died. Pro-abortionists wanted to paint a picture of unrelieved blackness. It is a known fact that in this country, very few back-streets abortions are carried out. Since 1967 scores of women have died, and women are continuing to die every week as a result of legalised abortion.

The pro-abortionists do not want to mention that cost because their real goal is to have a service with only one purpose, and that is to make sure that their lives are not hampered in any way. They are purely selfless and their reasons are social ones.

I am glad to listen to the Chairman and members of the Health Committee. I have had the pleasure of working with them in Committee meetings. I support the motion and I am glad that they also support it. I do not support the amendment. Certainly, I would welcome it in the future, as the Chairman, Dr Hendron, has said, if the matter were to be raised at the Health Committee — and that is the place where it should be raised. It is also very important that the Assembly send out a clear message that it supports the motion put forward by Mr Wells. I am glad that we are speaking for the motion, and I support all the people who have spoken in favour of it today.

**Mr Morrow:** I support the motion. If we are guided by the principle that the right to life is sacred, the only conclusion we can reach is to support the motion. There have been some excellent contributions to the debate, although I doubt if any surpassed that of Mr Close. It was an excellent speech, and I want to congratulate him publicly on it. It is regrettable that Mr Kelly of Sinn Féin decided to criticise that speech. Such criticism is very much misplaced indeed, and I say well done to Mr Close.

Those who declared that they would not be supporting the motion, without exception, only considered the rights of the mother. No mention, or indeed very little mention, was made of the rights of the unborn child.

It is a fact of life that if what is done to the child in the mother's womb were to be done to the same child in an incubator, a charge of murder would be considered and in most cases a prosecution would be brought. It is also a fact that where abortion is legal, violence against

children is greater. Where human life is afforded less respect than many forms of animal life, the rights of children always suffer.

If every unborn child could be asked, before it was aborted, "Do you wish to live or die?" could we as an Assembly assume what the overwhelmingly response would be? I have no doubt that the answer would be a resounding "Yes, I want to live." There must be something tragically wrong with a society that will, on the one hand, say that it is all right to kill an unborn child but, on the other hand, boldly declare that it is wrong to have capital punishment for those who commit murder. That demands some explanation. Many people raise their voices in protest and their hands in horror at what they call blood sports, or experimentation on live animals, and at the same time condone a strong lobby for the killing of the unborn children by the million.

We are talking about humans today. We are talking about unborn children. I understand that the baby's heart is already beating 23 days after conception. As early as two months after conception the baby can grab an instrument in its palm and after nine weeks it can suck its thumb. After three months the baby can kick its legs and feet. It has its own fingerprints — very significant because fingerprints are what distinguish us, one from another. It starts to breathe through the umbilical cord. It has already reached a stage where it is perfectly formed, where it has its own personality, yet under the Abortion Act 1967 that little human being can be destroyed.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

Someone described the unborn child as history's most pitiful victim. My party leader today posed the question: who will speak out in defence of the child? I trust that the Assembly will speak out today and that it will have to be said that the majority of Members were prepared to vote in favour of defending those who cannot defend themselves.

Society is often judged by how it treats its old and aged. It is also judged by how it treats its young and very young. In this case it will be judged by how it treats its unborn. I trust that today the Assembly will rise up in defence of those who are in no position to defend themselves. I fully support the motion.

**Mr Attwood:** I did not intend to contribute to this debate. The last time I spoke on this issue was at the thirteenth Annual Conference of the SDLP, which was a long time ago. The contribution I made at that time is basically the same as the one I want to make now.

When Dr Hendron replied to the debate which Jim Wells opened, he stated the SDLP's policy on abortion. Its policy is to oppose it. It is also to understand the social, economic and personal circumstances that give rise to women choosing an option that most in our society do



not agree with — abortion. That is the policy of the SDLP, crafted 13 years ago, and that remains its policy. It is important that that is understood and acknowledged.

This issue is very often debated in an extremist and emotional manner. My sense is that this debate, which I have not heard in full, has not been characterised in that way. In the South of Ireland, a place for which I have a great deal of affection, debate on this matter over the last decade or so has often been characterised not only by deep emotional commitment but also by extremist language and behaviour.

It is a credit to the Assembly, and may be, to a degree, a reflection of the responsibility in the wider society, that this debate has not been similarly characterised. It is also extremely healthy that a number of Members have said that whatever their views on this motion or the amendment, they have a responsibility to go back to this issue in its wider context in the Committee. That is a positive reflection upon everybody in this Chamber. Whatever our differences are on this issue — and there may not be many — there is a wider social, community and personal context that has to be addressed if it is to be more properly understood and managed by us as politicians and by the wider society.

In a previous public role I had some involvement with people who were opting for abortion. It was easy neither for those people nor for those of us who had some degree of responsibility in that context.

5.00 pm

The thing that struck me about those women who considered the option of abortion was that they were not selfish, but rather deeply confused and unhappy with the circumstances that had arisen. It was not disrespect for life that led them to choose abortion, but the unhappy and difficult personal circumstances in which they found themselves.

When we deal with this issue we have to acknowledge that, while there are people and societies that choose abortion as a form of contraception, the vast majority of women choose abortion, even if my party and I disagree with that option, in circumstances characterised by their unhappiness and confusion and by the difficulty of the circumstances in which they find themselves. While I have a moral and personal view, I find it difficult to make a judgement about their situations because their circumstances are so difficult that I cannot conceive of them, and I shall never have to.

I hope that when this matter goes to the Committee it will begin to look at the personal, social, economic and cultural reasons for abortions' being an option for so many people on this island and elsewhere. I refer to cultural issues because our society has developed to the point where consumerism and self-interest rather than a

sense of collective responsibility and responsibility to the vulnerable often define our culture. This has led to abortions' becoming an option and, very often, an easy option for people, and when our culture and values have changed so much that an option of that nature is easily adopted, the issue is much more profound than the circumstances in which these women find themselves.

I also hope that the personal, social and economic issues that have given rise to this culture and this option are more fully explored, for if our young people are not adequately aware of birth control and the need for individuals to take responsibility, they may also behave in an irresponsible manner.

Unless pregnant women are given every reasonable support, be it financial, psychological or emotional, and especially where circumstances are particularly difficult — where the pregnancy is unwanted, or the mother is alone — we will create the circumstances in which they will opt for abortion. They will not opt for life and for bringing up their children in circumstances that are best for all unless we create those circumstances.

**Mr Shannon:** The most basic of all human rights is the right to life. No amount of argument, discussion, debate or analysis could ever undermine that fact. In the huge majority of cases, this assertion can be applied without any further thought or question. While I believe that abortion represents a moral issue, I must also emphasise that the wish to prevent birth for purely selfish reasons, such as merely not wanting a child, is in no way, shape or form an acceptable reason for terminating a pregnancy.

There is no way in which the reasons for an individual's wish to terminate her pregnancy can be standard. Because there can be no defined basis upon which any blanket decision can be made, we can do one of two things.

First, we could apply a rule across the board that in no circumstances, irrespective of the implications of the decision, should anyone be able to choose to terminate a pregnancy. What then do you say to an individual who has been the victim of incest, or to an individual who, through an act of violence, has been condemned to have the child of the man who forced himself on her? How does one justify the emotional pain and suffering inflicted on an individual in these circumstances if she does not have the right to prevent the birth of a child conceived as a result of violent sexual assault?

**Mr Wells:** This is a debate on the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act. The areas that the Member is talking about are already covered by legislation that exists in Northern Ireland. The motion is to prevent abortion on demand from coming to Northern Ireland. There is already provision for dealing with these very difficult cases to which the Member refers.



**Mr Shannon:** I thank the Member for his intervention. The issue has to be raised because it is an important one for those people, who may be a minority, who have had to deal with it. I am against this Abortion Act's being extended to Northern Ireland. I stated that at the beginning, but this is an issue which does cause some concern. If these circumstances are covered by present legislation, that is to be welcomed.

We must also look at the problems facing the ladies to whom this has happened. The act of conception was unnatural and unwarranted. It represents a gross infringement of their rights. How do we justify a situation where a woman who, at the end of her tether and with nowhere to turn, takes her own life as a direct result of being unable to terminate her pregnancy? If we can ensure, under present legislation, that such a lady can terminate her pregnancy, that is to be welcomed. I would be glad to have that assurance.

I intended to ask the Member if he would clarify that in his summing up, but he has done that already. If even one life is lost because of legislation, or rather because of a lack of it, the system needs to be addressed.

The onus and obligation on us are to those whose circumstances are genuine and honest. Therefore, being committed to the principle of maintaining human life from the moral standpoint, we must support the rights and prevent the suffering of the unborn child. I do not believe that, as elected representatives, we have any other choice in this unfortunate matter.

**Ms McWilliams:** This has been a very thorough debate this afternoon. Our amendment contains the words "and related issues". Given the nature of the debate, we believe that "related issues" need to be discussed. Either Members understand the current situation or they do not. Some Members appear to misunderstand it, and other Members suggest that while they have great difficulties with the issue, in certain circumstances they can understand why terminations take place. That is why it is extremely important for us to refer the matter to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee.

Mr Alban Maginness was concerned that a call for an inquiry might be a call for abortion on demand. I assure the Member that that is not the case. When people in the Republic of Ireland made a decision to have a commission on the issue, they were not calling for that. They were calling for an inquiry that would call for opinions from a whole range of medical experts, health professionals, those in education and women themselves. This is an educational issue as well as a health issue. Mr Wells talked about putting an amendment down to his motion, through another Member. His motion is inadequate and needs amendment.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 refers to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, covering issues such as human genetics, surrogacy and xenotransplantation which have not been discussed in this debate. The Committee on Health, Social Services and Public Safety needs to consider these issues. If we leave it to jurisprudence or to the development of technology, we will be in serious trouble. We will be surpassed and will have to come back to make even more difficult decisions. It is much better to understand the current situation and to find out where Northern Ireland is getting into difficulties.

I say to Members such as Mr Alban Maginness that had he not entered politics he might have gone to the Bench. He could have been in the same position as one of the judges who had to rule in the case of a minor who was raped. What would he have done in that case? I refer too to the term "diminished mental competence", which was another case that came before a court. I ask Mr Jim Wells this question: if he had not gone into urban planning, but had gone into law instead, what would he have done in that case? We need to review these issues because such cases are coming to the courts. It is not to the courts that we should be looking to on health issues. Mental health, non-consensual sex, rape and incest matters, which are not covered under our current legislation, are being ruled on, case by case, in the courts.

Ethics of care should be our approach. Members said that we need to look at the rights of the child, and that is exactly what we are trying to do. Members should understand that we are talking about the principle of consent. Non-consent is a very serious issue. Any Assembly in the world should understand the principle of consent, and this Assembly has had more opinions on that than any other.

Some of the language used today was judgemental. My colleague may have left many women psychologically damaged. I am not sure whether he meant to do that with his reference to murderers, criminals and enemies. There are many women who have had terminations as a result of medical decisions. To refer to them in that way does them an extreme disservice after what has already happened to them, and it may further traumatise them. We need the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee to tackle this issue. I can understand why people become emotive.

We need to hear from those working in neonatology, paediatrics and obstetrics. Visits should be made to both the Royal and the Mater Hospitals. When the Royal presented its case on the maternity services debate between the City and the Royal, it brought all its figures and statistics. It was very clear that there are terminations for foetal abnormality. Such decisions are made every day. Members of the Committee should

make such visits to keep themselves informed of the situation.

I am glad that other Members, such as Mr Attwood, talked about the unhappiness and the confusion. It is clear that the Committee could have considered the issue of teenage pregnancies or the care for a mother who chooses to keep her child. Services here are inadequate. It is still the case that both the mother and the pregnancy have been exported, because we have not dealt with this in the proper manner.

5.15 pm

Last night I came from a meeting in London of women parliamentarians from around the world. One was from Kuwait. When asked what it was like for women in their parliament, she said that there were none. We said that obviously that must be difficult. She then said that women are not even allowed to vote in Kuwait. It has been decided that they are not competent to make a voting decision. That is not what we are saying here. We should have referred this issue to the Committee. I hope Members will vote for the amendment. We want to look at the competence of the doctors and of those who are making these decisions, whether they be on foetal abnormality, rape or incest, which, as I said earlier, is currently against the law in Northern Ireland, and the other issues that come before us.

I am grateful to Dr McGleenan of the law department at Queen's University for some information. He notes that there is a great deal of misinformation about the reasons for abortions, particularly in Great Britain. Members may not be aware that abortion after rape and incest is also illegal in Great Britain. That is why Members quoted figures today that put those into other categories: that category does not exist. The situation in Northern Ireland is different. That is why we need this debate about the period of time during which terminations can take place.

No one wants the 1967 Abortion Act transported to Northern Ireland — that is not what I heard in the debate. What I heard was that people want the circumstances and the situation of Northern Ireland to be considered. When we look at that, we need to look at everything that is happening, or not happening, and the difficulties that we face because no decent consideration has been given to this discussion.

Dr Hendron raised the issue — again, our Committee would probably have been the appropriate place to discuss this — of the psychiatric evidence from those who have had terminations and those who have chosen not to do so. That was the issue in the Republic — the “X” case, in which the woman was attempting suicide — which eventually led to an explosion of debate. We said that we would not set up the Assembly to make

policy or legislation on the back of tragedies. Make sure that we do not do that and refer this to the Committee.

**Mr Wells:** I thank everyone who took part in the debate. Some Members must have written notes containing phrases like “a heated irrational debate full of venom”, and then forgotten to delete them when they came to speak. I must have been in a different Chamber, because I did not detect that. I heard a reasonably well-balanced, rational debate, which covered the plethora of public opinion on this difficult issue.

Mr Close's contribution was one of the best I have ever heard in the Chamber, and I have been here longer than some. It was excellent, and far outstripped his contribution to the previous debate in 1984, which I read closely in case he attempted to repeat it today. I was also pleased with the support I received from Dr Birnie, who made a sensible and balanced contribution.

I was delighted with the contribution from Mr A Maginness. I noticed that the clock stopped on several occasions; I wish it had stopped for him and allowed him to continue, because he made some excellent points. I appreciate the wide-ranging support that the motion received. The debate was conducted in good humour and good spirit.

We need to remind Members again about the nature of this motion. It is the recognition of our opposition to the extension of the 1967 Act to Northern Ireland. Quite clearly the 1967 Act has led to abortion on demand in the rest of the United Kingdom. The only Member who dared to suggest otherwise was Mrs Bell. How anyone can interpret 5.3 million abortions as being anything other than abortion on demand defeats me. Eighty-five per cent of the consultants dealing with abortions admit that their hospital has an abortion-on-demand policy. How can anyone claim that there is not abortion on demand in Great Britain? I cannot understand that point of view.

The excesses of the Abortion Act have resulted in huge numbers of people being in a position to demand the termination of their pregnancy, after the most cursory examination of the situation. We do not want that excess imposed in Northern Ireland. Many Members — Mr Morrow and Mr Close in particular — raised the issue of when life starts. Those who spoke against the motion did not question the fact that life begins at conception. The more that we learn about medical science and the complexities of life, the clearer it is becoming that life starts at conception. Children born early, for example, at 30 weeks would have died almost immediately in the past. As a result of medical science increasingly younger lives are now being preserved after premature birth.

**Ms McWilliams:** Can the Member make a distinction between the point of conception and the point where a

mother's life is at risk? Clearly, the situation is that a termination is performed for an ectopic pregnancy, which is when a pregnancy develops in the fallopian tube. Does the Member accept that while there has been a point of conception, this situation carries an enormous risk for the mother? Would he accept that in this case termination is an acceptable alternative?

**Mr Wells:** Dr Paisley put the case extremely well. This debate is not designed to stop abortion when the mother's life is genuinely at risk. It is designed to prevent the excesses of the 1967 Act. As I said earlier, only 0.004% of all terminations under the 1967 Act — 212 cases — were carried out for that reason. That leaves 5,299,980 abortions carried out for other reasons. It is no good putting up straw men. The argument today is whether, as a society, we want the excesses of the 1967 Act, which applies to the rest of the United Kingdom, imposed on us.

**Ms McWilliams:** Will the Member accept that maternal mortality is minimal today and that most cases are not recorded as such? They are recorded under other categories, which means that the argument about the minimal number of cases where the mother is at risk is not substantiated. Terminations are listed under headings such as blighted ovum, ectopic pregnancy, and so forth. Currently that is the case in all maternity hospitals in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Wells:** I would prefer to give way to people other than Ms McWilliams from now on. She has had more than adequate opportunity to comment.

The situation is that 98.65% of pregnancies terminated in Great Britain are carried out for social purposes, because of a perceived risk to the mental or physical well-being of the mother. This loophole in the law has effectively led to abortion on demand. The only person who disputed this was Mrs Bell.

**Mrs Bell:** I wonder how Mr Wells can claim that every termination is a result of abortion on demand. There is no way he can say that.

**Mr Wells:** The point I was making is that when 85% of gynaecologists say that there is abortion on demand, I accept their point of view. This is not just my opinion. Effectively, that is what is happening.

I accept that the Northern Ireland legislation is dated. There are those who have cast aspersions on it because it is based on the Offences against the Person Act 1861. However, even though that legislation is cloudy, ambiguous and dated, it has prevented abortion on demand in Northern Ireland.

I am deeply suspicious of those who demand clarification of the present situation in Northern Ireland. Those demands are exactly the same as those that were made in 1966 by David Steel when he was pushing

through his Act. His so-called clarification opened the floodgates to abortion on demand throughout Great Britain.

**Ms Morrice:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Wells:** Once only.

**Ms Morrice:** It is my perception that all the interventions this afternoon from women Assembly Members have either been in favour of our amendment or against the motion. I would like the Member to comment on that.

**Mr Wells:** I can assure Members that had the hon Member for Strangford, Mrs Robinson, not been unwell, she would have been here to support my motion fully. As Dr McCrea said earlier, I resent the view that because I am only the father of three children, rather than the mother, I have no right to have a say on this issue. Like Mr Bradley, another Member for South Down, I represent the overwhelming majority view of the people of South Down on this issue. If the letters and phone calls that I have received since this matter became public are anything to go by, I can walk down the main street of Kilkeel, Ballynahinch or Mayobridge — well, perhaps not Mayobridge [*Laughter*] — or Rathfriland with my head held high.

The case for the Women's Coalition amendment has been very ably put by both its Members. I believe they are deeply split on this issue and do not want to face up to it. They should, like my party, have a free vote. We can vote according to our consciences, and I hope that the same applies to other parties.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Does the Member agree that one of the faults with the Women's Coalition amendment is that, despite all its pleadings today about its concern for this issue, its member on the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee has, since the Committee's inception, failed to bring this matter before it? She has failed to make it a matter of public concern and failed to generate debate about it. Fortunately the motion before the House today does so.

**Ms McWilliams:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Member does not know what has taken place on the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee and, therefore, could not possibly make an accurate statement. In fact, it is inaccurate.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you give me a ruling on whether that was a point of order?

**Mr Speaker:** The Speaker does not have to make a ruling in that regard. I am not sure of the facts of the situation, and it seems to me that others are not clear about them either.



**Dr Hendron:** As Chairman of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee I can say that the issue of pro-life or abortion has not been a subject for discussion by the Committee. I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that it has never been raised at some time under any other business, along with other matters, but it has certainly not been a subject for discussion.

**Ms McWilliams:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to put on record that we had the gynaecologists and obstetricians from the Royal and City Hospitals in front of us, and the facts and issues of what takes place in the Royal were placed before us for discussion.

**Mr Speaker:** A completely extraneous debate is beginning to develop during the winding-up speech on a motion that has been under debate for some three and a half hours. It is best to proceed to the completion of the winding-up speech, which has only a few minutes left. If anyone returns to this debate I will rule that he desist and that the winding-up speech be completed.

5.30 pm

**Mr Wells:** I thank the hon Member for North Antrim for his very useful intervention. I would have thought that had this been a really burning issue for the Members from the Women's Coalition, they would have initiated a debate on the Floor of the Assembly by putting down a motion themselves. I notice that — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have already advised the Member, and he has proclaimed to the Assembly his vast experience in the Chamber. He will therefore know that what he is doing is verging on contempt of the Chair, and he should desist. Please continue with your winding-up speech, Mr Wells.

**Mr Wells:** I accept your advice entirely, Mr Speaker.

The other major plank of the Women's Coalition argument is that a four-hour debate on this subject is totally inadequate. The whole issue regarding the outworkings of the 1967 Abortion Act has to be one of the most debated issues ever, both in Parliament and among the public throughout the United Kingdom. There is no new information available. What can the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee possibly do in the six months within which it has promised to complete a report? It is quite clear that all the material, all the statistics and all the information that we need to come to a conclusion on this subject have been available for many years and have been well and truly debated.

I was very impressed this evening by the number of Members who have clearly researched this issue, looked at the statistics and provided reasoned, rational argument. I cannot see what the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee can do to change minds on it. We are well and truly educated about the matter

and aware of what is going on. The Women's Coalition wants to hive this issue off into oblivion in the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee in the hope that it will never return.

Why am I insisting that the Assembly come to some decision on this vital issue tonight? In Westminster there is a very active lobby group called Voice for Choice which is seeking to impose the 1967 Abortion Act on this community. I have a leaked document from Voice for Choice, which is supported by 68 MPs. It contains these words:

"to allow abortion on request in the first three months of pregnancy ... to place a duty on doctors to declare a conscientious objection to abortion, and refer a woman immediately to another doctor who does not share that view ... to extend the amended Act to Northern Ireland."

At present there is pressure in Westminster to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland and Dr Mowlam mentioned that. The last point Dr Mowlam made before she left Northern Ireland was that she wished she had found the time to extend the amended 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. We must send out this evening a very clear, cross-community message — supported by different parties with different viewpoints — that the people of Northern Ireland totally resist any extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to this community. The way to stop that happening, to put the brakes on this process, is to have a massive vote tonight in favour of my motion. I ask Members to reject the amendment and vote to stop abortion on demand in the Province.

I will finish with this. In the time that this debate has taken, 72 more children have been aborted in Great Britain under the terms of the 1967 Abortion Act. That must never happen in this part of the United Kingdom.

5.45 pm

*Question put* That the amendment be made.

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 15; Noes 43.*

#### AYES

Gerry Adams, Eileen Bell, David Ervine, Michelle Gildernew, Billy Hutchinson, Gerry McHugh, Mitchel McLaughlin, Pat McNamee, Monica McWilliams, Francie Molloy, Jane Morrice, Conor Murphy, Mary Nelis, Dara O'Hagan, Sue Ramsey.

#### NOES

Billy Armstrong, Alex Attwood, Roy Beggs, Paul Berry, Esmond Birnie, Norman Boyd, P J Bradley, Joe Byrne, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Seamus Close, Wilson Clyde, Robert Coulter, John Dallat, Ivan Davis, Nigel Dodds, Arthur Doherty, Sam Foster, Tommy Gallagher, Oliver Gibson, Denis Haughey, William Hay, Joe Hendron, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, Danny Kennedy, Alban Maginness, Kieran McCarthy, Alasdair



McDonnell, Maurice Morrow, Danny O'Connor, Eamonn O'Neill, Ian Paisley Jnr, Ian R K Paisley, Edwin Poots, Mark Robinson, Peter Robinson, Patrick Roche, Jim Shannon, John Tierney, Denis Watson, Peter Weir, Cedric Wilson.

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly is opposed to the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland.

*Adjourned at 5.45 pm.*



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 26 June 2000

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am [Mr Speaker in the Chair].*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

**Mr Speaker:** After the Final Stage of the Appropriation Bill there will be a statement from the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister about their recent visit to Brussels.

After questions this afternoon there will be a statement from the Minister of Finance and Personnel about EU special funding, and immediately before the Adjournment debate tomorrow there be a private notice question in the name of Mrs Mary Nelis about the Transtec company.

The final stage of the Appropriation Bill is the first item on this week's Order Paper. The matter was well aired in debate on the Estimates, no amendments have been tabled at any stage, and no notice has been received of Members wishing to speak. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, that we take not more than 30 minutes for this item.

**Mr McCarthy:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am concerned about the authority of your office. Last week a Member took upon himself the role of "Pope". In view of the statement by that Member, who in other places exercises powers of infallibility, will you confirm that he will not be allowed to exercise those powers in this House and that your authority will remain paramount?

**Mr Speaker:** Whatever authority the Speaker may have, it is much more limited than that of the Holy Father. I will simply do the best that I can to make the Assembly work, and I have no doubt that other Members will do likewise.

## APPROPRIATION BILL

### Final Stage

*Resolved:*

That the Appropriation Bill [NIA5/99] do now pass.—[*The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan)*]

## BRUSSELS VISIT OF FIRST AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTERS

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notice from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister that a statement is to be made on their recent visit to Brussels.

I will allow up to the full one hour for questions on the statement.

**The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon):** I wish to advise the Assembly that on 21 June the First Minister and I, accompanied by the Minister of Finance and Personnel, had a series of important meetings in Brussels with members of the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council.

The aim of our visit was three-fold. First, as Members will be aware, over the last 18 months the First Minister and I have been working to obtain significant continuing financial support from Europe to help secure Northern Ireland's transition to a new peaceful society. That is something that we must all work towards, and I thank the MEPs for their continuing role.

During our visit we met with Commissioner Barnier, who is responsible for the structural funds, to conclude our negotiations on the first stage of a process that will secure the allocation of £940 million of support over the next six years. That will be channelled through both the Transitional Objective 1 and the Peace II programmes.

We had a very useful and very heartening meeting with Commissioner Barnier. We discussed the important role that the Peace II programme can play, both in addressing the legacy of the last three decades and in seizing the opportunities of peace. In short, it can help us create a prosperous, peaceful and inclusive society. When one takes the matching funding into account, Peace II equates to £75 million each year for Northern Ireland. We agreed the importance of not just spending these resources effectively but creating a highly inclusive plan to implement and monitor these important funds.

The first stage has now been completed with the formal processing of these documents in Brussels. We can now turn to the detailed negotiation of the

operational programmes. In that matter we will work closely with a wide range of local interests including local government and the social partners. Commissioner Barnier, whose first visit to a region as the Commissioner was to Northern Ireland, emphasised his personal commitment to our work. He also emphasised the European Union's desire to share in the process of creating peace here. We discussed our aim of developing our links with Brussels. This includes the opening of an office and increasing the exposure of Northern Ireland officials to the European institutions. He particularly welcomed these plans.

Secondly, the First Minister and I had a valuable meeting with Commissioner Byrne, the Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner. We supported very strongly the real efforts made by our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Brid Rodgers, and the United Kingdom Minister for Agriculture, Nick Brown, who are seeking to ensure that Northern Ireland can benefit from low incidence BSE status and the potential that provides for beef exports. We thanked the Commissioner for his continuing commitment to this initiative and emphasised the importance of rapid progress. The prospects of a resolution of this problem seem to be good and we welcome the efforts of the Commission and the support of the United Kingdom Government and congratulate the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on her efforts.

The third theme of our day was to re-establish contact with key individuals in both the Commission and the Parliament and to start building the links we need to ensure that Northern Ireland not only benefits from the European Union but contributes to it as well. We had a very substantial meeting with Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, to brief him on Northern Ireland and to invite him to visit here.

I am delighted to say that he eagerly accepted the invitation, and plans will be put in place in the coming months. We also emphasised the need for an early decision on the eligibility of the Viridian capital fund.

We also met with Commissioner Kinnock, Mr David O'Sullivan, the new secretary-general of the commission, Sir Stephen Wall, the UK's permanent representative to the European Union and Denis O'Leary, the Irish permanent representative. Two of our MEPs, Mr Hume and Mr Nicholson, were involved in part of the visit, and their presence, as always, was most helpful. We had a series of meetings with Members of the European Parliament to brief them on developments.

This visit emphasised the immense goodwill towards Northern Ireland in all parts of the European institutions. The successful transition that we are seeking to achieve here is of real interest to our European partners. They see it as an important development for the European Union. They have shown

new willingness to support this not just financially but also in other practical ways. This is extremely welcome. It is important, however, that we do not see ourselves simply as recipients of others' assistance. We have had to learn a great deal over the last decades. Those lessons have been hard learnt, but we have now a unique experience of seeking to live together in peace. Leading a region through the transition from conflict to peace is no minor task. It is the task that faces all of us. We are not the only region in the expanding European Union that faces this challenge. It is important that we share with others what we have learnt and, of course, in the process, learn more ourselves. We too will be exploring practical ways to see how this can be brought about.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Will the Minister explain to the House when this money was first announced and when it will be available? We seem to be having a series of announcements about money, many of which repeat what is already in the public domain. What extra money would we have received if we had met the same conditions for Objective 1 as were met by the Irish Republic? What extra percentage of funds would this part of the United Kingdom have obtained?

What is the result of the agriculture talks on the BSE problem? The Minister responsible is today in the Irish Republic and absent from the House. Surely her first duty is to tell this House what is happening among the hard-hit farmers of Northern Ireland. How long ago was the money known to be available? Sir Reg Empey made a statement about money from Europe being squandered. What actions are going to be taken by the Minister to see that this will not happen with this money?

This money is supposed to be extra. It is not supposed to be used for areas or programmes to which the Government are already committed. The vexed question of additionality arises again. Is the Minister prepared to tell us that this money will be used for additional and supplementary programmes?

These are questions that need to be answered by the Deputy First Minister.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the hon Member again, as I do all other MEPs, for the help and support that he has given to us on this. I am sorry that Mr Paisley was not present last week, though no doubt there were good reasons for his absence.

The Assembly will know that it is clear to everyone who was involved in and understood the institutions in the run up to the Berlin summit of 1999 that no region with a GDP of more than 75% on average could maintain Objective 1 status.

No exceptions to that were possible, and none was made. The outcome secured for Northern Ireland is much better than that obtained by any other former Objective 1 region. The continuation of the peace



programme with full additionality means that Northern Ireland benefits as much from funding as any other comparable Objective 1 region. We should recognise that the battle for the Peace II programme in terms of traditional Objective 1 status was crucial for it has created a situation in which funding for the North of Ireland is equal to that of any other Objective 1 region.

10.45 am

The First Minister and I secured this outcome after an intensive six-month lobbying campaign with the help of all the MEPs to obtain the support of the United Kingdom and Irish Governments, the European Commission and the German presidency. Fortunately, it was successful.

The Member raised the question of funds being squandered. I should like to point out that the most stringent monitoring will be carried out. There is disquiet, and we must ensure that we deal with it. We shall do this in the most effective and ruthless way possible so that there can be no misappropriation or squandering of the funds for which we are responsible. I also give an assurance that the Peace II programme is additional. That was one of the conditions of its being granted by the European Commission, and we shall adhere to that.

As the Member knows, a range of BSE-related issues regarding trade must be sorted out to deal with a complex system. In Brussels we stressed the importance of rapid progress in this area. Both Commissioner Byrne and Nick Brown, the Minister of Agriculture, are committed to having this matter resolved, and I believe that that will happen. It is impossible to put a timescale on it at this stage, but it is on the way to being resolved, and that must be good for us all.

**Ms Lewsley:** I welcome this opportunity to congratulate the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Minister of Finance and Personnel on completing the negotiations on European support mechanisms, including the structural funds and the special support programme for peace and reconciliation. I also commend the three MEPs on their ongoing work in Europe and their working relationship, which, along with the working relationship between the parties in the Assembly, are a proof of our future strength in Europe.

How can we ensure that partnership boards are fully involved in the implementation of the structural funds?

**The Deputy First Minister:** The European Commission has been extremely positive about partnership in the peace package. Commissioner Barnier stressed the value of such partnership during both his visit to us and our visit to him. I also recall his predecessor, Monika Wulf-Mathies, placing a great deal of emphasis on partnership in her earlier negotiations. The question of how we develop it will arise in the next stage. The involvement of local

government, the voluntary sector and other parts of the local partnership — a key part of the Peace I programme — is to be considered and developed. I understand that proposals on this are being discussed and will come before the Executive Committee.

Undoubtedly this form of partnership has been a crucial aspect of the Peace I programme, and in the light of experience we will wish to see how we can develop this to the maximum benefit. I would like to dispel any unease that, in effect, the partnership element in the administration of the Peace II programme will continue; we will try to ensure that it continues in the most valuable way possible. Also, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved in the positive elements of those partnerships for the work they did and the efforts they made.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to say on behalf of Sinn Féin that we welcome the statement. We applaud the very good work of all those who contributed to securing this additional funding, both the transitional funding and the additional tranche for Peace II. A relationship with European partners is a necessary and important element in the peace process in Ireland. Of unique importance, over and above the continued EU financial support for the transitional funding from Objective 1 status, has been the continued funding for peace and reconciliation purposes — Peace II. A number of concerns in relation to Peace II have emerged, and the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister — and, indeed, Minister Mark Durkan — will be aware that these issues have been raised. The previous balance between economic development and social inclusion, which was achieved with such remarkable results under the peace and reconciliation funding, is now under threat, and that balance may be lost.

A second concern is that there might be a hiatus in funding, and I would like to ask the Deputy First Minister if this is to be addressed. Now that the funding has been secured, would it be possible to arrange for bridging funding to ensure that many of these organisations do not collapse as a result of a break in funding or a lack of continuity?

A third issue of concern is to do with the district partnerships, which represent civic society's involvement in this process. A proposition is being seriously considered that district councils take over those functions and replace the district partnerships. That would be a step back from the principle of inclusivity.

I note with some assurance the mention in the statement that we are talking about a more inclusive process, and I hope that that particular aspect will be addressed and resolved.

Finally, I want to mention the issue of this possibly being the last such funding tranche for peace and reconciliation purposes. This is a society emerging from conflict into a process of change. That process of change will continue to challenge all of us, and it may be necessary to attempt to secure continuous support from the EU for this process — and I hope that the Deputy First Minister will be able to give some indication of this. As a society, we are looking towards not just continuous political change but, quite possibly, within the foreseeable future, constitutional change. That would be of interest to our European partners. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his observations. He is quite right: the European Union is a crucial part of our existence. I welcome his implication that we should be a crucial part of the European existence. We are not simply a region sitting with our own problems here; we are part of a European Union that has and will have continuing problems — problems especially concerning the expansion of the European Union. It is my belief that we have a very important role to play in being able to make the North of Ireland the template for conflict resolution in other places, the template for dealing with the transition from violence to peace. I consider that that is one of the crucial roles that we should and must play in Europe. It is not just a matter of our always looking for what we can get out of Europe; we should be asking what can we contribute to Europe. The more we do that, the more our voice will be heard there.

The Committee has developed an approach that strikes a good balance between the economic and social elements. Commissioner Barnier also appeared to feel that we were getting this right. Economic and social actions can and must be mutually supportive. We will continue to listen to the views expressed in consultation on this so that the best possible outcome is secured in the next phase of negotiations.

I also take the point that the Member made on a hiatus in funding. We have to ensure that that hiatus, if there is one, is as short and as painless as possible. I know the Member will understand that I cannot anticipate decisions that may be made on this by the Executive Committee or by other Departments.

There should be no tension between the partnership boards and district councils. When we look at the genesis of the partnership boards we realise that most of them, and the community groupings involved, did a remarkable job, in difficult circumstances, on issues which were not being addressed by Departments or by district councils. That was one of the reasons for the creation of those partnerships. We will have to get, as in the socio-economic balance, the right mix between partnerships at all levels in Northern Ireland.

The Member makes a very interesting point about securing continuing support from the EU. We will try to do that. We will try to make the North of Ireland as relevant to Europe as is possible to try to maximise that opportunity. We have to work on the basis that we are not going to see the same type of Peace I or Peace II programme. That does not mean that we cannot, given our ingenuity, create other ways in which to seek assistance, while not at this stage attempting in any way to anticipate that we might get it.

**Mr Speaker:** I encourage Members to remember that this is an opportunity to ask questions. Any intervention should be in the form of a question.

**Mr Leslie:** I welcome the statement from the Deputy First Minister about his visit to Brussels. I note the reference to the opening of an office in Brussels. What budget has he in mind for that office, and what does he anticipate being the additional benefits that would be obtained through that office in return for the money that it would cost to run it?

In his statement he used the words, in the context of that office,

“increasing the exposure of Northern Ireland officials to the European institutions.”

That is a slightly unfortunate choice of words in view of the recent inquiries on the conduct of certain European officials. He might like to rephrase that if it is going to be used in future. I have no reason at all to think that any of the inquiries about European officials will be about our officials, but I would not like them to be associated with those inquiries by a form of words.

The other matter relates to the question the Deputy First Minister has just answered on the peace money. His statement says that Peace II equates to £75 million each year for Northern Ireland. Last week I asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether this should be spent in equal tranches over the period or whether it would be in some other configuration. At that stage he thought that equal tranches were what was envisaged. I question whether that is sensible. There is the distinct probability that this funding will diminish very considerably at the end of the current programme. It might be more prudent if the amount were higher at the start and then tapered. The recipients would become accustomed to getting by with a smaller allocation over time.

We do not want a repetition of the situation which we have now with a great many, often very worthy, organisations finding themselves short of funding because of the uncertainty between one programme and the next. We should be planning for the future to ensure that we do not have that problem at the end of the programme.

11.00 am

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his questions.

I am advised that the cost will be in the region of £500,000 per year. Proposals, soon to be brought to the Executive Committee about the office will ensure that the money is well spent. The proposals will also aim to achieve a number of other things. We have been looking at examples from other regions and would like to start by developing an office to provide a base for Ministers and officials visiting from Northern Ireland. That is important, because as the Assembly develops, the number of visits, in both directions, will increase.

A small number of permanent staff will have a role in ensuring that we have an early warning of developments at the European level and this will ensure that the Northern Ireland interest is taken into account in all negotiations, in the Commission, the Council and the Parliament. We should look at the Welsh and Scottish experiences and at how they are maximising their presence in Brussels. They know the fast tracks, they know how to get on to the fast tracks and more importantly, and they know how to get off the fast tracks with the maximum advantages.

We also want to see how such an office could help us build links with regional authorities from other member states to ensure the best exchange of ideas and information. The other objective is to establish a role for us in the European Union that will transcend funding. Such involvement could substantially increase our stock there and ensure that when we do need assistance we will be knocking at more open doors than might otherwise be the case. We are very keen to work with other organisations from Northern Ireland that are also eager to develop links in Europe.

The second point that the Member made was about exposure. I am not sure which elements of exposure the Member was speaking of, but I will simplify it in these terms. As the relationship between the political process in the North of Ireland and Europe increases, I would like to see people from there being seconded to here, and vice versa, so that we can develop that ongoing process. We have to lose our insularity. We have to expose ourselves and our officials to fresh thinking, especially from within the European Union.

Regarding the Member's third point about allocating £75 million per annum on a decreasing scale as opposed to in equal tranches, I am not sure that any mathematical formula will be consistent. I will leave that to the Executive Committee and to the Department of Finance and Personnel. However, thinking of partnership, there are some things you cannot quantify, such as the value of inclusion and the work done by inclusion. I do not think that we should be looking at the Peace II element

in that way. While it must be effective and efficient, I am not sure that it is something that a slide rule could be effectively applied to.

**Mr Neeson:** I welcome the statement made by the Deputy First Minister and thank him and his Colleagues. We are well aware of the delays in the acceptance of the submission that was made from Northern Ireland, so this is very good news for Northern Ireland and the Assembly. We want joined-up Government in Northern Ireland, so can the Minister assure me that the funds will be used in a strategic way, rather than Department-led, as was often the case in the past?

A large element of the package deals with structural funds, and a major element of that, in my book, relates to infrastructure. As a member of the monitoring committee that was established during the period of suspension, I raised the issue of the crisis with the railways. May I ask the Deputy First Minister what provisions have been made to address this crisis and what funds have been made available for the possible extension of the natural gas pipeline to the north west.

Finally, I welcome the announcement that there will be an office representing Northern Ireland's interests in Brussels. As a very strong supporter of Europe, I would like to be assured by the Minister that the role played by the Northern Ireland centre in Europe will also be recognised.

**The Deputy First Minister:** With regard to the Member's first question, the detail of the operational programmes still has to be negotiated. Like Mr Neeson, I hope that it will be done on a strategic basis with the cross-cutting element properly and adequately dealt with. With regard to the targeting of social need (TSN), it is essential that each Department fully implement those proposals and, at the same time, have a strategic overview on what must be done.

The second question about support for railways depends on the view taken by the Minister for Regional Development and other Ministers on how we approach investment in railways. The rail infrastructure for the North of Ireland is a huge issue which must be addressed by the Executive Committee. We must make progress here, but railways are not likely to be suitable for inclusion in the Peace II programme, although there may be scope in transitional Objective 1, but not as an addition, as I think the Member will accept.

**Ms Morrice:** I join with others in welcoming the Deputy First Minister's statement. A number of people have been patting themselves on the back for securing this funding, but I am sure that the Deputy First Minister will agree that it is the European Union that deserves the appreciation and recognition for the strong commitment it is showing to Northern Ireland.



Can the Deputy First Minister confirm that European Union funding from Peace II, the peace and reconciliation fund, will be used for the vital purpose of peace building, and for this alone, and that any project which does not fit this criterion will not be accepted?

Secondly, can the Deputy First Minister confirm that intermediary funding bodies which have shown high levels of expertise and experience on the ground will continue to be used as funding mechanisms for this new programme?

Thirdly, I too welcome the increased links with Europe and the opening of an office as an extension of those links. I hope that it was only a slip of the pen that caused mention to be made of increasing the exposure of Northern Ireland officials to the European Institutions. Surely what we need is to increase the exposure of Northern Ireland's people to these institutions. That includes young people, business people, trade unions and other organisations, which can become a much greater part of the European project.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for those questions. When I speak of exposure, of course I mean it at every level. I referred to the ones for which we have administrative authority. Like the Member, I hope that every facet of life will avail of the communications that exist, and especially of the new office, which will be a great help.

The Member asked whether the Peace II programme would be used for peace-building alone. I believe that the mixture of economic and social priorities has to be right. It is very difficult. To put it simply, one of the most basic things that puts people at peace with themselves, their neighbours and their environment is the hope that they will have a job to go to and a wage packet at the end of the week. That gives them the self-respect that any family is entitled to. I do not think it is possible to draw a simple line of demarcation between that which would assist people in the North of Ireland in economic terms and that which could be defined as purely social input.

The remarkable work that has been done by many of the partnerships has been to give people the confidence not just to develop their own communities but to develop on the type of strategic basis that Mr Neeson mentioned. We must keep developing that. I cannot say at this stage which funding mechanisms will be retained or sustained, but we are committed to building on the success of the peace programme, and particularly on those partnerships. Further work is needed on how best to bring together all the positive contributions made by district councils, social partners and voluntary and community groups.

We must have an inclusive, grass-roots-based process. That is very important to us and to the

Commission. The Commission has made it clear that that is regarded as being of primary importance. We will treat it as such, not only because it is the right thing to do — which it is — but because it is essential in this type of development to have those partnerships working properly, in the proper meaning of the term — partnerships with this Administration, with the district councils and with the communities.

**Mr Shannon:** I too thank the Deputy First Minister, as well as the three MEPs, for the work that they have done. They have worked industriously backstage to ensure that the money will arrive.

In his address the Deputy First Minister referred to the wider range of local interests, including local government and the social partners. I welcome a close liaison between local government and the partnership boards, but I have three questions.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I ask the Member to speak a little slower. Some Members are having difficulty picking him up.

**Mr Shannon:** I will come a bit closer.

I wish to ask three questions about local government and social partners.

Does the Deputy First Minister agree that local councils have an important role to play in economic strategy and can spend up to 5p in the pound of their rates income on that sector? Secondly, does he agree that there should be more local representatives on the local partnership boards? At present they number seven out of 21. Thirdly, and most importantly, does he agree that there should be closer co-operation between councils and local partnership boards, as many councils feel that they would be the poor relation in that partnership?

11.15 pm

**The Deputy First Minister:** Obviously district councils have a crucial role to play in developing economic strategy, and they have the fund-raising mechanism to facilitate this. There have been many instances in which district councils have been the springboard for investment and for Government decisions that would not otherwise have been made. We must continue to try to get this balance right — the balance between economic strategy and the need to deal with the social aspects of partnership. The two are not mutually exclusive, and we should avoid thinking that district councils and district partnerships are exclusive. I served on a district council for 16 years. Many of the needs of the partnerships were fulfilled by the partnerships themselves because they were doing the type of work that neither the district councils nor the Departments were equipped to do. The term “partnership” needs to be regarded more globally. We need to consider



partnership between this Administration, district councils, partnership boards and other elements of social partnership. There will, no doubt, be further discussion about the numbers of councillors on partnership boards, and here again we need to get the balance right. The more successful the current operation is, the more we will extend beyond just administering funds to creating broad partnerships throughout the community. We ourselves are a product of this process. We should not forget that, when we set about trying to resolve our political problems, we took as a template the partnerships that already existed. From these we created the partnership here, known as the Northern Ireland Executive Committee of the Assembly.

**Mr Dallat:** I congratulate the Ministers and welcome the Deputy First Minister's assurance that he will stamp out any misappropriation of European funds. Is he aware that the irregularities of EU funding will be highlighted in an 'Insight' programme to be broadcast this evening? What steps will he take to reassure people watching this programme that EU funding will reach the people that it is intended to help?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his question, which is very important.

I understand that this evening's 'Insight' programme takes a critical look at excessive, or irregular, EU funding for projects under Peace I. I should like to stress that, while I am not aware of specific project details, any evidence that suggests misappropriation of European programme funds has been, and will continue to be, thoroughly investigated. These are public funds, and the highest standards of accountability must be attached to all these moneys. Accountability, value for money and the safeguarding of public funds are all of primary concern in the structural fund programmes. The programme places considerable emphasis on reaching out to grass-roots organisations, but since these are public funds, their use must be carefully scrutinised and the moneys accounted for through the proper channels. Grants-in-aid to intermediary funding bodies and second-tier bodies are subject to terms and conditions, which make them responsible for the monitoring of grants to final recipients. Government Departments remain fully accountable for all EU and matching funding handled by these organisations. All structural funds expenditure handled by Northern Ireland Departments is subject to the normal requirements for Government accounting by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the European Court of Auditors.

Any lessons learned from Peace I, along with the experience gained by the funding bodies, will be built upon in Peace II to ensure that the programme is managed efficiently and effectively. This matter was raised with the First Minister, the Minister of Finance and Personnel and myself by Commissioner Barnier. I

say to the Assembly what I said to him: "We will not put ourselves in the position where we make a case in Brussels for funding, for that funding to be in any way misused or misappropriated."

I know that there are details that must be looked at. They are being looked at, and they will be looked at. I would dispel the notion that it is just some of the community groupings that are involved. It is much more fundamental than that and, therefore, much more worrying. At this stage I assure everyone that what can be done will be done in relation to what might have happened, and we will ensure there will be no repeat of that in any shape or form.

**Mr Hussey:** I welcome the Deputy First Minister's statement. I want to tease out the last sentence on the first page of the statement:

"We agreed the importance not just of spending these resources effectively, but creating a highly inclusive plan to implement and monitor these important Funds."

Efficiency and inclusion are important. On efficiency, can the Deputy First Minister give us an assurance that sustainability will be an important element of any projects coming through under peace and reconciliation? It should be addressed under project assessment.

This follows from Mr Shannon's question. In some projects, district councils are having to give assistance. It would be better if the sustainability element could ensure that these projects are able to proceed on their own. Regarding inclusion, there is a need to be proactive in encouraging applications from the Protestant community, whose ethos, particularly in the rural areas, has, in the past, militated against it availing of the benefits of peace and reconciliation funding. I know that there is a need to redress the balance in my constituency. I hope that this will be taken on board.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his question.

Sustainability is very important. It is very important in relation to the question from the Member for Foyle about the end — for there will be an end to Peace II, just as there was an end to Peace I. In seeking sustainability, we must recognise that there are elements in our lives that cannot be measured. The benefit to the entire community in the North of Ireland from some of the input from Peace I and Peace II cannot be quantified. It cannot be sustained unless we, as part of the political process, recognise its importance and ensure that we have laid the basis for its sustainability should funding of this nature come to an end. The Member's point is a good one, and it must be kept at the forefront of our minds.

He also raised the question of district councils, and I reiterate that the ultimate elements of partnership involve that between all of us. I know from experience

that remarkably good work is being done in the community by various groupings — work that district councils and Government Departments are not equipped to do. One must ask why, if district councils and Government Departments regard that work as important, they were not doing it when it was most needed. In reality there is, and will continue to be, another level in our society which needs input on a community basis.

The Member's third point related to encouraging the Protestant community to redress the imbalance in community involvement and in the level and depth of applications. I believe that is right. The Catholic community, for whatever reasons — and there were many — was better geared towards benefiting from this type of funding. It was probably better organised on a community basis and hence better able to seek this funding. We want to make sure — I intensely dislike talking in terms of Protestant or Catholic communities — that the entire community in the North of Ireland is in a position to seek funding where it is needed and that the Administration is in a position to ensure that it gets it.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** I too welcome the Deputy First Minister's statement. Following from the answer that he gave to the hon Member for North Down, Ms Morrice, can the Minister confirm that he is giving no guarantee that intermediary funding bodies will be used to channel Peace II funds?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I am not refusing to give guarantees. I am saying — this should be obvious from everything that I have said — that I want to see partnership boards. I want to see those groupings which worked well and effectively in the past continuing to do that work and receive funding for it. I also want to make a special case for groupings that were not working effectively but received funding in a way which I do not think was acceptable. We will look very closely at their involvement, but the main thing is to ensure that those groupings which are doing good and proper work receive the funding needed to enable that work to continue.

**Mr McHugh:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I too welcome this opportunity for extra funding, and I thank everyone involved in securing that allocation for the coming months and years. For us, the question is obviously to do with implementation. There has to be a balance in implementation between east and west. There have been several bids for money for certain areas so far. I ask that the needs of the economy in the west be given due consideration.

The recent package given to agriculture has had very little impact, particularly when one considers the negative impact that European policies have had on our agriculture industry.

I hope that some of this money will be used to try to redress the losses rural areas have sustained because of

European policies which have made them non-competitive. Clearly, this money must be additional. It is important that we do not simply use it for Government schemes which should be covered by the block grant. In the last round the Government tried to get some of the peace money used in this way.

11.30 am

There is also the matter of the bid for control of the money between the councils and the partnerships. Part of the success of the partnerships has been the whole issue of social inclusion. The Minister mentioned that those that were there previously were not doing the work that the partnerships have done. I see that as being part of the success of partnerships. It is important that that element be considered very strongly indeed and that they have the necessary input to deal with this money in a balanced and fair way.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his question. I can assure him that, so far as the Executive Committee is concerned, it will be done in a balanced and in a fair way. That is the type of problem we now have to grapple with in terms of how we deal with the negotiations and make sure that those negotiations are properly handled.

With regard to the western part of Northern Ireland, I share his view that we must be aware of the needs of all sections of the community — and not just in terms of political or religious divisions. One of the biggest divisions in Northern Ireland is that between the rural and the urban areas. We have to ensure that the rural areas are properly catered for, and it is not easy to do that. Rural areas tend not to have the infrastructure in terms of community involvement that urban areas have. There the problems are not so glaring, but they are there.

I can assure the Member that things will be done fairly and in a way that the entire Northern Ireland community is allowed to benefit from them and that the problem of divisions between urban and rural areas will be addressed. Some of us on the Executive Committee are from rural Northern Ireland, and we will ensure at all times that those needs are brought to the attention of other members and dealt with.

**Mr Hay:** Does the Minister agree that in some parts of Northern Ireland there has been serious tension between local government and the 26 district partnerships? In fact, both local government and district partnerships sometimes see each other as a threat. What mechanisms can he put in place between district councils and the 26 district partnerships to try to smooth out those issues?

There is another matter which seriously concerns those involved in local government in Northern Ireland. It has been the experience of our council that after money has been allocated to projects, groups come

along asking for serious money to make up the shortfall in their finances and also looking for running costs for their projects. These costs can run into several thousands of pounds. I want to ask the Minister how these projects can be sustained. I believe that many of them will run into financial difficulties over the next few years. The only path that they see open to them is that of local government.

What mechanism can the Deputy First Minister put in place to ensure that both communities share finance equally? I am glad to hear him say that there has been an imbalance of the spending of European money on Northern Ireland's communities — it is good that he recognises that — and I agree that the Protestant community comes from a lower base when applying for project funding. There is an imbalance that needs to be addressed.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his questions.

The question of district councils as opposed to partnership boards keeps cropping up in those terms. We must try to regard this in terms not just of district councils versus partnerships but also of how they could work and dovetail together. When the Peace I programme was agreed by Europe, we should remember, it was agreed only on the basis of the approach that Europe suggested in terms of partnership boards — in other words, a bottom-up approach. Commissioner Barnier would not have sanctioned Peace II unless there were that partnership approach and those mechanisms. That does not preclude the fact that district councils could work with partnership boards in such a way that it will not be regarded as a contest bout that they are working together maximising the benefits for their city, town or district council area.

I recognise the shortfall and the unease that exists. It is always easy to blame something else, but suspension did not help in having this matter finalised, and it is one of the contributing factors.

The last question relates to what mechanisms there are to ensure that all of the community properly maximises its advantage from these funds. I am not sure that there is a specific mechanism or mechanisms that could be devised for that, but I am sure that the everybody realises that the proper, effective and full utilisation of these funds will benefit the entire community, and I recommend that type of approach.

**Mr A Doherty:** May I too compliment the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Minister of Finance and Personnel on the encouraging outcome of the work they did in Brussels this week. I am sure that

Deputy Speaker Morrice will acknowledge that this was in the face of considerable competition from others interested in securing EU funding.

I note from his statement that the Deputy First Minister raised the issue of BSE low incidence status with Commissioner Byrne. He also indicated that the prospects for a resolution of the problem are good. Will he outline how this issue is to be resolved?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his question.

While Northern Ireland complies with the criteria for a low-incidence region as set out by the OIE — and as we all know what the OIE is, I will not attempt to pronounce it from the piece of paper in front of me.

It is the Animal Health Organisation, and it has a very important say in this matter. We have yet to have BSE low incidence status formally recognised by the European Union. The main obstacle to achieving that centres on convincing the Commission and the other 14 member states that we have the controls in place to guarantee that only Northern Ireland cattle, beef and beef products could be exported.

That is the kernel of this problem, and it is the kernel of the problem that the Commissioner, the Minister of Agriculture (Nick Brown) and our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Brid Rodgers) are addressing. We must address it in a way that will minimise any disruption to the existing trade in beef and beef products coming into Northern Ireland from Britain. Again that is a crucial part of the problem.

Nick Brown has already made it clear that the case would only be progressed on the basis of a full and detailed public consultation throughout the United Kingdom. To that end DARD and MAFF officials have had preliminary discussions with Commissioner Byrne's officials to agree the shape of the consultation document. It is hoped that that consultation could start in the next few weeks. Again, I am reasonably hopeful that the matter will be addressed at its core, which is in ensuring that beef that would come from the North of Ireland would be Northern Ireland beef. I look forward to a resolution of this matter because I think it is now possible to have it resolved in our favour.

**Mr Speaker:** We have come to the end of time for questions. I regret that a number of Members who had questions were not able to put them in the time but we have only a maximum of one hour for questions after a ministerial statement.

## FISHERIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

### First Stage

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr McGimpsey, will represent the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Rodgers.

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey):** I beg leave, on behalf of Ms Rodgers, to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 9/99] to amend the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966.

I apologise for the absence of Ms Rodgers, who is attending a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This Bill is not yet available to Members.

**Mr Speaker:** The Bill cannot be made available until it has achieved its First Stage, which constitutes agreement to publish. It is a purely formal stage, and the Bill will be ready in the usual form tomorrow morning, if we proceed with it. It will then be on the list of future business until a date for a Second Stage is determined.

*Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.*

## WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (AMENDMENT) BILL

### Second Stage

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

**Sir Reg Empey:** I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill [NIA 8/99] be agreed.

This stage provides an opportunity for a general debate on the Bill and for Members to vote on its general principles. Weights and measures law has a history going back thousands of years. In England, it was mentioned in as fundamental document as the Magna Carta.

Until about 100 years ago weighing and measuring equipment was fairly basic and consisted of simple weighing scales and measures of capacity for commodities such as wine and grain. During the first half of the twentieth century, weighing machines with levers and dials and petrol pumps with meters, became commonplace. With the advent of electrical devices and more recently micro-electronics, equipment has become more technical in its construction and operation and it is often connected to other equipment such as cash registers.

*11.45 am*

The history and nature of weights and measures law in Great Britain and Northern Ireland has evolved to establish suitable units of measurements and to ensure that equipment operates fairly, favouring neither buyer nor seller.

In Northern Ireland, the law governing the verification of weighing or measuring equipment is the Weights and Measures (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, and this Bill proposes three specific amendments to that Order.

Verification is the examination and testing of weighing and measuring equipment before it is allowed to be used for trade transactions. The equipment includes things like butchers' scales and petrol pumps. Currently, verification is achieved by having the weighing and measuring equipment tested, passed and stamped by inspectors of weights and measures before it can be used for trade. Inspectors of weights and measures are suitably qualified to verify that equipment conforms to the relevant regulations, and measures with sufficient accuracy, before it can be used.

The purpose of this Bill is to introduce deregulatory measures associated with such verification of weighing or measuring equipment. These deregulatory measures can be achieved without compromising confidence in a fair trading environment.



The first measure — the self-verification of weighing or measuring equipment — will permit approved manufacturers, installers and repairers to conduct their own testing, passing as fit for use for trade, and stamping of weighing and measuring equipment. Currently, such equipment can only be verified by an inspector of weights and measures. Any approved manufacturer, installer or repairer will have to meet the same testing standards as used by inspectors.

The second measure — the testing by official European economic area (EEA) testers — will allow an inspector of weights and measures to accept, as part of the process of verification of equipment, test reports from third-party testers established in the European economic area.

If the inspector is satisfied that the tests have been performed by a competent person, he will accept the test report as part of his verification of the equipment. That would result in a saving to the owner of the equipment, as he will not incur the cost of having the test repeated.

The final measure — applying the prescribed stamp prior to testing the equipment — will enable manufacturers of weighing or measuring equipment (beer glasses, for example) who are approved verifiers to incorporate into the manufacturing process the stamp to be applied to the equipment. However, the manufacturer must have safeguards in place to ensure that the equipment will be passed as fit for such trade use and that it will not be used until it has been so passed.

These three deregulatory measures were first proposed for inclusion in the composite Deregulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. Consultation on that draft Order took place here in December 1996 and January 1997. No adverse response to the weights and measures provisions was received from this consultation exercise. The delay in proceeding was, of course, due to the 1997 general election. The measures perished at the time of the dissolution of Parliament.

The measures replicate for Northern Ireland the provisions contained in the Deregulation (Weights and Measures) Order 1999, which was made by the Department of Trade and Industry on 1 March 1999. The proposed amendments in this Bill will provide parity with the law already in force in Great Britain.

The implementation of the measures contained in this Bill has the potential to reduce burdens on business and can be achieved without reducing the current level of consumer protection in this area.

I hope that I have given Members an appreciation of the scope of the Bill and that the Assembly is content that it should now pass to the Committee Stage for more detailed scrutiny.

**Dr O'Hagan:** I want briefly to sound some notes of caution in relation to this Bill. Obviously we will be looking at it in greater detail in Committee.

At the moment, such equipment must be verified by an inspector of weights and measures. This Bill means that shopkeepers and manufacturers can act as their own inspectors. Installers and repairers can verify equipment as fit for trade.

I am concerned that this deregulation is fraught with opportunities for abuse. I sound a note of caution at this stage, and we shall obviously look at it in further detail.

We should not go down the road of deregulation for its own sake. One must remember the deregulation of animal feeds which brought us the BSE crisis. If there is to be deregulation we must be careful that, at the very least, we put something in place for the safeguard of consumers.

Go raibh maith agat.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Second Stage of the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill [NIA 8/99] be agreed.

## **INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD: REPORT OF HOUSE OF COMMONS PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

**Dr O'Hagan:** I beg to move

That this Assembly welcomes the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report on the Industrial Development Board (HC 66) and directs that the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee give continuing attention to the issues raised in the report.

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. I welcome the opportunity which the publication of the Westminster Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report has afforded the Assembly to debate an important issue. Since putting this motion down I have been contacted by various Government officials and advised that such a motion may be premature as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Industrial Development Board (IDB) in particular cannot formally reply to the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster until 20 July. I have also been informed that it will then be up to that Committee to decide if the response is acceptable and that the Comptroller and Auditor General will monitor undertakings given in the response, reporting back on any concerns.

All of this, however, should not and does not preclude this debate's taking place, especially since we are heading towards the summer recess. This is too important an issue, and there are too many concerns about the activities and performance of the IDB, to put this debate off until September. Nor does it preclude the Assembly's PAC from keeping a watching brief on the IDB as recommended by its Westminster counterpart.

Over the years, a number of official and academic studies have analysed the work of the IDB. These include reports by the Northern Ireland Economic Council and the Controller and Auditor General, community research undertaken by the West Belfast Economic Forum and hearings and reports by the Westminster PAC itself. Each of these investigations and reports contains remarkably similar findings. These are: that the IDB claims to create far more jobs than it actually does; that it violates its own criteria for providing grants; that its internal performance appraisals are inadequate; that its monitoring of grant recipients' performance is disastrously insufficient; and that there is evidence of an unjustified waste of public money.

Further criticisms are also common to several reports. These are: that the IDB has failed to locate sufficient jobs in areas most in need of employment (namely, targeting social need (TSN) areas) in spite of the fact that TSN has been a thread in Government policy since 1990; that even those jobs located in TSN areas are not held in sufficient proportion by residents of the area,

especially target groups such as the long-term unemployed; and that the IDB has shown an arrogant disregard for the public and for Government officials by providing misleading evidence and statements and, most significantly, by steadfastly refusing to change its bad practices.

The report by the Westminster Public Accounts Committee expressed surprise that the IDB had to carry out special data collection exercises to answer basic questions that it should be monitoring as a matter of course. The Committee found that the IDB provided evidence that was contradictory, confusing and misleading. It concluded, in view of the IDB's failure to respond to previous criticisms or to come under any kind of public control, that should devolved Government be re-established, that IDB activity is a subject which we should be commended to the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee for continuing attention.

I want to turn to some specific concerns surrounding the IDB. First, job creation. Studies have consistently shown that IDB claims regarding job creation are totally unrealistic. The IDB uses a basic indicator called job promotions which is a notional figure of the number of jobs that could be created in a grant-aided project over a number of years. I quote an IDB representative:

"a job promoted is a result of negotiating with the company on a promise that the company will make on the basis of its business plan presented to the IDB."

Studies of actual jobs created have shown that the number is much less than quoted, and that the duration of IDB assisted jobs is quite short. For example, the Comptroller and Auditor General found that in the North of Ireland as a whole only 51% of the jobs promised by IDB assisted inward investors between 1988 and 1994 were actually created. Moreover, only 36% were still in place by March 1997.

There is also a disingenuous method in place for costs-per-job figures. This is calculated by adding together jobs promoted and jobs safeguarded, which are existing jobs that were safeguarded by IDB grants. This year's end-of-year statement from the IDB, for example, indicates 7,145 jobs promoted and 1,796 jobs safeguarded. These total 8,941. That figure is used to calculate the cost-per-job figure, which comes out at £9,507. However, when pressed, IDB representatives stated that the actual number of jobs created in 1999-2000 was 1,609. There is clearly a vast difference in these two figures, and that difference greatly affects the cost-per-job figures. The cost-per-job figure also does not take into account the cost of running overseas offices.

The IDB also uses various forms of double counting in its yearly statements and annual reports, claiming the same jobs promoted over more than one year. The IDB has been criticised for using these unrealistic

figures and counting methods since the 1983 Northern Ireland Economic Council Report, yet it has resolutely refused to change this practice. Therefore when actual jobs are considered, the IDB's performance in terms of job creation has been to say the least woefully inadequate.

In relation to equality issues it appears that the IDB has never taken equality seriously by actively promoting the siting of projects in economically marginalised TSN areas. In response to public pressure, the IDB promised to site 75% of jobs in TSN areas. Yet in the period 1988-97 just 30% of projects and 41% of jobs promoted went to TSN areas. When one looks closely at the figures the lack of adherence to TSN becomes even more appalling, with only 2.3% of IDB-assisted projects situated in west Belfast and none in the Moyle and Strabane District Council areas.

Instead of actively overturning this record and seriously tackling economic marginalisation and disadvantage, the criteria were simply broadened to include areas adjacent to TSN areas. This is such a wide category that the IDB can now claim to have successfully carried out their equality obligations when in fact there has been little operational change.

Up until this year the IDB made no effort to ensure that firms that have located in disadvantaged areas hired people from those areas. The IDB viewed the hiring practices of sponsored companies as the business of those companies. There is no monitoring of the equality effects of grant-aided companies hiring practices on groups such as Catholics, women or the long-term unemployed.

The Westminster Committee stated

"it is not enough to record only the location of projects the acid test is to measure the extent to which jobs are going to people who actually come from disadvantaged areas."

The IDB is now beginning to carry out monitoring on this basis. This to be welcomed as a step in the right direction and should be monitored by the Public Accounts Committee here.

12.00

Given the IDB's failure to carry out its equality obligations thus far, it is therefore cause for concern that it was not obliged to publish a draft equality scheme. Instead, the Department's equality scheme will also cover the IDB. The IDB is the largest recipient of public funding within the Department. Other agencies under the control of the Department are obliged to publish equality schemes. Therefore it is simply not good enough that the IDB should be exempt. Basic data on the religious and gender composition of workforces in IDB-sponsored companies must be maintained and published.

Statistics that measure actual job creation should be compiled. The IDB claims it must use the measure of job promotion because that is widely used by other agencies and allows it to measure its success against its competitors. This is a disingenuous argument. First, one method does not preclude it from using other methods for measuring performance. Secondly, the IDA in the South of Ireland publishes annual statistics of actual jobs in IDA-assisted companies by economic sector and location. It has carried out an annual survey of employment in all industry since 1973. That survey gathers data on employment in each company, including by gender. As the existing regulations require companies to report on the religious composition of their workforces, there is no excuse for the IDB's avoiding the collection and publication of a similar survey of IDB-sponsored companies.

Another issue brought up by the Westminster Committee, and also the subject of other studies, has been the internal performance of the IDB — in particular, its failure to adequately assess the performance of its units, and especially its foreign offices. The Select Committee found that the IDB does not yet have a performance-measurement system that clearly demonstrates the relative and individual cost-effectiveness of its overseas offices, despite the high levels of costs involved in running these offices. Such internal accounting must be implemented. Not only is it necessary for assessing the efficiency of specific units, but it also has an additional impact on other statistics. As I mentioned earlier, cost-per-job figures are understated not only because of the use of inflated jobs promoted figures but further because they do not include the institutional costs of attracting companies.

The IDB also fails to collect data on the economic performance of grant-aided companies. The Select Committee found it unacceptable that it took the IDB five years to begin even basic monitoring of the economic efficiency of the firms it sponsored, even though it had been told to do so in a previous report in 1992-93. Having failed to adhere to Westminster recommendations, the IDB must be monitored in this regard. Moreover, it is crucial that the IDB extend its data collection and monitoring to other areas. It should be conducting annual surveys of each company's performance. It should be looking at costs, whether the materials or services are purchased locally or imported, its profit rate, where it obtains its technology and at what costs, and so on. Citing a company confidentiality clause is not enough. The IDA has conducted a complete survey of components of sales, including scrutiny of costs and profits since the early 1980s. All companies are required to provide this by law. As the recent performance of the "Celtic tiger" demonstrates,

such requirements have not affected in the least the IDA's ability to attract companies.

There is also need for a review of IDB operations in promoting local economic development projects and jobs in indigenous companies. The IDB admits that it has failed badly in this respect. We must all recognise, whatever our concerns, that foreign companies and multinationals will play a role in the future development of our island economy. However, this should not be to the detriment of indigenous Irish industry. Over-dependence on transnational corporations does not make for a healthy economy. Experience has shown that multinationals whose decisions are based on global success rather than local concerns are more likely to move away from a host locality if global market conditions dictate. The IDB would be better placed promoting local industry, which is rooted in local economies and is more likely to reinvest its profits in the local economy.

No one denies that the IDB has difficult job. Its activities have been severely hampered by several factors, including the political conflict and the inability to use policies like low taxation rates, which the much more successful IDA in the South has been able to do.

However, the IDB's job is not made any easier by massaging figures to reflect better performance or by making grossly inflated claims. Keeping accurate records, carrying out rational accounting and putting in place adequate monitoring practices all represent good housekeeping.

The IDB has received massive sums of public money. It has the largest budget within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. People are entitled to know what is being done with this money, how efficiently and successfully it is being used, and what improvements are going to be brought about within the IDB.

The resistance within the IDB over the years despite repeated studies and recommendations, be publicly accountable, to make positive changes, to institute rational accounting and monitoring methods is unacceptable. Furthermore, it leads one to wonder whether if the true cost of their activities were known, it would bring forth such public criticism as would convince those who hold the purse strings that some money which has gone to the IDB would be better spent elsewhere.

I ask the Assembly to vote in favour of this motion because one of the problems over the years has been the lack of accountability shown by the IDB.

Go raibh maith agat.

**The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (Mr B Bell):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

First, it gives me the opportunity to pay tribute to the valuable work carried out by the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster over recent years. That work has been based on reports prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland and by Mr John Dowdall and his staff in the Northern Ireland Audit Office. It has been their job to seek to ensure that Government Departments and their agencies fulfil their responsibilities to the taxpayer and that money voted by Parliament has been spent wisely and in a proper manner.

I know that Mr Dowdall and his staff have drawn the attention of Parliament to a number of instances where Departments have fallen short of this requirement. He will now carry out this important function for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The independence of the Comptroller and Auditor General in exercising his functions is an essential element in the process of holding Northern Ireland Departments accountable to the taxpayer through elected representatives. Section 65 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides that he shall not be subject to the direction or control of any Minister, Northern Ireland Department, or the Northern Ireland Assembly. Taking that into account, I wonder how wise it was, or what the Business Committee were thinking about, to even propose that this motion be debated here today.

Section 60(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides for Standing Orders to establish the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee. The main statutory function of that Committee is to consider accounts and reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The remit of the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee is strictly limited to the consideration of reports prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Since the legislation makes it clear that he cannot be directed by the Assembly in exercising his functions, it follows that the Assembly cannot direct the Public Accounts Committee as the motion seeks to do.

We all have a number of concerns in relation to the report on the IDB's performance. However, there is a clear procedure already. As the report was submitted by the Committee on Public Accounts, the next stage in the process would be for the Department of Finance and Personnel to respond by producing a memorandum of reply. That procedure is based on the principle that, in replying to reports of the Committee, the Government should provide considered responses to the recommendations, which must first be given to Parliament.



This is a long-established procedure, and it will apply to any future reports to this Assembly by my Committee. Sir Reg Empey will undoubtedly want to carefully consider the issues raised in the report, and provide a measured response through the memorandum of reply. That reply is due to be completed next month. In those circumstances, Members should be aware that the Minister will not be able to respond at this stage to detailed issues in the report.

Although my Committee awaits publication of the Department of Finance and Personnel memorandum with interest, it will be a response to the Committee of Public Accounts, and it will be for that Committee to decide if the response is acceptable. The Comptroller and Auditor General will of course monitor any undertakings given in that response and report to my Committee any concerns about their implementation.

The recommendation of the Chairman of the Committee of Public Accounts that my Committee should keep a watching brief on this issue has already been drawn to the attention of Committee Members. The Assembly's Public Accounts Committee, however, can only take this matter forward in the context of any future Northern Ireland Audit Office reports on the work of the IDB. My contention is that we cannot be directed by this motion.

**Mr Dallat:** I would like to pick up on what Mr Bell has said. If we are not directed, I hope that at least we will be influenced. That is what is important. As Chairperson of the Audit Committee and a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I welcome the report referred to in the motion. The under-performance of the IDB is an issue which the Public Accounts Committee will, in time, have to take on board as part of a programme of work which is already under review. I have before me the business for next Wednesday, which deals with road safety in a very comprehensive way — one of the major issues concerning Northern Ireland at the moment.

The Public Audit Office's function is to ensure that the Assembly gets value for money. That is achieved by providing the Assembly with independent information and advice about how economically, efficiently and effectively Departments and agencies and other bodies use their resources.

The public auditor also gives help to audited bodies on how to improve their performance to achieve value for money. Clearly the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee must be concerned that the IDB achieved its annual targets for job promotion in only four of the nine years under review. There will be concern too about the number of jobs that remained in place. The absence of a set of performance measures to demonstrate the relative and individual cost-effectiveness of the IDB's overseas offices is perhaps one of the most alarming disclosures

in the report. Clearly, a Government agency charged with inward investment and having no formal records of their performance is mind-boggling, to say the least.

On a positive note, we welcome the IDB's assurance that in future it will monitor the cost-effectiveness of its overseas offices and sector campaigns. However, it is essential that the weaknesses exposed in the IDB be taken on board by our Public Accounts Committee.

*12.15 pm*

Now, for the first time, we have a responsibility to ensure that the IDB delivers. The admission that it failed, over the nine-year period reviewed, to attract any inward investment to seven disadvantaged areas, including two areas of social need, is alarming. The further disclosure that the IDB has only begun to monitor the impact of inward investment on disadvantaged areas is also a cause for concern. Without pre-empting the findings of the Public Accounts Committee, I have no doubt that the IDB will be asked to ensure that what it promises is delivered.

Now that the Public Accounts Committee is up and running, I, as Chairman of the Audit Committee, hope that there will be opportunities to scrutinise the work of all Government Departments with a view to improving performance. That includes value for money. As Chairman of the Audit Committee, I can report that there have been several formal and informal meetings with the Comptroller and Auditor General, at which my Vice-Chairman, Mr Billy Hutchinson, has also been present. A meeting of the Audit Committee was held last week, and another is scheduled for Tuesday. The Public Accounts Committee meets on Wednesday.

Finally, I take this opportunity to assure the House that the Comptroller and Auditor General is not only able but willing to deal with this and with any other issue that Members feel is of concern. It is a developing process. Resources are obviously limited, but I am impressed by the high standards to which the Northern Ireland Audit Office operates. The draft programme of work already agreed by the Public Accounts Committee is impressive and will make a significant impact on how the Assembly delivers on its responsibilities for efficiency, value for money and fairness. As time goes by, new and fresh ideas will emerge from the scrutiny responsibilities of the Northern Ireland Audit Office that will result in joined-up government, bringing many benefits to the people of Northern Ireland. I do not accept that the Assembly has no role to play. The Public Accounts Committee has a critical and evolving role to play on this issue and on many others that will emerge in time.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** The House of Commons Committee's report on the IDB is an indictment of the failure of the IDB, over the medium term, to make a significant and lasting

impact on job creation, employment and investment in the Province. The report is littered with serious criticisms of the board's practices in attracting investment and its inability to cope with market demands and provide accurate information about its own activities. Without saying so openly, the report practically calls the IDB a failure. It is heavily peppered with criticisms such as

"A substantial proportion of jobs promised were not, in fact, created",

"taxpayers' money is put at risk",

"we are most dissatisfied with the provision by IDB of misleading information."

It also says that the IDB's overseas offices secured no new projects, despite spending £80 million.

This is a catalogue of shame and long-term disaster. We are indebted to the House of Commons for pulling no punches. They have given us a wake-up call. If the IDB does not buck itself up, the situation will get worse. It is now for the Minister, Sir Reg Empey, to respond to the detailed and serious recommendations in this report and say what his Department is going to do to repair the damage and ensure that the future of the IDB is a success.

It would be easy to come to the House, give the IDB a good kicking, shout "Hurray" and walk away, but if the House is really serious about improving investment, opportunity and employment in Northern Ireland, it will take a different approach. Pious hand-washing and condemning while doing nothing is of no use.

It is in all of our interests for the IDB to become a success story as a result of this report rather than wallow in its failures. Because of the way in which the motion was brought forward, we will not be supporting it. Nor do we believe that it can be supported. The motion has been pre-empted by the recommendations of the report itself. If the Member who moved the motion had read the report, she would have seen that the House of Commons commended it to the Public Accounts Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly for continuing attention. That has already happened, and it is being considered by the PAC in Northern Ireland.

Sinn Féin/IRA has shot itself in the foot by bringing this motion forward. It is loathsome in the extreme that IRA/Sinn Féin has the audacity to criticise the Industrial Development Board. Yes, the IDB's record is poor and the IDB must improve itself. But at least the IDB, misguided though it has been, had the best interests of Northern Ireland at heart.

That can certainly not be said of IRA/Sinn Féin. Not only has it detracted from investment by its long-term bombing campaign, but it has shot industrialists, extorted money from building and investment programmes, done untold damage to Northern Ireland's

public-relations schemes, and killed workers. It boasted to the world that its ambition was to destroy Northern Ireland, and now it comes here and criticises the IDB for doing a terrible job. Despite IRA/Sinn Féin the IDB tried to make a good job of things. If the situation were not so serious, the inverted evil of Sinn Féin would be a joke, as I think most Members on this side of the House would agree.

This report by the House of Commons says that the disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland must now become priority investment areas. It singles out two specific areas — one in Mid Ulster and the other in my constituency of North Antrim. The report urges the IDB to attract investment to North Antrim — to Moyle in particular. I hope that the Minister will respond to this positively. In the report an amazing excuse is given by the IDB to the House of Commons. It claimed that it was unable to attract investment to the Moyle area because the location was bad. Only the IDB would dare to say that the Causeway coast, which has a major research university on its doorstep and a young well-educated workforce, is not a suitable area for investment. This is especially the case since the IDB owns sites less than 10 miles from Moyle in the Ballymoney area, and we could indeed have major investments there. The IDB refused to invest in the Moyle area despite the fact that there are excellent opportunities there and 10·6% unemployment.

I hope that, as a result of this report, the Minister will prompt the IDB to develop a strategy for investment in that area — a strategy that will encourage inward investment and also encourage indigenous employers to develop and act positively for the whole area. If we are to attract disadvantaged people into employment such a strategy must be created. However, we are not going to pre-empt the Minister who, we hope, will be able to respond positively on these issues.

The reality is that the IDB dropped its ambitions because of the problems it faced as a result of terrorism. As a House we must encourage the IDB to lift its eyes again to get a vision and to create a strategy for investment which is both ambitious and achievable. We all understand the terrible blight that terrorism has inflicted on Northern Ireland, but the IDB cannot keep using that as an excuse. Rather, it will be judged on its ability to overcome the additional problems associated with Northern Ireland.

I do not believe that the Belfast Agreement has made things much better in terms of public relations. I have spoken to industrialists, and I am sure that many of them look cautiously at investment in Northern Ireland when they consider that one of the Ministers of the Crown is also a godfather of IRA/Sinn Féin.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to restrict his comments to the report.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** I am speaking about the report and the ramifications for Northern Ireland. The reality is that investors and industrialists have spoken to me about their concerns. They have made statements in the press that they will look cautiously at Northern Ireland, given that one of the Ministers of the Crown is also a godfather of Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin. That is a fact. It is something that people might not like to be said in the House, but it has to be said if we are going to be honest about achieving investment in Northern Ireland. At the weekend I was reading a book written by Eamonn Mallie and Patrick Bishop. I was refreshing my memory — it stated, with specific regard to the long-term investment problems in Northern Ireland, that in 1976 the IRA army council gave its approval to the new Northern command. One of its leaders was, of course, Mr McGuinness, our Minister of Education. Mallie goes on to say that the first action of Northern command was

“across the whole of Northern Ireland ... a wave of incendiary attacks on hotels”.

Today Sinn Féin has the audacity to criticise the IDB when its leading members organised the campaign that made the work of the IDB doubly difficult for all those years. The proposer of this motion should hang her head in shame.

**Mr McElduff:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Get away.

The IDB headquarters in Belfast was bombed by this crowd over here — IRA/Sinn Féin — in the early days of the troubles, in some of the first actions of Northern command. Now it has the audacity to condemn the IDB. The IDB has been sweeping up the results of bomb attacks on its own offices, so it is little wonder that it has had difficulty attracting investment into the Province. Yes, the IDB could have done better, and it did back the wrong horses at times. Some of the examples in this report about Hualon and other companies clearly indicate that, but the reality is that the IDB's job was made doubly difficult by this crowd over here — Sinn Féin.

This report indicates that the IDB spends, in real terms, almost £40,000 per job. That is an astounding figure, given that less than 50% of the investment proposals are successful. I hope that the IDB and LEDU can, together, come up with a strategy that will allow more money to be spent on LEDU projects — instead of vast sums going to create short-term jobs, some of which last less than 10 years. LEDU projects give indigenous companies the opportunity to pay and increase their workforce and to develop indigenous employment. Indigenous employers stay here longer because they have a long-term commitment to the Province.

I hope that the Minister will take up the recommendations and ensure that the very detailed criticisms made of the IDB in this report are responded to thoroughly. We look forward to the House of Commons continuing to monitor the IDB. A number of recommendations have come to my attention. I have skited over some of them briefly already. Recommendation 8 urges the IDB to attract investment to

“disadvantaged areas ... and those locations which have enjoyed little or no such investment in the past”.

We know where those locations are, and I hope that they will attract successful investments in the future. Projects should be matched to areas of unemployment. In my constituency, Moyle has 10·6% unemployment. Moyle and Ballymoney should attract an investment programme. In the last 10 years there has not been one successful investment in the Ballymoney area. That is alarming, given the fact that the IDB holds great swaths of land in that part of the Province.

12.30 pm

It is essential that indigenous companies be given the opportunity to develop. If the IDB cannot attract industrialists and inward investment, then let it encourage local companies to invest in the Province and make a success of things. Yes, the IDB has had a difficult job. Yes, this report indicts it for some startling failures, but the reality is that Sinn Féin/IRA bears a great deal of the responsibility for the major problems faced by investors in this Province. On that basis, we will certainly not be associated with a Sinn Féin motion on this issue.

**Mr Neeson:** I am somewhat surprised that this motion is before the House today, for it is out of order, and the Business Committee must bear some responsibility for that. It is important to bear in mind though that the report is very alarming and should be taken seriously indeed.

A number of issues need to be addressed by the IDB, but I regret that we have not yet heard its response to the report. Convention at Westminster allows a period to respond, and that period is not up. As Deputy Chairman of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, I was looking forward to having the IDB before the Committee to answer the criticisms made in the report and to answer my questions and those of my Colleagues.

Clearly, there are issues which need to be addressed, but we have to also accept that we are living in a time of change. This report was drawn up for the years 1988-97. The ceasefires had not been declared, and there was a very unstable environment in Northern Ireland. I hope that the announcement made this morning about the arms dumps will give us the confidence that will enable us to create a stable environment with increased opportunities for attracting inward investment and



creating more indigenous jobs. Those are the opportunities that need to be grasped.

We are currently looking at the document 'Strategy 2010'. One of the issues that it raises which is very pertinent to the report is that of tax incentives. My party has consistently argued that the Assembly should have tax-varying and tax-raising powers. Until that happens, we will be running behind our nearest neighbours in the Irish Republic, particularly on corporation tax.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** I tend to agree with the Member on corporation tax. However, the tax-varying issue has been part of the Member's party's policy since 1997, yet it has failed to deliver. Why was there no successful House of Commons or House of Lords amendment to the 1998 Bill that would have given this House tax-varying powers like those of the Scottish Parliament?

**Mr Neeson:** I regret that our point has not yet been accepted, but I hope that it will be seriously considered by all parties concerned when we come to review the agreement.

We must also bear in mind the positive side of the IDB: 86,000 people are currently employed in Northern Ireland because of IDB ventures. These issues must be taken on board as well.

I wish to make two final points.

The Chairman of the Committee and I had a meeting with the Minister recently, and he raised the point about reductions in the ETI budget — what was then the DED budget — over the years. I fully concur with him that there are opportunities for inward investment there as a result of the new environment, and I think it is vitally important that the budget should not be reduced, regardless of the pressures that come from elsewhere.

Finally — and this is no criticism of Mr Billy Bell — I wish to reiterate the point that the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster comes from the Opposition, and I still believe that it is morally wrong that the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of this Assembly should come from a party that is included in the Executive.

**Dr Birnie:** I too welcome the recent publication of the PAC report. It is obviously going to be of great interest to many of our constituents. However, now is not the time for a full-scale debate. Such a debate can properly be held after a formal response to the report following the due procedures as outlined by the Chairman of our Public Accounts Committee, as said in Parliament.

To borrow — rather, adapt — one of Shakespeare's phrases, I am speaking neither to praise the IDB nor to bury it.

What we can do is highlight a number of issues which this House can subsequently carefully evaluate. We can start by looking at several things which can be said in defence of the IDB's record. The first point has already been put quite well by the Member from North Antrim. Obviously the actuality of violence and the threat of violence over the last 30 or so years has been a very big factor in explaining why Northern Ireland's record, and latterly the record of the IDB in terms of job creation, has not reached that of its counterpart in the Republic of Ireland or, indeed, those of the comparable agencies in Wales and Scotland.

All parties in this House must recognise that point. The second thing which can be said in defence of the IDB's position is that it is very easy for ourselves as elected representatives to demand that jobs and factories be put in certain places. I could, for example, note the finding in the PAC report that the Greater Belfast's share of inward investment has been only roughly half of its share of unemployment. It is easy for all of us to do that and demand that jobs come to certain localities. However, we need to recognise that we work in the context of a market economy and there are distinct limits on the extent to which the state can order companies to go to this village or that village, or that county or locality. We are not dealing with some sort of Stalinist system of central planning, nor indeed are we attempting to go back to the heyday of so-called indicative planning, which was tried in Northern Ireland during the 1960s and to some extent failed.

In subsequent Assembly consideration of the PAC report we will obviously need to take on board the various areas of concern which it raises, the first being the very large discrepancy between the promotion of jobs and the actual creation of jobs on the ground. This is nothing new. As the mover of the motion noted, a variety of reports, including those done by the Northern Ireland Economic Council, have been pointing this out over the years. Secondly, we obviously need to look at the cost per job, and that must include all of the costs of promotion as the PAC report has outlined.

Thirdly, there is the whole issue of targeting social need. To what extent have jobs actually gone to TSN areas?

With regard to jobs in TSN areas, how far do the people who took those jobs live from the TSN areas? Linked to this, and to a point that I made earlier, there is inevitably a trade-off, a difficult balance, that has to be struck. We can attempt to skew the location of jobs, but if we do so, efficiency suffers and the costs to the Exchequer rise. And that is public money which could be used more profitably in other ways to combat poverty. We need to look at that balance.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*



Finally, when the House comes to consider this report and the long-term performance of the IDB formally we will need to do so in context — and it is a worrying context. I think it was Mr Neeson who made reference to ‘Strategy 2010’. It is of great concern that in ‘Strategy 2010’ there was no critical evaluation, in any real sense, of the work of the IDB. Some commentators would say that that was not an accident. The way in which the former Department of Economic Development structured ‘Strategy 2010’ and the composition of its steering committee were quite deliberately designed to shield the IDB from the type of critical evaluation that, over the years, has been given to the work of the IDA in Dublin or similar agencies in, for example, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

I support the spirit of the motion, yet, because of the qualifications relating to procedure, which were properly raised by my Colleague Mr Bell, I cannot vote for it.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has just made comment about procedural issues that were raised by the Chairman of the Assembly’s Public Accounts Committee and a number of other Members. I need to make a ruling in this regard.

First, in producing its report the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster requires the IDB to respond within a period. That is clearly laid down, and it may well be that the Minister’s response will be limited by the IDB’s having to make some necessary enquiries before responding to the PAC at Westminster.

That is wholly different from the assumption that the Assembly is not entitled to consider this matter and respond under the terms of the motion. Some people across the water do not yet understand the impact of devolution and what this Assembly, and the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, can and cannot do. It seems that that is also the case even in this Chamber.

The Public Accounts Committee’s report on the IDB is a public document, and anyone can comment on it. However, the IDB has a particular responsibility to do so and will respond within the necessary time. That is a ministerial responsibility, but the Assembly is entitled to debate a public document and to express its view, and that is what it is properly doing.

That that view might be taken into account by the IDB and the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster is not unreasonable, but it is proper for the Assembly to debate this matter, and I rule that the motion is competent.

In general recommendation xix of the PAC report it is recognised that the Public Accounts Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly should attend to the matters raised and give its continuing attention to them post-devolution. We are in a transitional period, and

there may be questions about whether the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster will retain a right to address cases of substantial expenditure.

There may also be questions about procedures for this Assembly’s Public Accounts Committee and what matters it may or may not deal with, but those are entirely separate issues. Members should not hold back from expressing their views on this publicly available document. Subsequently there will have to be some understanding between the devolved Assemblies and Westminster, on a convention basis, I suspect, as to how deeply things are considered, but this Chamber has the right to continue to debate this motion. It is a competent motion.

I have already made it my practice when the Assembly adopts motions which relate to business elsewhere — the recent motion on the Postal Services Bill is an example — to forward the matter to the relevant Minister, with the Official Report, so that due consideration can be given to the views of the Assembly. That is proper practice, and I intend to do the same with regard to this matter. I felt that it was important to make this ruling. Without clarification, much of the debate might end up nugatory.

12.45 pm

**Mr C Murphy:** On a point of order, A Cheann Comhairle. Does your ruling and advice mean that those Members who agreed with the spirit of the motion but were somewhat concerned about its procedural correctness can now support it entirely?

**Mr Speaker:** I can only clarify procedural questions. If that has laid some Members’ concerns to rest, so be it, but it would certainly be quite wrong for me to give even the slightest smidgen of advice as to how Members may vote. All I can do is clarify the procedural matters.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Further to your ruling, Mr Speaker. If this House decides to follow the Committee on Public Accounts recommendation (xix), which you read, will we have established the convention that when the House of Commons commends a report to this House, we consider it on the basis that it has been commended to us? If that is the case, we are today establishing convention, and that should not be knocked out of place either.

**Mr Speaker:** The Assembly, through its Business Committee, has agreed to consider this report on foot of a motion brought forward by Dr O’Hagan. That is an entirely proper thing to do. My clarification is that procedurally it is entirely correct to do so within the boundaries set out in our Standing Orders, in the motion itself and in relationships that are already established.

It may be that this will quickly become a convention in the same fashion as routes rather quickly become

traditional routes. This process might quickly become a conventional process. I cannot say whether that is a good or a bad thing in either circumstance, but it is there, it is proper, and if the Assembly takes the view that it should debate such matters, I see no reason why it should not do so.

**Mr Weir:** Mr Speaker, do you agree that, while it is perfectly appropriate for you to rule that it is competent for the House to debate a subject, there is a difference between the competence of the Assembly and whether Members feel that now is the appropriate time to debate the issue, or that this is the appropriate manner? That is a different issue, though it does not impinge on whether the House is able to deal with this matter.

**Mr Speaker:** That is, of course, true. Members might have other views. What must be understood — and it may go some way towards the point mentioned by Mr Paisley Jnr — is that, given that one cannot have recurring debates on the same question, Members cannot assume that an opportunity for further debate will arise. That is an entirely different matter.

**Mr Close:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I recognise, appreciate and accept your ruling with regard to the competence of the House to debate the issue before us. Does your ruling also extend to the directive that is involved in the motion — namely, that the Assembly is going on to direct the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee?

**Mr Speaker:** It is entirely proper for the Assembly to direct that a Committee give attention to a matter. That is what this motion suggest — that the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee give continuing attention to the issues raised in the report. It is entirely proper that the Committee should do that. How it chooses to give that attention, and whether it might attend positively or negatively to all those matters, is a wholly different question.

The terms of the motion make it clear that it is not something that can simply be ignored. The Assembly's Public Accounts Committee may make its own judgements about precisely how it attends to the matter. It may agree or disagree with all of it. The motion is simply directing that the Committee pay attention to it. That seems to be a competent thing to do.

There may well be a procedural question — a question of Standing Orders — as to whether the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee may have wider or lesser powers extended to it within the requirements of the Act. That is another matter. However, this is a competent motion.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** Mr Speaker, I appreciate your outlining the position of the Business Committee. As a member of that Committee I think we were coming under flak from parties whose Whips sat in the same

room and did not complain. The point was that the Committee took a decision that the motion was competent and brought it forward to the Floor of the House.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

Mr Neeson said that during the period covered by the report — 1988-97 — there was still a lot of violence and that this affected the level of inward investment. I am sure that, on reading the report and noting the issues that must have raised for the Public Accounts Committee, everybody in this House, including the Minister responsible, would be concerned. We can talk about violence affecting jobs here for the last 30 years. However, if we look at the record of inward investment we see that there were foreign companies here well before the ceasefires were in place. They did not seem to have much of a problem.

We need to look at the reasons the IDB cannot respond or has not done so. The hon Member for North Antrim said that the IDB had backed a few wrong horses. If I had backed as many wrong horses as the IDB I would be looking to find out the number of Gamblers Anonymous. It makes mistake after mistake after mistake.

With regard to the levels of violence in the past and job creation, a number of places — for instance, Antrim — have done very well for inward investment. It is not that far from north Belfast or from other places where there has been conflict, but we still could not attract jobs to those areas. I do not necessarily believe that that argument holds.

My argument is about the way taxpayers' money was spent. In some cases great risks were taken with that money, and it did not deliver jobs. The records of the IDB and LEDU indicate that the lifespans of the jobs they create are about 3.8 years and 4.2 years. This is about the length of time the grants last. People continually talk about a benefit culture. We have got into a grants culture and a benefit culture for inward investment. We need to look at better ways of doing this.

A number of Members have pointed out that we have not done so well for indigenous companies. I would like to see us taking the same risk for indigenous companies as we have taken for the IDB. One thing is for sure: the indigenous companies are going nowhere; they are from here, and they are based here. Most of them started out as family businesses and have grown. We should be making sure they grow even bigger.

That is not to say that we do not want to see inward investment. Of course we do. It would be madness for this House to suggest that we do not. We want to create an IDB that performs much better. Take its performance overseas. Any of us who have been on trips abroad and

have talked to people in foreign cities will know that the IDB could perform a lot better. Everybody knows that.

We have met industrialists who say that if they wanted to come here, the last people they would even talk to are those in the IDB. That has nothing to do with the people who work there; rather it has to do with the way it operates and the rules and regulations that restrict it. Those are the things that we need to change. I am convinced that the people who work there can perform at a better level. We need to ensure that the Minister is given support from the Committees and from the Floor of this House in finding the best way forward.

We need to focus on how we give them the tools to bring the jobs here. We will not solve the problem by talking continually about IRA bombs and murders by loyalist paramilitaries, and so on. We must live in the real world and look at how to get jobs into the areas that most need them. The best thing to do is focus on this report, see what the problems are and try to correct them.

This is not about kicking the IDB or anyone else. It is about having a debate, because a number of our constituents are concerned. People out there looking for jobs cannot get them, and they are asking questions about people here. Let us look at the number of jobs the IDB announces. It will tell us tomorrow that 1,500 jobs are going to appear on a particular site. Do we ever see 1,500 jobs? No. Those are the sorts of things we need to get to grips with. Why do we continually raise expectations? All this reflects badly on the IDB. If we were to look at the number of jobs it said it was bringing and then at the number of jobs it actually brought, it would be a very bad picture indeed.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Does the Member accept that one of this report's criticisms of the IDB is that it does not yet have performance-measurement systems in place, the recommendation being that such systems should be introduced? The House of Commons commends the report to the House, and if we accept that position, those measurement systems will be in place so that in future the problems the Member has rightly identified will be dealt with.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** I thank the hon Member for his comments, with which I agree. As a member of the Business Committee, I wanted to see this motion come before the House so that we could discuss these very matters. Having met sufficient of the industrialists who deal with these matters, the hon Member knows as well as I that we need to put such things in place. If we do not have them we shall not be able to perform at the necessary level to give confidence to taxpayers and Members of this Assembly representing those people.

We need to make sure that we support Dr Dara O'Hagan's motion and move things on. If we do not do

so, that will send an extremely bad message to our constituents regarding job creation. I want to ensure we can bring jobs to this Province, irrespective of where. However, I should like to make sure we get them in TSN areas. Those jobs would be extremely valuable to the people there, as well as to this Assembly and to the peace process as a whole.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It might be helpful for me to tell Members about some of the timing arrangements. I hope to suspend this debate at 1.30 pm and resume it at 5.00 pm. The sitting will be suspended at 1.30 pm, resuming at 2.30 pm for ministerial questions.

**Dr McDonnell:** I welcome the report and the debate on the issues it raises. It is not appropriate to go backwards. We could use this occasion to hurl abuse and poke each other in the eye. However, if we did that we would undermine the very basis of confidence our economy requires. I should like to think anything we do in this House gives support to the Minister and the IDB in their considerable efforts to ensure we get the economy we desire, for it is the engine that will provide for all our social spending. If we do not have a healthy, strong economy, we shall not in the long term have the funds for the Health Service and the top-class education system to which we aspire.

I am equally concerned that some of my Colleagues' comments highlighted the risks involved. We must be clear that part of the problem with our economy has been that we have been averse to risk. Perhaps the IDB has been taking the wrong risks, or taking the right risks in the wrong places. I am not sure, and it will take some time to tease out the detail. However, I wish to make it quite clear that it is essential that we be prepared to take risks in the long term, for otherwise we shall not succeed.

*1.00 pm*

That is the big difference between our economy and the American economy. Those who succeed in America are those who take risks. In the United States people go bankrupt one, two, three, four times, yet on the fifth they may come up with an outstanding success. The cutting edge of technological developments, whether it be in information and communication technology, multi-media or biotechnology, requires risk. Venture capital is also important. If venture capitalists achieve one winner out of 10, they feel all right; if they achieve two out of 10, they feel successful. We do not need to run like lemmings over a cliff on this. Certainly, there are issues involved, but we have to know the difference between taking responsible risks and taking irresponsible, reckless risks.

There are glaring mistakes and omissions in the report, as well as a lack of accountability. This must be corrected. That is different from taking risks. We must refocus, re-energise and ensure that all our efforts go



towards developing our economy to the maximum. We should not talk down the examples of success and the good work done at times by the IDB in difficult circumstances, but the underperformance and misinformation mentioned in this report will not do anyone any favours if we are to create a healthy economic environment, one in which entrepreneurship and economic prosperity flourish.

A great deal of work still needs to be done on 'Strategy 2010'. It was hailed initially as being the be-all and end-all, but gradually we have come to realise that 'Strategy 2010' was only the beginning of a process. We must now ensure that we are all singing from the same hymn sheet, that we are all marching together in the same direction, and that we are all broadly agreed — maybe not in every detail — on what we are doing, and where we are trying to go.

I am concerned about false figures and headlines that provide jobs that are not delivered. These serious inaccuracies lead to cynicism of, and disinterest in, any publicity or announcements that the IDB makes. Many of the jobs it has announced in the past were temporary and short-lived.

There are also the issues of cost-effectiveness, the measurement of the function of the overseas offices and project appraisal. Having gone through the various recommendations that emerged, I believe that immediate and urgent pressure must be brought to bear on our own Public Accounts Committee, the Department, and the Minister, to ensure that when jobs have been promised, there is a reasonable chance that they will be created, and that if they are short-term or part-time jobs, that is made clear.

I am seriously concerned about the creative accountancy that is involved, suggestions regarding some of the costs that were attributed to jobs but not included, and the cost of some of the overseas offices. The report mentions using the Internet. Could a strong case not be made for scaling down some of the overseas offices, utilising an Internet system and mobile support unit, based at home but which could respond when and where it was needed? There must be ways and means of ensuring that our job promotion operation is cost-effective and efficient. These are the issues highlighted by the proposer of the motion today. The motion is down because we need to take account of it. I welcome the ruling from Mr Speaker that set the parameters. It is entirely appropriate for the House to discuss this and, indeed, for the Business Committee to put it on the agenda.

I would welcome a more comprehensive opportunity later for a debate on many of the issues raised. Nevertheless, the point I want to emphasise is that there is a desperate need — if we are to go forward with a healthy and expanding economy, particularly in the field

of new technology — for honesty, openness and transparency, balanced with the need not to talk ourselves into a corner or into a loss of confidence. We must learn from the serious mistakes highlighted in the Public Accounts Committee's report. We need to put those right and go forward steadily, gaining the broad support and confidence of the community. If the IDB and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment do not have public support at home, they are unlikely to be able to sell themselves and Northern Ireland abroad.

Finally, I want to raise one of my hobby horses, which may not be appropriate to the Public Accounts Committee or the issue at stake. My concern is that the IDB has not managed — I will not put it any stronger — to come to terms fully with the whole swath of new technology. While we do have some involvement in communication technology, perhaps it is at the lower end of the market. I would welcome much closer attention to information and communication technology; movement and effort on biotechnology, particularly in the fields of life and health sciences, and closer attention to the emerging multimedia opportunities where growth is currently at 37% per annum. Perhaps we have been a little shy and reserved about grappling with some of the opportunities that lie therein.

I am broadly in support of the motion. It is only right that we should debate the issues raised, as they are pertinent to all of us. In doing so, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. We should be constructive in our criticism to ensure that we retain the credibility and strength to go along. It would be disastrous if we were to do ourselves damage in discussion.

**Ms Morrice:** I support the motion. It mirrors the general recommendations of the Westminster Public Accounts Committee that has been mentioned:

"Should devolved government be re-established in the region, this is a subject which we would commend to the Public Accounts Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly for continuing attention".

That is what we are doing this afternoon.

As a member of the Public Accounts Committee and of the Enterprise, Trade and Industry Committee, I have a direct interest in the public accountability for IDB spending and in the future of the IDB and its role in the economic development of this region. We have listened to a great deal of criticism of the IDB. I agree with those who say that this report should be used as a means of ensuring that the future work of the IDB is open, transparent, properly targeted and appraised. I agree with those who have said "Let us learn from the lessons."

I want to pick up on what Mr Hutchinson said about the need for the IDB to start taking serious risks for



indigenous companies. It is essential that there is a balance between attracting inward investment such as the high-tech models from outside and supporting local industry. I am keen to ensure that the IDB does not close its door on things that Northern Ireland is famous for, such as the textile industry. I would like to see the IDB and the economic advisors take a strategic approach to restructuring the textile industry here. I would also like to see greater support for and innovation and research and development in successful areas such as our “clean, green image” food processing. That would allow us to capitalise on what we do well. Those issues will be important to feed into the review of economic development here and the role of the IDB.

We recognise the importance of providing support for new hi-tech industries, such as call centres and financial centres, but we need to ensure that when support is given to these new industries, the jobs that are created are properly contracted and secure jobs. We do not want to be used as a back door for cheap labour. The need for secure jobs is highlighted by the recent announcement by British Telecom that it is going to move its BT Cellnet operations to England. More than 200 jobs could be lost in Belfast if that happens, and I am hoping that the IDB is taking this on board and doing something about it.

In recent meetings with IDB officials we have noted that the situation appears to be improving. I have seen serious attempts to inform and brief Assembly Members and others about their work. We hope that the new political climate in Northern Ireland will make the work of the IDB less important as foreign investors queue up to put their money in what will undoubtedly become the perfect place in the world, and certainly in Europe, to invest.

**Mr S Wilson:** My Colleague from North Antrim has already made clear our decision on this motion, but I want to re-emphasise the point. We oppose this motion not simply because we are unhappy with the procedure, as described by Mr Bell. We are unhappy about its source.

I am especially unhappy about what I believe to be the real motivation behind it — namely, an attempt by IRA/Sinn Féin to rewrite the history of the last 30 years. We are going to be subjected every week, I suspect, to the nauseating spectacle of Sinn Féin Members bringing forward motions to show how concerned they are about the ordinary issues which affect people on a day-to-day basis, while ignoring the fact that they have been partly responsible, and sometimes completely so, for causing the very problems to which they are now drawing attention. Last week we had Mr McHugh lamenting — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Wilson, it would be useful if you were to restrict your comments to this report.

**Mr S Wilson:** I think they have been restricted to the motion. I do not know if you want instant gratification or whether you are prepared to allow me to lead up to the point I want to make.

Last week we had a debate on the closure of post offices. For the past 30 years post offices have been held up and bombed. Postmasters and postmistresses have been killed. Yet Sinn Féin was concerned last week about the decline in the number of post offices. And today it is jobs.

*1.15 pm*

For 30 years the job of the IDB has been made practically impossible by the destructive actions of members of IRA/Sinn Féin. I remember, in another place, a member of the party opposite proudly proclaiming that they would demolish Belfast brick by brick. Then they complain about social disadvantage and no jobs. They point the finger at the IDB when its problem was caused by IRA/Sinn Féin’s economic warfare against the people of this Province.

The first reason we are opposed to this motion is that it would give credibility to the hypocrisy and two-facedness of its authors. Having said that, I should point out that the report does list some valid concerns which need to be highlighted here today — concerns which hold for the Assembly in dealing with civil servants from various bodies. I want to emphasise the points made by Alasdair McDonnell and Ian Paisley that this is not an exercise in bashing the IDB, although the report does point us to what needs to be done to make sure that government in Northern Ireland is made more accountable. The Assembly and its Committees can learn from that.

Another concern is the lack of information. The report stated in paragraph 5 (xii) that the PAC was dissatisfied with the IDB provision of misleading information on the write-off costs of the Hualon Project. That failure to provide accurate information is unacceptable. We must stress that it is incumbent upon all witnesses who appear before the Committees to ensure they are properly briefed on the subject being examined. I do not believe this is unique to the IDB. A few weeks ago, on the Education Committee, we could have said the same about officials who came along from the Department of Education and who, I believe, treated the House, through the Education Committee, with utter contempt. This is endemic, because after 30 years of direct rule, civil servants have not been used to the level of scrutiny they would have had in other parts of the United Kingdom or in other democracies in the world. This warning to the IDB officials should be treated as a general warning to the Civil Service as a whole.

There is also a lack of information on the cost of overseas offices. We do not know what they cost. I tried

to find the IDB on the Internet and it does not have a site. Here is a body which is supposedly promoting modern industry, to which the House of Commons has to commend the use of the Internet. It seems anachronistic that a body trying to promote high-tech jobs still relies on people using shoe leather to walk around the world — a fairly expensive walk, an £80 million walk.

I notice in the report a statement that I am sure will warm the Minister's heart:

"IDB needs to improve their ability to respond promptly, clearly and accurately."

It does not use the terminology we are used to in Northern Ireland, but the words are similar: "clarity and certainty". We wish to see some clarity and certainty. Given the practice that the Minister has at seeking clarity and certainty and at getting clarity and certainty about the things that he has got clarity and certainty about, I am sure that we will get that clarity and certainty over the period of his stewardship of the IDB. It is appalling that the kind of basic information that the House of Commons would have sought was not available.

The second matter is the failure to hit job targets. There is a need to keep tabs on the promises that are made. There is no point in the IDB giving grant aid to firms and getting promises of jobs. I understand that this cannot be totally accurate. Circumstances change, and sometimes technology changes. Markets change, and one cannot be absolutely certain that the job targets set will always be met. However, it is important that the Minister ensure that when targets are set, they are met. The Minister's record, or at least that of his party, on having targets met has been appalling. I hope he will be more successful at getting job targets met than he is at getting the IRA's targets on decommissioning met. That is an aside, but I hope he heard it.

My last point is on disadvantaged areas. There are disadvantaged areas in nearly every constituency. Nobody can claim a monopoly on disadvantage. Some of that disadvantage, as I said earlier, has been self-imposed by people who have gone out of their way to make areas difficult for industrialists to invest in. We cannot pretend, as Esmond Birnie said, that the IDB can say to an industrialist "Go there", and the industrialist will jump up and go there. The skills he needs must match those available in the area. Very often an industrialist will go where he can get support from similar industries and not be sitting in isolation.

Certain areas have an image. I accept that it makes good economic sense to match areas of unemployment with job opportunities, but the other point made by the report is that often, when a firm locates in a particular area, it is not people from that area who get the jobs. It is not simply a case of saying "There is a business, now

you have to recruit from that local area." There is the complex business of training and making sure that people are available and have the skills that are required. Sometimes — I have had experience of this on Belfast City Council — where a firm gives advance notice of the numbers of people and the kinds of skills it is going to need, and there is a long lead-in period, it is possible to do that. At other times, it is not. It is unrealistic for the House to impose a burden on the Minister and on the IDB to deliver what may often be an unrealistic wish-list. It is important to address these issues, but it is also important to recognise that microeconomics does not always work so smoothly.

This is an important report that generates a lot of work for the Assembly and the Department. As a result, I trust, we will see an improvement in the performance of the IDB.

**The Chairman of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee (Mr P Doherty):** Cheann Comhairle. As Chairman of the Committee of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and from the meetings I have had with the Minister, I am entirely aware of the convention which prevents the IDB from responding for eight weeks. To some degree this restricts the Minister in dealing both with the issue and with the responses. However, there have been numerous reports, going back to the 1980s, which outlined virtually the same problems. Even without these reports those people who live in areas of social need (they are scattered throughout the Six Counties — Fermanagh and Tyrone, for example) do not need reports to tell them that they do not have work. They do not need reports to tell them that they have been discriminated against. They do not need reports to tell them that society here — let us hope that it is changing — has been unequal.

Since this Assembly was elected some two years ago I have held, sometimes on my own and sometimes with my party colleagues, a number of meetings with IDB officials to try to understand their concerns and to put our views across as forcefully as possible. I am not lightening or lessening my criticism of the IDB, but we need to look at the issues in a holistic way.

The concerns of the IDB generally involved the lack of infrastructure in some areas. There are historical and political reasons why the areas west of the Bann do not have infrastructure. We have a Minister for Regional Development who does not attend Executive meetings yet his fellow Members preach to us about political instability. He will have a role in helping the IDB to develop and expand into areas of social need and into those areas which have not as yet received the type of inward investment that they require. As we look forward to the future, the political instability is coming repeatedly from the same source — the people who will not attend, the people who will criticise and reject and

defy any of the collective decisions that are being taken by the Executive. Perhaps we need a Select Committee at Westminster to investigate the denial that emanates continuously from the DUP. Maybe it would be enlightening with regard to its attitudes to us.

Focusing on the key point, I do support the proposal. The IDB has failed many, many areas. It needs to seriously consider the criticisms of the Westminster report and of the various other reports which have appeared on a regular basis. If the IDB focuses on these issues, and if it approaches the situation in a holistic way, then in a year's time — or two years' time — when we again discuss the IDB it will be developing and growing and we will be able to work in co-operation with it. If, however, it reverts to the old ways, the old in-house practices, we will again be criticising and focusing — perhaps on the basis of our own reports rather than those from Westminster — on its many, many failures.

Today's criticisms stand. They are absolutely clear. One would need to be totally incompetent not to recognise that those criticisms are well founded. We need to take on board these criticisms and look to the future. We need to develop a holistic approach, and there is an opportunity now for members of the Committee and for the Minister, with his new responsibilities, to take on board these concerns and to get it right. We need to get it right, particularly for the people on the ground who have suffered from the lack of inward investment.

*Debate suspended.*

*The sitting was suspended at 1.30 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### EDUCATION

#### Autistic Children

2.30 pm

1. **Mr McElduff:** Ba mhaith liom ceist uimhir a haon a chur. What plans does the Minister of Education have to improve educational provision for children who suffer from autism, and will he make a statement?

(AQO 339/99)

**The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):** There are a number of special programmes designed specifically to help autistic children, and all special schools for children with severe learning difficulties operate structured provision to meet the needs of pupils with severe learning difficulties and autism. Education and library boards also provide specialised support to other schools with pupils with autism, and I am committed to achieving greater consistency in the level of such provision.

To assist in this, the Education and Training Inspectorate will shortly be issuing two reports on provision presently being made for autistic children. The first deals with provision for autistic children in special schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties, and the second is a survey of provision for children with Asperger syndrome, that is autistic children with normal or high intelligence. As I indicated in my statement of 5 June to the Assembly on the North/South Ministerial Conference held on 3 February, provision for pupils with autism is one of the priority areas for co-operation on a joint North/South basis through a special education co-ordination group that will examine the possibilities for the exchange of information and experience, and for commissioning joint research studies. I have also agreed with the United States Secretary of Education, Mr Richard Riley, that we can have access to American expertise and research in this area. Both initiatives will, I am sure, lead to significant improvements in the quality of provision for children with autism.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. I welcome the North/South dimension to educational study on this matter. What provision is there presently in mainstream schools, and what can be done to improve consistency and provision across all the boards? I am very conscious that this issue affects six out of every 10,000 people.

**Mr M McGuinness:** In mainstream schools, the operation of the special educational needs code of practice ensures that children's needs can be picked up at different levels of intervention, from school-based to school-supported. Stage 3 intervention brings additional resources and advice from the education and library board, and the process of individual educational plans identifies targets and achievement dates for review. Children can have differing degrees of autism, and provision must have regard for the impact of the condition on the child's learning and ability to work with peers. It can also change with age. For example, a child with Asperger syndrome will probably experience more emotional problems during adolescence — hence the need for individual support — and may have additional problems with examinations, as the nature of autism can inhibit some children from doing well.

Such children's circumstances can be taken into account by the examining bodies, which will make special arrangements to meet their needs. Provision in mainstream schools therefore needs to be individualised and underpinned by a visual and structural approach. Support is now available from education and library boards, educational psychology services and their outreach and peripatetic services. Classroom assistance is also provided where necessary.

On the consistency and provision across the education and library boards, I am aware that in special schools for children with moderate learning difficulties, and in the mainstream, provision for autistic children is not as consistent across the boards as we would like it to be. I expect the Inspectorate's forthcoming reports to highlight this. There is a regional strategy group for special education and that comprises the special education officers and principal educational psychologists from all the education and library boards. It is chaired by a senior education officer and provides the appropriate forum to address this important issue. I will be charging the group with doing so. After the Education and Training Inspectorate have monitored their success in this regard and they will report back to me.

**Mr Dallat:** I welcome the Minister's statement. Does he accept that dyslexia is also a very serious problem in schools — one which has not been adequately resourced?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I agree that dyslexia is a serious problem. I am not sure that I would agree that it has not been resourced. My Department is very conscious of the need to deal in a serious-minded way with any children who have severe or medium learning difficulties. Since I came to the Department of Education I have made it clear to my officials that we must prioritise the issue of children with severe learning difficulties. I recently visited Rathfriland Hill School in Newry, and that

brought home to me at first hand the great difficulties faced by the children and the teachers who look after them. We are aware of the seriousness of the issue. It is probably safe to say that approximately 10% of all school-going children suffer, in varying degrees, from dyslexia, and a considerable number also suffer from dyspraxia. That is a huge problem by any standards, and it is one which my officials and I, as Minister, take very seriously.

**Mr Speaker:** May I urge Members to try to stick with the issue at hand. Dyslexia and autism are somewhat separate issues — in fact, entirely separate issues. I urge the Minister to be as concise as possible and Members to stay as close to the point as possible. Otherwise we will get through very few questions.

**Mr Hay:** Following the Minister's recent visit to America, can he tell the House if the trip was financed in whole or in part by his Department, and the amount of money involved?

**Mr Speaker:** I have to rule that that question is entirely out of order. Unless a specific part of the visit was connected with autism, I fail to see any link to the question.

**Mr Hay:** The Minister raised it in his first answer.

**Mr Speaker:** Sorry. I did not hear what the Member said.

**Mr Hay:** The Minister raised the subject of his trip to America in his first answer, and I am trying to find out if there was a cost to the Department of Education.

**Mr Speaker:** Supplementary questions must be relevant to the initial question, not necessarily to the ministerial answer. Ministerial answers do not always entirely, and only, respond to the question asked. Members must understand that if they raise points of order it will take away from the time available for questions. Mr Wilson, do you want to raise a point of order?

**Mr S Wilson:** Let him answer the question.

**Mr Speaker:** Not on that basis. Next question.

### School Building Programmes: Private Finance

2. **Mr Leslie** asked the Minister of Education what is the value of school building programmes so far commissioned using private finance initiatives.

(AQO 338/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The estimated capital value of the four school pathfinder projects commissioned so far using the private finance initiative is £38 million.

**Mr Leslie:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I must say I am disappointed at the small amount involved.



Does the Minister intend to make wider use of this form of funding?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I have always been of the view that the private finance initiative approach cannot compensate in any way for the need for a substantial school capital building programme in any given year. I have already raised this issue on several occasions, particularly in a number of interviews with the 'Belfast Telegraph'. The Department of Education has been evaluating the experience gained during the pathfinder programme. As I announced earlier this year, we will be consulting with school authorities and the Assembly's Education Committee on a more extensive programme of private finance initiative projects to be launched next year. The present school projects are part of the pathfinder programme. Further private finance initiative developments will be subject to additional consultation, and I expect that increasing numbers of people will be keenly interested in how we develop this particular aspect of our school capital building programme.

**Mr Gallagher:** Clearly, we are going to see further developments in the private finance initiative PFI, the public/private partnership PPP — or whatever we want to call it. Has the Minister checked that satisfactory arrangements are in place for the care and maintenance of school buildings under PPP? Also, will those who will be employed in the care and maintenance of the schools, under these arrangements, enjoy the same terms and conditions as those employed in other schools?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Obviously, value for money is vitally important to my Department. Given the condition of the schools estate I have to be seriously concerned as to how Department money is spent in relation to PFI. I have had in-depth discussions with departmental officials in relation to all of these matters, and we are conscious of the need to ensure that, over a twenty-five year period, we are getting value for money.

There are also contractual issues for providers, but we are conscious of that. It brings into focus the second part of the question, and that is how employees in these schemes will be treated, particularly as they will be within a private finance initiative. We are concerned about that. My Department officials and I will keep a close eye to ensure there is equality of treatment, and we will move forward on that basis.

### Strabane Grammar School

3. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Education what is the current position in regard to the allocation of grammar school places to Strabane Grammar School, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 334/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The admissions and enrolment numbers of a school are based on the number of pupils that the school can physically accommodate. My Department had discussions with the board of governors of Strabane Grammar School but was unable to approve additional places for admissions this September. I am satisfied that there are sufficient places available at the school.

**Mr Hussey:** I must express my extreme disappointment at the Minister's response. He will be aware that students in the Western Board area, in Londonderry and Omagh, can enjoy a 35% allocation of spaces and indeed with the new proposed amalgamated school by CCMS due to be constructed in Strabane, they have been guaranteed a dedicated grammar stream of 35% intake, whereas Strabane Grammar is currently operating on a 25% to 26% intake. This is a severe discrimination against pupils in controlled primary schools in the rural areas. I am aware of one boy—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I must prevail upon the Member, who was about to elaborate extensively. This is not an opportunity for a speech. It is a supplementary to a question which has already been put. Please make it concise.

**Mr Hussey:** I am trying to illustrate the point that somebody, instead of being offered a place in Strabane, has to travel to Londonderry. Does the Minister not agree that this is a discriminatory decision made against the controlled grammar school in Strabane?

**Mr M McGuinness:** No. I do not agree that it is a discriminatory decision. No grade guarantees a place in any grammar school. The position on admissions varies from year to year according on the numbers of pupils transferring, the grades obtained, and stated parental preferences. Boards of governors draw up and apply admission criteria when a school is oversubscribed with applicants.

My Department monitors the availability of grammar school places on an area basis, and not on an individual school basis. The broad general policy parameter is that places should be available in an area for all pupils obtaining grade A, and 80% of pupils obtaining grade B who are seeking grammar school places. The situation in Strabane is that grammar school places are available in Strabane, Derry and Omagh, and the general policy parameter has been met within the area.

2.45 pm

The current approved admissions and enrolment for Strabane Grammar are 54 and 400. The school's physical capacity is 400, and enrolment as at October 1999 was 397. Therefore the school is almost full. There are plans for future capital development at the school, and the long-term enrolment used in the economic

appraisal for the capital scheme is 400, so I fail to see how the allegation of discrimination can hold up.

**Mr Gibson:** Does the Minister accept that in the case that he cited there was geographical discrimination? A pupil with a similar grade was refused a place because he lived in Castlederg. The place was allocated to the person living closest to Strabane. Does the Minister accept that allocating grammar school places on a geographical basis requires further serious consideration?

**Mr M McGuinness:** My Department monitors the availability of grammar school places in all areas for both sections of the community against the parameter that there should be places available for all grade A applicants and 80% of grade B applicants, and that parameter has been met this year in both sectors.

With reference to the earlier point made about the maintained situation in Strabane, we must all understand that the proposal for rationalisation in Strabane is under consideration by my Department. There is no question whatsoever of any section of the community being discriminated against. It is important that people understand that this is dealt with on an area basis, not on a school-by-school basis. Therefore, in the year just ended, it is clear, Strabane Grammar, with 397 places, for a school that holds about 400, has been fairly treated.

### Integrated Schools

4. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Education to review the criteria for the establishment and funding of integrated schools, and if he will make a statement.

(AQO 344/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Before the suspension of devolution last February I announced that a review of the viability criteria for new integrated and Irish medium schools was to be conducted. My Department is currently undertaking this review, and I will keep you informed of the developments in this regard.

**Mr Ford:** I thank the Minister for his brief and succinct response. Will he take on board a particular concern I have while those criteria are being reviewed? My understanding of the present situation is that when establishing the criteria for integrated schools, only the number of Protestants and Catholics are counted, and those of mixed background and others are ignored. Will the Minister acknowledge that this discrimination is increasing the hurdles to the establishment of new integrated schools, for which there is a huge parental demand, and that this is something that must be addressed in the review that is currently underway?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I am willing to address that issue in the review. In my time as Minister of Education, before suspension, I had a number of discussions with

those in the integrated sector about this matter, and so it is something I am conscious of. Mr Ford knows as well as anyone that in relation to the development of these schools, it is absolutely essential to get the balance right. The current legislation clearly refers to reasonable numbers of Catholics and Protestants, but I know that there are people who fall between two stools, and we will take account of that.

**Mr S Wilson:** Does the Minister accept that he is using integrated primary schools as a cover for discriminatory behaviour in favour of Irish language schools? Given the fact that the Department of Education has closed primary schools in the controlled sector on the grounds that they were not educationally efficient — some of them with just fewer than 100 pupils — does he agree that it is absurd to suggest that the viability criterion for Irish language schools and integrated schools should be 12 pupils? Is it not a case of him plundering his budget once again for his Republican disciples rather than giving good quality for people?

**Mr M McGuinness:** No, I do not agree at all. Mr Wilson would be surprised if I did.

Integrated primary schools must demonstrate the potential to achieve a minimum year one enrolment of 25 pupils and a minimum long-term potential enrolment in the range of 150 to 175 pupils. Integrated secondary schools must demonstrate the potential to achieve a minimum year eight enrolment of 80 pupils with a minimum long-term enrolment of 400.

At the moment, Irish medium schools must demonstrate over a two-year period their ability to meet the minimum requirements for annual intake. The review put in place by my Department is about meeting demand. When I became Minister of Education I made it clear that the issues of choice, accessibility and excellence were very important. The demand for Irish-medium and for integrated education is legitimate. It is fair to say that, over the years, people in both sectors felt very strongly that they were not being given a fair opportunity to develop these forms of education.

My Department has a responsibility, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, to encourage integrated education and Irish medium education, and we will continue to do that. There is no question of my Department discriminating against any state school. If there are specific allegations that the Member wishes to make on the matter, the sensible thing to do is to sit down and have a discussion about it.

**Mr K Robinson:** Will the Minister assure the House that he will adhere to the principle of equality of treatment when dealing with the establishment, funding or rationalisation of schools, regardless of the educational sector they represent and thereby ensure

that the substantial savings achieved by such an approach will be specifically targeted at genuine social need?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I do not disagree with the Member. Equality of treatment is vitally important for all educational sectors and I give you a firm commitment that my Department will adhere to that principle.

### Transfer Procedure

5. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education what assessment of the Gallagher report he has made in relation to the transfer test. (AQO 340/99)

14. **Ms E Bell** asked the Minister of Education when he expects to announce the results of the Gallagher report into transfer procedures. (AQO 346/99)

15. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Education when the review of the transfer procedure (11-plus) will be completed, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 317/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The purpose of the Gallagher report is to provide objective information on the effects of selection on pupils, schools, teachers, parents and society and to act as a catalyst for a full and open debate on the issues. The report is not yet complete. It will be published in September. It will be followed by a series of dissemination seminars at which the researchers will present their findings. The arrangements for taking forward the subsequent debate and consultation will be determined shortly. However, I wish to ensure that all the relevant interests, including educational bodies, the Executive, the Assembly Education Committee and the Assembly, have full opportunity to contribute to our deliberations on the nature of future post-primary education arrangements.

**Mr Kennedy:** Can the Minister indicate the financial impact any changes to the current transfer test will have on the education budget, particularly in relation to the school estate?

**Mr M McGuinness:** It is impossible to give that answer at this time. Clearly, my Department is focussing on the fact that we will have, through the research, which is currently with officials and which will be published in September, a huge body of work, to be finalised over the summer period. We will then have what conceivably will be one of the biggest debates in relation to education we have seen in 100 years. Before we even get to the issue of what type of structures are going to be required. We need to deal first with the research and the contents of that research. It is important to stress that this report will not make proposals. I firmly envisage our moving forward to examine the effects of selection, and the 11-plus in particular, on pupils, teachers, the community and society as a whole.

**Mr Kennedy:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. With due respect to the Minister, I must say that he has not answered my question. It seems strange that the Department cannot —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It is not in order for Members to intervene in a ministerial answer on the subject of whether the Minister has answered the question when he is still on his feet. One should not forget that, if there is time, there will be supplementary questions.

**Mr M McGuinness:** With respect, I believe I have answered Mr Kennedy's question, and the answer was an honest one. I do not know what the financial implications will be, for the simple reason that we must first deal with how to handle the research findings and move forward to what, in my opinion, will be a large educational debate which, I hope, will take in all sections of the community and everyone involved in the education of our children.

With regard to the research, after it has been put together, I hope that the researchers will go out to the education and library boards to meet the people and explain how they came to their findings. The Department will shortly decide how to move the subsequent debate forward. We shall then have to bear in mind all the debate's implications for the Department of Education, for the Executive and for society as a whole. At this stage, when we do not know what our decision will be, based on research and consultation, it is difficult to answer the Member's question, since it presumes we shall initiate wholesale change.

I do not know what the outcome will be. All I know is that it is a serious matter. It must be handled extremely sensitively, and the Department is doing just that. Some people may have criticisms about the slowness of the process, but some of the delay has come about because we decided at a late stage to conduct a comparative examination of other systems elsewhere in the world. It is impossible at this stage to talk about the report's financial implications until such time as we have the debate, go through the consultation period and I, as Minister of Education, in consultation with everyone else, decide how we move forward. When we reach that stage, and a decision has been taken, we shall look at the financial implications.

**Mr Speaker:** I appeal to the Minister to be as concise as possible in his replies. There is always a temptation not to do so, and it has sometimes become substantial in other places. In that case, Members need not also complain if their questions or those of their Colleagues are not reached.

**Mrs E Bell:** I am aware of the work done on the Gallagher Report and that which will be needed following it, but I ask the Minister to remember that one thing that will come out of this will be the stress and



trauma experienced by pupils of that age and their parents. I hope that whatever work is done will be done as expeditiously as possible to ensure that future generations do not suffer the same stress and trauma.

**Mr Speaker:** I am not entirely sure whether the Minister is clear about the question, but I appeal to him to make his response briefly so that we might get in one or two more supplementaries.

**Mrs E Bell:** If the Minister has any problem I shall be happy to clarify the situation.

3.00 pm

**Mr M McGuinness:** I am very conscious of the points made by Mrs Bell, and I know that this has been the subject already of a huge debate within our society.

**Mr McGrady:** I thank the Minister for his reply to the initial question. Will he undertake to expedite the review of the Gallagher Report so that we do not have the paralysis by analysis that we have had for many decades? Will he also assure us that the wide range of consultation he has undertaken will be relatively time limited as this matter has been debated for many years in our community? The fact that there are multi-party questions today indicates the importance.

Does he further agree that the important thing, as has been said, is to remove this trauma from our children and from our families and ensure that it is not substituted by a similar one? The children's abilities should be foremost, and financial considerations should be hindmost, in the ultimate resolution of this difficult problem for the community.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I fully intend to expedite all this. I know that down the years different Ministers of Education ran away from the hard questions. I am not for running away from this hard question. My Department is facing up to it and the research will be published in September. It will be complete and will not be adjusted by the Department. The researchers will be available to answer questions, and I hope that the consultation process will be finished by next spring. By that time, I fully hope, my Department and I will be in a position to state quite clearly how we intend to move forward. We will be very decisive in all of this.

**Mr Speaker:** The time for questions to the Minister of Education is up.

**Mr Hussey:** On a point of order under Standing Order 19(7), Mr Speaker. Members will recall that on 12 June I posed a question to the Minister who is about to take the podium. She did not answer the question. I asked the Deputy Speaker, Sir John Gorman, to clarify the point, and the Minister refused to answer the question.

Under Standing Orders,

“for the purposes of scrutiny, questions should be answered as clearly and fully as possible.”

Standing Orders further state

“supplementary questions shall be answered individually as they arise.”

The words are “shall be answered”. I ask you, Sir, for a ruling.

**Mr Speaker:** It is not always entirely easy for the Speaker to rule whether questions are being answered. It is particularly difficult to rule on the question of whether they are being answered as fully as possible. What happens then is that they are no longer answered concisely, and there is no time for supplementary questions to be introduced.

There is a dilemma here. We have already seen a whole raft of questions for oral answers, which we were not able to reach today. I tried to get through as many as possible, but there is a difficult balance to be achieved. We must proceed as best we can, with rulings in individual circumstances and guidance in general.

**Mr Hussey:** Further to that, Mr Speaker. Will you look at pages 84 and 85 of the Official Report of Monday 12 June, and then give your ruling?

**Mr Speaker:** I will happily do that.

**Mr Neeson:** Is it in order for the Assembly to restrict the amount of time for questions to the Minister to 30 minutes, bearing in mind the large number of Members who are disappointed when their questions are not answered, and are not given the opportunity for a supplementary?

**Mr Speaker:** I am somewhat puzzled by the Member's question. It is not only in order; it is a requirement. It is in Standing Orders that there shall be questions for an hour and a half — from 2.30 pm to 4.00 pm. The alternative is that a Minister will appear for questions once every three months and have an hour and a half. The decision of the Business Committee was that three ministerial Departments would be here for questions each Monday from 2.30 pm to 4.00 pm. Ninety minutes divided by three gives 30 minutes, and that is the amount of time available. It is entirely in order for that decision to be taken. It would also be in order for the alternative decision to be taken that one hour 30 minutes be available for Ministerial questions but only once every three months or so. The immediate answer to the question is that it is in order.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Mr Speaker, would you not consider taking points of order after Question Time, as happens in another place?

**Mr Speaker:** That is an excellent suggestion. I hope that the Assembly will be content to hold with what is a reasonable proposition. Points of order will generally be



taken after Question Time. We will now proceed with the questions to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

## HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Child Protection Legislation

1. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm when she is planning to introduce legislation equivalent to the Protection of Children Act 1999. (AQO 328/99)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** Níl comhaontú ann go fóill ar an chlár reachtaíochta. Ach thig liom a dhearbhu go bhfuil rún againn dul i gcomhairle san fhómhar faoi mholtaí gur cheart bunús reachtúil a chur faoi na socrúithe reatha trína meastar oiriúnacht iarratasóirí atá ag iarraidh bheith ag obair le páistí.

The legislative programme has yet to be agreed. However, I can confirm that in the autumn I intend to consult on proposals to place the existing arrangements for checking the suitability of those applying to work with children on a statutory basis. We clearly wish to strengthen the protection afforded to children, and our proposals will include a requirement for childcare organisations not to employ anyone on the register of those deemed unsuitable to work with children. The effect will be to provide legislation equivalent to the Protection of Children Act 1999. In the meantime, before proposals are brought forward, I will be happy to receive Members' views.

**Mrs E Bell:** I thank the Minister for her answer, which dealt with my point of concern. Obviously the Minister agrees that there are gaps in our current system of vetting. Although it is relatively effective, List 99 needs to be reviewed given the number of names included and the legislation it can use to protect children in care. I am glad that that has been looked at. Does the Minister agree that the appointment of a commissioner for children would further children's rights in Northern Ireland?

**Ms de Brún:** The appointment of a commissioner for children is a very positive idea. It is slightly separate from the question that I was being asked, but in terms of strengthening children's rights it is a very positive proposal.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Referring specifically to the protection of children and young people, is the Minister aware that between 7 February and 15 May the Provisional IRA shot or beat 12 youths in Northern Ireland? These youths have been treated under the

Health Service. The treatment of victims of such beatings and shootings by the IRA costs the health service a vast amount of money. Will the Minister confirm that she has spoken to her comrades in the Provisional IRA and asked them to stop these beatings? Will she condemn the Provisional IRA for carrying them out? If they are unfit to be associated with children and young people, does her association with members of the Provisional IRA make her, as Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, unfit to be running that Department?

**Ms de Brún:** I can say very clearly that I do not wish to see beatings — I am opposed to them. It is not the way forward. I have experience, in my constituency, of communities trying to put forward alternatives, trying to develop restorative justice schemes. That is the way forward. Punishment beatings, as they are called, are not the way forward, and I am opposed to them.

**Mr Beggs:** Does the Minister agree that for any new child protection legislation to be effective, it should clearly define a policing role, so that the expertise of the RUC can be brought to bear in protecting children in our society?

**Ms de Brún:** Any proposals being developed are being developed in consultation with other agencies, notably the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Education. They will bring forward the points that they believe to be necessary in the legislation. Certainly, we need to see what the policing role will be in all of this. We need to ensure that there is provision in the legislation for co-operation between all of the statutory agencies involved in the protection of children. That is the way to go forward.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** Does the Minister plan to have the budget in place to enable her to give legislative effect to an equivalent of the Protection of Children Act? We are being told we do not have enough social workers working with children to deal with the court cases or with cases in our constituencies. Will the budget be in place for this?

**Ms de Brún:** Dúirt mé go minic cheana féin go bhfuil mé ag dul a dh'iarraidh tuilleadh airgid don Roinn agus do na seirbhísí sóisialta agus sláinte — agus déanfaidh mé sin. I have said on several occasions that I will be seeking an increased budget for health and social services. This will be necessary for a range of priorities I want to see developed, as do others.

**Mr Speaker:** We move to the next question, but just in case Members do not recall the note that went round, I should point out that question 4 should not have been on the list as it was a second question in the name of one Member. It was removed at an earlier stage.

### Hospital Services (Southern Area): Use of Term “Temporary Transfer”

2. **Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policy she will pursue in relation to the Southern Health Board using the term “temporary transfer” when making a decision on hospital services, and if she will make a statement.

(AQO 342/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Is eol domh go ndearnadh seirbhísí a aistriú ó Otharlann Dheisceart Thír Eoghain an bhliain seo caite. Chuir mé in iúl go soiléir go bhfuil coinne agam go ndéanfar gach iarracht an bhail chearta a choinneáil ar na seirbhísí láithreacha go dtí go ndéanfar cinneadh ar thodhchaí fhadtréimhseach na n-ospidéal atá laistigh de limistéar an bhoird.

I am aware that a number of hospital services were transferred from South Tyrone Hospital last year. I have made it clear that until decisions are taken on the long-term future of hospitals within the board's area I expect every effort to be made to maintain existing services. Where this proves impossible, any changes must be the minimum necessary to ensure safety and quality and must be temporary.

**Mrs Carson:** Does the Minister agree that this is not the case in south Tyrone, where the term “temporary transfer” has been used in order to avoid a judicial review of the decisions made affecting the provision of services? Does the Minister also agree that staffing and resources should be made available to South Tyrone hospital again, so that no more temporary transfers occur?

**Ms de Brún:** Until decisions are taken about the long-term future of hospitals within the board's area, I expect the board to maintain existing services, to make the minimum amount of changes necessary — should it feel any transfer of services is necessary — and to ensure that the transfer of services is temporary. My view is that a temporary transfer is one which is made until final decisions on the long-term future of hospitals in that, or other, board areas can be put in place. I therefore do not agree with the Member's suggestion as to why transfers are made on a temporary basis. I have made it clear to the Board that any decisions to be made, relating to existing services, need to be very clearly based on robust evidence that changes or transfers are needed. There is a large number of complex issues involved in the suggestions being made at present. It is not simply a question of making available the necessary finance or resources. That is a question, first and foremost, for the Board, but I will expect it to indicate to me, as it has done to date, that it has looked at every possible option.

### Community Care Services

3. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how she proposes to increase provision of community care services over the next five years. (AQO 352/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Caithfear fanacht ar thoradh an athbhreithnithe chuimsithigh ar chaiteachas don bhliain seo sula bhféadfar cinntí a dhéanamh faoi sholáthar seirbhísí cúraim ó 2001-2 go dtí 2003-4. Tá an Roinn ag déanamh machnaimh faoi láthair ar phleananna na mbord sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta conas atá siad ag brath a gcuid féin den £53 milliún breise a cuireadh i leataoibh do sheirbhísí sóisialta agus sláinte phoiblí na bliana seo a úsáid. Tá an £11 milliún do sheirbhísí cúraim phoiblí san áireamh.

3.15 pm

Decisions on the provision of community care services from 2001-02 to 2003-04 must await the outcome of this year's comprehensive spending review. The Department is considering the health and social services board plans and how they propose to use their share of the additional £53 million allocated to health and personal social services this year, including the £11 million earmarked for community care services.

Last winter I commissioned a review of community care in response to the widespread concern about pressures in services, and my Department's report, 'Facing the Future', contains provision for a longer-term review of acute bed provision and community care.

**Mr Ford:** The Minister previously answered a written question which I submitted clearly showing that spending on community care has lagged behind that on acute hospital services since 1996. Will she agree — and she has hinted at this but not really answered — that a full range of domiciliary care, day care and respite care services is absolutely essential to the quality of life for many disabled people? Will she give a commitment that, in the programme of government, community care will be a real priority and not lost in a welter of claims for acute hospital services alone?

**Ms de Brún:** I am as concerned as the Member that the amount of domiciliary care provided by trusts has not kept pace with assessed needs. I intend to take action to ensure that, in the long term, the provision of care to people in their homes is given as much priority as other types of care, particularly residential care. Overall, there has been underfunding in community care services over a number of years, and I intend to bid for additional resources in this year's comprehensive spending review to improve the full range of community care services.

**Dr McDonnell:** In the context of improving community care services over the next five years, can

the Minister tell us the basis for her decision to abandon fundholding without any consultation, thereby launching the health service into another pointless restructuring programme where only the bureaucrats will benefit?

**Ms de Brún:** The decision to end GP fund holding was not taken without consultation. It was clearly flagged up in consultation documents put out by my predecessor. The consultation has already taken place. It did not fall to me to consult again on the matter. Ending fund holding is an essential part of developing modern care services. Health and social services ought to be about care and co-operation and not about market and competition.

**Mr Kennedy:** Regarding the lack of provision within community care, may I draw the Minister's attention to the under provision of nurses trained specifically in epilepsy in Northern Ireland and ask what steps she intends to take to address this area of concern.

**Ms de Brún:** I want to ensure that funding is available to improve the full range of community services but exactly how this will happen and what decisions will be made will depend on the outcome of the comprehensive spending review. I intend to bid for additional resources for community care and then I will be in a better position to discuss what can be done with those resources in all areas.

**Mr Morrow:** With regard to gross underfunding in community care, does the Minister accept that the countless thousands of pounds spent on translation into Irish would be better spent on community care?

**Ms de Brún:** The provision of health and social services is not carried out in only one language. My Department and the agencies, boards and trusts within the health and social services sector have to deliver services to a community diverse in social class, community background and language. We need to tailor our services to that. It is wrong to think of any one attempt to do that as taking away from the overall level of service. My Department not only works in this way, but also allocates part of its budget to ensuring that its documents and consultations make provision for audiocassettes, Braille, Chinese and large-format print. This ensures that we properly deliver the service that is required by our whole community.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** Is it not accepted that the policy under which people are sent out of hospital without providing the appropriate community care is totally unacceptable in a civilised community? In the light of that, is it not also accepted that there is an urgent need for additional occupational therapists? Many of the people in the Province who need this attention actually

die before they can be visited. What action is going to be taken to correct this situation?

**Ms de Brún:** Ó thaobh na chéad cheiste de, tá pleananna ag na boird faoi láthair an fad ama a ghearradh a chaithfeas daoine fanacht sula bhfaigheann siad an pacáiste ceart.

Those are two separate questions. With regard to the first, the spending plans that I have received from boards will achieve real reductions in the time patients have to wait before receiving a community care package. I am also commissioning further work to improve the integration of hospital and community care services.

As regards waiting lists and waiting times for access to occupational therapy services, responsibility for reducing waiting lists lies, first and foremost, with the health and social services boards and trusts. For our part, the Department and the Housing Executive are undertaking a joint review of the housing adaptation service. This will identify the key factors impeding delivery of housing adaptations and discover what needs to be done to improve the service.

### Sexual Abuse Victims: Residential Places

5. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether the Department has plans to allocate resources for the provision of additional residential places for victims of sexual abuse. (AQO 360/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Tá na ceithre bhord ag tabhairt aire do chúrsaí a shocrú do St Joseph's, Middletown atá le druidim go gairid. Ar na roghanna sealadacha atá ann nó atá ina bhféidireachtaí tá: Ionad de chuid Barnado a fhoscailt a bhí druidte go dtí seo, áit san earnáil phríobháideach a úsáid i gceantar Bhord an Iarthair agus duine nó daoine le scileanna altrama a fhostú. I dtaca le hairgead breise atá ar fáil, deir na boird go bhfuil forbairt ceantar cónaithe do pháistí ina tosaíocht acu.

I take this question to refer to specialist provision for children. The four boards are giving attention to making alternative arrangements to cope with the scheduled closure of St Joseph's, Middletown. Interim measures either in place or being explored include the possibility of Barnardo's reopening a previous facility, the use of a private-sector provider in the Western Board area and the recruitment of foster carers with the necessary skills. Boards have told me that the development of children's residential care is among their priorities for the extra resources that were made available following the budget.

**Ms Lewsley:** What particular consideration is being given by the Department to young people who have



been the victims of sexual abuse, rather than integrating them into the general care system, which is currently in severe crisis with the shortage of places? We know how many homes have closed down over the last couple of years. These children need some kind of structure put in place specially for them.

**Ms de Brún:** That question relates mainly to the current mix. The best way of addressing it is to ensure that sufficient places are available to make up the correct mix, so that young people get places that are suitable. There is a working group looking urgently at this at present. The boards are now saying that this is a priority in their spending plans, and I hope to see some move forward in the mix.

### Bangor Community Hospital

6. **Mr McFarland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether she plans to visit Bangor Community Hospital. (AQO 329/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Bhí áthas orm cuairt a thabhairt ar Ospidéal Pobail Bheannchair ar 17 Eanáir na bliana seo. Faoi láthair, níl pleananna ar bith agam cuairt eile a thabhairt air.

I was pleased to visit Bangor Community Hospital on 17 January 2000, and I have no plans at present to make a further visit.

**Mr McFarland:** The Bangor Community Hospital and primary care trial in North Down and Ards has been an outstanding success. Will the Minister guarantee continued use of this system and, indeed, its expansion across Northern Ireland, after the completion of the trial in March next year?

**Ms de Brún:** When I visited Bangor Community Hospital I was very impressed with many of the things I saw. However, it is absolutely essential that a rigorous evaluation of this model be conducted to test its overall effectiveness and its applicability to other locations. I will look again at the question when this has been completed.

**Mr Kane:** Is the Minister and her Department in a position to give a definite opening date for the new Causeway Health and Social Services Trust Hospital at Coleraine, County Londonderry? I have reason to believe that the opening date, which was set for autumn 2000, is unlikely to be met.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Even with my relatively limited geography, I am aware that this is well outside the North Down Community Trust area. The question, while understandable, is not in order.

**Sir John Gorman:** The Minister has confirmed my belief that her visit to Bangor Community Hospital was a great success. It is interesting that 70% of the cases

taken by acute hospital out-patients departments across the Province are actually of minor importance. Is there not a lesson to be learned here about the need for similar hospitals to take the strain off the more substantial hospitals?

**Ms de Brún:** The question that the Member has raised about the use of accident and emergency departments is very relevant. I certainly want to consider this when looking at the overall question of future hospital provision. The future of hospital services is a very complex issue, and therefore it is important that we get it right. Ensuring that we do so will take some time.

**Mr McClarty:** The success of the Bangor Community Hospital trial is directly related to the enthusiasm and professionalism of hospital staff and local GPs. What system does the Minister intend to put in place to ensure that all doctors carrying out general practice are regularly tested on their ability and competence?

**Mr Speaker:** It may not be a matter of geographical licence, but I will allow the Minister to respond in that regard.

**Ms de Brún:** After I have finished answering questions here, I will be meeting with a delegation from the General Medical Council. I have welcomed their announcement that doctors should go through a revalidation process. That is something that I will be looking to take forward here. There needs to be absolute confidence in the medical system, and a revalidation process should be put in place.

### Downe and Downpatrick Maternity Hospitals: Acute Services

7. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what further discussions have taken place with the Eastern Health and Social Services Board, the Down Lisburn Trust and other bodies concerning the retention of acute services at the Downe and Downpatrick Maternity Hospitals, and if she will make a statement. (AQO 318/99)

3.30 pm

**Ms de Brún:** Ar 1 Meitheamh bhí cruinniú ag an bhord le dochtúirí clinici Ospidéal Downe, le saineolaithe An Ospidéil Ríoga agus Ospidéal na Cathrach, le gnáthdhochtúirí áitiúla, le hIonabhas an Dúin Lios na gCearrbhach agus le Coiste Sláinte Pobail an Dúin gur phléigh siad cad é mar sholathrófaí sa todhchaí na seirbhísí géarmhíochaine atá anois á gcur ar fáil in Ospidéal Downe. Mar thoradh ar an chruinniú bunaíodh meitheal a tháinig le chéile den chéad uair ar 23 Meitheamh.



On 1 June the board met with clinicians from the Downe Hospital, specialists from the Royal Victoria and Belfast City Hospitals, local GPs, Down Lisburn Trust and the Down Community Health committee to discuss the future provision of acute services currently provided in the Downe Hospital. A working group established as a result of that meeting met for the first time on 23 June. I am aware of how important hospital services are to local communities, and I want to ensure that decisions about the future of such services are based on the fullest possible information. In that context I intend to consider any recommendations made by the working group and to meet local interests.

**Mr McGrady:** I thank the Minister for her full reply, and I acknowledge what she said in her letter of 21 June, which is part of the answer that she has just given. I would like to respond on two issues. First, can she confirm that there is a need for a new hospital building in the Downe to replace the 250 year old building, and is she, as Minister, committed to the continuation of the process which is now nearing tender stage?

Secondly, on the clinical grouping referred to, which has just met, could she confirm that its terms of reference are not restricted to the withdrawal of acute services and their substitution by outreach as envisaged by a previous Administration? Will its considerations embrace the totality of acute services and how they could properly be provided in the Down and Mourne area through the new-build Downe hospital?

**Ms de Brún:** As I have said, the working group has met to discuss the future provision of acute services currently provided in Downe Hospital. Those, therefore, are the terms of reference. They do not make any specific reference at this stage to where those services will be provided. However, I have not yet decided on the way forward on this matter. The provision of hospital services is a complex matter, and I want to look at all available options. Therefore, I want to hear the views of local people and of those who have an interest in this issue, as well as looking at the outcome and any recommendations coming from the working group.

**Mr M Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Will the Minister stop the Eastern Health and Social Services Board's consultation that has been based on the decision of the British Prime Minister to remove acute services?

**Ms de Brún:** The board's consultation seeks views on a range of services in hospitals throughout its area, including the Downe, and I am very aware of how important hospital services are to local communities. As I have said, I want to ensure that decisions are based on the fullest possible information. In that context, I am quite content for the consultation to continue, and I will

be interested in the views put to the board. I also want to meet local interested parties to hear their views for myself.

**Mr Close:** In light of the Minister's last two responses, can she give an assurance that the maternity unit at the Lagan Valley Hospital in Lisburn is secure?

**Mr Speaker:** I leave it to the Minister to judge whether that is inside or outside that particular catchment area.

**Mr Close:** Down Lisburn.

**Ms de Brún:** I think that the response to that is the same as the other responses. I am very aware of local concerns about the future of smaller hospitals and the services available. The question of the provision of services is of the greatest priority to me. It is one that I do not wish to rush because it is a complex matter. I want to ensure that people have the opportunity to make their views known, and I want any decision that I take to be based on the fullest possible information.

### **Craigavon and South Tyrone Hospitals: Acute Services**

8. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what arrangements have been made at Craigavon Hospital to deal with extra demands resulting from a discontinuation of acute services at South Tyrone Hospital in Dungannon from 31 July 2000. (AQO 357/99)

**Ms de Brun:** Níl socrú déanta go fóill i dtaca le géarsheirbhís leighis d'othair-istigh in Otharlann Dheisceart Thír Eoghain. Mhol Iontabhas Ard Mhacha agus Dún Geanainn nár chóir géarsheirbhís leighis d'othair-istigh, géarsheirbhís seanliach d'othair-istigh, máinliacht toghaí d'othair-istigh agus seirbhís CSS d'othair-istigh bheith ar fáil san otharlann i ndiaidh 31 Iúil 2000.

Decisions have not been taken yet about the future of acute medical in-patient services at the South Tyrone hospital. The Armagh and Dungannon Trust has concluded that after 31 July 2000 the South Tyrone hospital will be unable to provide acute in-patient general medicine, an acute in-patient geriatric service, in-patient elective surgery and in-patient ear, nose and throat services. This is initially a matter for the Southern Health and Social Services Board to consider. I have made it clear that until decisions are taken on the long-term future of hospitals within the board's area, I expect every effort to be made to maintain existing services and, where this proves impossible, any changes must be temporary and the minimum necessary to ensure safety and quality. The board will consider the trust's views at its meeting tomorrow, and I expect to be

advised of its decision as soon as possible to allow me to consider the way forward.

**Mr Speaker:** I regret that time is now up and that it is not possible to proceed with the supplementaries. We must move on to questions to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

## FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### **‘Peace II’ Funds: Rural and Agriculture Sectors**

1. **Mr McClelland** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps will be taken to secure funding allocations for the rural and agricultural sectors in the ‘Peace II’ funds. (AQO 358/99)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** Proposals for Peace II, which have been lodged for negotiation with the European Commission, contain provisions for natural-resource rural tourism, reskilling, retraining and capacity building for disadvantaged farm families and cross-border co-operation which will benefit the rural and agricultural sectors.

**Mr McClelland:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Can the Minister give us an undertaking that he has had and will continue to have the widest possible discussions with groups, such as the Rural Development Council, the Ulster Farmers Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers’ Association (NIAPA), which represent agricultural and rural interests?

**Mr Durkan:** Rural interest groups have been consulted throughout the drawing up of the proposals. They are represented on the interim community support framework monitoring committee and on a working group which has been established and will be meeting this week to decide how best to take forward the work of the monitoring committee over the next key stage of the development of the operational programmes. I also make the point that there are matters and measures involved in Peace II which will involve other Ministers. I know for example that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development expects that a rural intermediary funding body will continue to form part of the delivery mechanism for the distribution of Peace II funds, and obviously that will work closely with the full range of rural and agricultural interests.

**Mr Savage:** Bearing in mind that the European Investment Bank devotes two thirds of its lending to the less advantaged regions of the European Union, and that it has also recently broadened its remit, can the Minister tell the House what discussions, if any, he has had with the European Investment Bank to secure loan funding for Northern Ireland’s rural economy?

**Mr Durkan:** The question goes somewhat outside the peace programme. I have had no discussions yet with the European Investment Bank on any sectoral interest.

**Mr Hussey:** The supplementary question was a little unclear. Those of us living in the rural community find the Rural Community Network and the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council programmes to be extremely beneficial. Can the Minister comment more fully on speculation that under the current proposals to distribute Peace II funds neither the Rural Community Network nor the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council will be allocated any funding? There is also a suggestion that there is no specific provision for the community based actions measure. Will the Minister comment?

**Mr Durkan:** Not unlike the Deputy First Minister this morning, I would point out that we have reached the community support framework stage of Peace II, which sets out the broad strategy and rationale on the funds. The next key stage examines the development of the operational programmes. Rural interests are fully represented on the interim monitoring committee for the community support framework and will also be represented on the monitoring committee that would be established for Peace II. In relation to delivery mechanisms, we are trying to make sure that form follows function. I can certainly reassure the Member, and indeed any others who are concerned, that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development is clearly determined and fully expects that a specific rural intermediary funding body will continue to form part of the delivery mechanism for the administration of Peace II funds, a point which people were particularly concerned about. The Executive is making it clear that in relation to any measures that will fall to any of the Departments to administer, those Departments are going to have to show that they attach a premium to social inclusion, to cross-border activity and to applying measures to and through local delivery mechanisms also. That is something that will be monitored by the Executive as well as by all the other monitoring arrangements that exist.

### **Housing Executive Budget**

2. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has held with his ministerial counterpart in the Department of Social Development concerning the reduction in the budget of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 319/99)

7. **Mr Cobain** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Northern Ireland Housing

Executive will retain all receipts from the sale of Housing Executive houses as additional funding to address the urgent housing need, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 327/99)

**Mr Durkan:** Prior to the suspension of devolution, I had one meeting with the Minister for Social Development, Nigel Dodds, to discuss the budgets for his Department, and that included the budget for the Housing Executive. Representations in relation to budgetary matters take many forms, and as well as expressing his concerns about the housing budget at our meeting, the Minister has used other means as well.

Turning to Mr Cobain's question, I stress that the Housing Executive will be able to retain almost £60 million of house sale receipts in the current year to offset its costs. As with other receipts, any extra will be at the disposal of the Executive Committee and this Assembly to be used to address emerging pressures which could, of course, include housing. This general principle on receipts enables planning for expenditure to be on a known basis, while maintaining flexibility to respond to changing priorities.

**Mr McGrady:** Is the Minister aware that the decision by his predecessor in terms of the budget allocation to the Housing Executive has resulted in the postponement and sometime abandonment of much needed rural redevelopment and rehabilitation programmes? Will he take this matter up with his ministerial Colleague for Social Development? There seems to be some confusion in that a letter that I have states that work on the refurbishment and replacement of rural cottages is largely completed, yet the same letter states

"nevertheless there remains a considerable amount of improvement work to be carried out in the rural community."

So there seems to be some dichotomy in that letter alone.

Will the Minister of Finance and Personnel address this issue either unilaterally or in conjunction with others? Rural community rehabilitation and redevelopment has lagged behind urban renewal and rehabilitation, and it needs that re-injection of finances to enable the current planned programmes to be implemented.

**Mr Durkan:** I certainly do not believe that I can take unilateral action in the form that was being suggested by Mr McGrady. If there are problems in ensuring that funding in respect of various programmes is going to areas for which it was intended, that should be taken up through the relevant agencies and, obviously, by the relevant departmental Minister. DFP's responsibility lies in the overall allocation to the various programmes of the Departments. The administration of those allocations then falls to those Departments and

Ministers, subject to delegated authority from the Department of Finance and Personnel and subject to approval and various other standard requirements. A lot of cases have been made and reflected here in the course of recent debates on the supply resolution and some of the questions on the Estimates. The many and diverse pressures on the various aspects of the housing programme have certainly been well identified for my ears and, I am sure, for the Minister's ears as well.

**Mr Cobain:** Minister, we have been assured by you and other ministerial Colleagues that the TSN programmes are at the heart of all departmental spending programmes. Will the Minister explain how cutting the housing budget and ensuring that tens of thousands of the poorest people in the community continue to live in slums for the foreseeable future fits in with the TSN programmes?

3.45 pm

**Mr Durkan:** I did not catch all of the question, but I take it that Mr Cobain was once again challenging what he regards to be any underfunding of the Housing Executive's programme. I have already made it clear that this year the Housing Executive will have gross resources of £528 million. Let us remember that the work of the Housing Executive is also now supplemented by work in the new-build area of the Housing Associations, and that also brings in private-sector money. Overall, £600 million is being spent on the housing programme this year.

We want to ensure that, as with all programmes, real need is met in the best, most efficient way possible. The Housing Executive will have to continue to work within its resources and the Housing Associations within theirs, including the additional money levered from the private sector, to address and reduce the sort of problems that Mr Cobain has identified.

**Mr O'Neill:** Does the Minister agree that there is something unjust and unfair about the fact that the Housing Executive continues to have to pay loan charges on properties that have already been sold off under the house sales programme, and will he confirm that some of the money accrued from such sales is not brought back into the housing budget? If he agrees, can he ascertain the extent to which this happens?

**Mr Durkan:** Returning to the point that I made previously about the treatment of receipts, there is a suggestion, which has been a recurring theme in this House, that the Housing Executive should be allowed to retain all receipts generated by house sales. As with receipts in any Department or programme, any extra revenue has to be placed at the disposal of the Executive Committee and the Assembly. It is clear that not all programmes generate receipts and, therefore, not all programmes or services can benefit from windfall



receipts. There are some extra receipts in housing this year, and where these extra receipts emerge, they are pooled for reallocation across various programmes in which there are pressures. Many people have identified that one of the programmes with pressures, and in which they want to see additional resources, is housing. Ministerial Colleagues and I will, at a future point, try to bear that in mind when such moneys are available for reallocation.

### Rates

3. **Mr Carrick** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide an estimate of the loss of rates revenue for each of the 26 council areas as a result of inadequate monitoring arrangements, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 322/99)

6. **Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will take appropriate action to reinstate a rate collection office in Newry. (AQO 326/99)

**Mr Durkan:** The Rate Collection Agency is responsible for the collection of rates as assessed in each of the 26 council areas. The agency is independently audited each year to test the adequacy of its policies and the system of internal control in support of its business objectives and on its collection performance against ministerial targets. The agency pursues all outstanding rates, which may include taking recovery action through the courts.

There are no plans to reinstate a Rate Collection Agency office in Newry.

**Mr Carrick:** Is the Minister aware that at a meeting of chief building control officers on 12 April, a representative of a leading and reputable firm of consultants brought forward a report that said that up to £26 million per annum could be lost through inadequate co-ordination and inaccurate information among the various Government agencies — that is Building Control, the Valuation and Lands Agency and the Rate Collection Agency. What is the Minister prepared to do to further investigate this allegation of serious public revenue haemorrhage?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member. First, I am not aware of the basis for the figure of £26 million quoted. I certainly do not believe, whatever figure people may have been referring to specifically in relation to the question of loss of rate revenue, that it was £26 million. None of the information available to me concerning the Rate Collection Agency's performance, in recovery terms, suggests that there is any such haemorrhage or deficit in the recovery of the rates. I assume that someone has misinterpreted other references made at that particular meeting, which was discussing a project being brought forward under the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. The aim is to

develop a joined-up approach to land and property information services delivered by Government to citizens and businesses of Northern Ireland. As to where the figure of £26 million came from, certainly in terms of the Rate Collection Agency's performance and responsibility I do not know the basis for that figure.

**Mr Bradley:** I am disappointed at the Minister's response to the return of the Rate Collection Agency office to Newry and it is probably a request that will not go away. Does the Minister agree that our rural towns and villages would benefit from decentralisation? If he does agree, would he advise this Assembly of what measures he may introduce to relocate agencies and services under his control?

**Mr Durkan:** The supplementary question is turning a further corner. I appreciate Mr Bradley's disappointment at my answer in relation to the Newry office of the Rate Collection Agency. However, in terms not unrelated to my answer to Mr Carrick, the fact is that the agency's performance in rate recovery has continued to improve, even with the closure of some of the local offices. More and more people are using direct debit and local post office services for the payment of rates.

In relation to the relocation of other agencies in my Department, I would look to the overall question of the location and distribution of such offices in the context of the wider review of civil service locational accommodation policy, and that is the subject of a later question.

**Mr Kennedy:** I endorse Mr Bradley's great disappointment in respect of the Minister's answer regarding Newry. Could I press the Minister to give active and urgent consideration to reinstate agencies under his control in the constituency of Newry and Armagh?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member. I am sorry that he is disappointed about my answer in relation to the Newry office, but I should make it clear, as Minister with overall responsibility for the Rate Collection Agency, that the closure of the offices that took place over recent years has not actually been at the expense of the overall performance of the agency. It certainly has not even been at the expense of the performance of the agency in respect of those localities. The payment rate and recovery rate has remained high and has even improved. Let us remember that people are now availing of different payment systems than were previously available.

Again, in relation to the question of other agencies within my Department I would like to look at that question in the context of the wider review in terms of civil service accommodation and relocation policy.



**Mr Speaker:** Before I call on what will probably be the last supplementary question, I need to make a ruling in regard to supplementary questions that are effectively covering the same ground as substantive questions already put down. This would fall foul of the rule of anticipation. If a Member was to put down such a question as an oral question, it would simply not be accepted by the Business Office, because it would be in anticipation of a question that is already down. I have to make a ruling that Members are not at liberty to ask a supplementary question if it anticipates or foreshadows a substantive question which is down on the list for oral answer.

**Mr C Murphy:** Would you rule that my question was also on decentralisation, and if that question is further down the list then I will defer to your judgement on it?

**Mr Speaker:** I have already addressed the question of a supplementary anticipating or reiterating the field, and frequently the wording, of a substantive question. In future, such a supplementary will not be in order. I trust that clarifies the matter.

**Mr C Murphy:** I might be able to squeeze my question in. It is specifically to do with the Newry office and decentralisation in the southern region, not the general question of decentralisation. Is the Minister aware that the tendency in the southern region has been to centralise services in the Craigavon area, which is less accessible than Belfast for people from Newry, South Armagh and South Down? I hope this is something that will be borne in mind when we come to address the issue.

**Mr Speaker:** I am sure the Minister will take your remark into account. It is not in fact a question. I can understand when Members try to push out the boundaries of rulings to see exactly how far they extend, but I remind them that, when there is a substantive question, they should bring their supplementary in under that. It should be a question, not an observation, however enlightening it may be.

**Mr Bradley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If the Minister had replied that the office was returning to Newry —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am afraid it is no excuse if the Minister's answer was not desired or appreciated by the Member.

### Northern Ireland Block Grant

4. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the block grant from the United Kingdom Government has decreased in real terms over the past 10 years. (AQO 336/99)

**Mr Durkan:** Over the period from 1989-90 to 1998-99, expenditure on the Northern Ireland block, excluding social security payments, has increased by 2.2% in real terms. This is equivalent to real annual average growth of 0.2%. This figure also excludes expenditure on law, order and protective services.

**Mr Poots:** Will the Minister confirm that the so-called subvention we receive from the United Kingdom budget has been reduced over the past 10 years, with economic growth taking place year on year in Northern Ireland leading to a reduction in money paid out in unemployment benefits and social security?

**Mr Durkan:** With regard to the last point, if the figure I gave earlier had included social security payments, the increase would have been not 2.2% in real terms but 15.8%. There have clearly been continuing increases in social security expenditure. The deeper question of the subvention has also been raised, among others, by members of the Finance and Personnel Committee, in particular Mr Leslie.

Not all the information is available to us on all the revenue generated and all the taxable income that flows from Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom Exchequer. However, many observers would have some agreement with the point the Member makes. Clearly, based on the fact that there has been economic growth and greater buoyancy in the economy here, one might assume this would also translate into higher tax yields. However, there are no definitive figures on that point at this stage, much to the dissatisfaction of members of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

**Dr Birnie:** Does the Minister agree, since there is always likely to be some stringency with respect to the total size and growth of the Northern Ireland block, that it is imperative for the Executive, as soon as possible, to start a review of administration in order to cut the costs of running the Government, taking in quangos, boards, agencies, and perhaps even the size, competencies and numbers of district councils, in order that money can be directed to highly productive and, indeed, social welfare ends as opposed to simply running Government?

4.00 pm

**Mr Durkan:** We want to make public expenditure more efficient. We want to make sure that we are running effective public services. We want to make sure that as far as possible the money to fund public services goes into services for the people rather than into structures and systems. We want to make sure that as much public money as possible goes into real services rather than be absorbed by the Government.

These are not straightforward issues, and we must make sure that the systems and structures are adequate to support services and reflect the needs of services properly. Wiping away various structures and systems

may not protect or promote the quality of those services. We have to consider this in a hard-headed and thoughtful way.

### Decentralisation of Government Departments

5. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what progress has been made towards the decentralisation of Government Departments outside the Greater Belfast area, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 351/99)

**Mr Durkan:** I can confirm that it remains my intention to develop a civil service office accommodation strategy, which will incorporate a review of the current policy on job location. Following the restoration of devolved Government, I asked officials to bring forward proposals on how the review might be carried out. I will consult ministerial colleagues and the Finance and Personnel Committee on the way forward. Pending the outcome of the review, opportunities to disperse civil service functions will continue to be examined on a case-by-case basis, as particular needs and issues arise.

I am pleased to announce, that as a result of a recent decision to centralise staff superannuation functions currently carried out by the Department in the Belfast and north Down area, up to 20 jobs will be relocated to Derry over the next year or so.

**Mr Ford:** I am sure the Minister got great pleasure from the last words of his announcement. It is regrettable that since we discussed this during our previous period of devolution, the Department does not seem to have done any work. The Minister has had to ask his civil servants once again to proceed with it.

May I remind him of the recent report about the dangers of congestion on the eastern side of this island, with the potential to have half the population living in the Belfast/Dublin corridor. In the Republic there seems to be a significant decentralisation of Government Departments. Will he indicate when he may produce a comprehensive report for Northern Ireland, preferably in line with his remarks about anticipation earlier, and without giving other Members an opportunity to detail the merits of their constituencies?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for not encouraging people to offer sites and premises. That is an issue we are bringing forward in the Department. I accept Mr Ford's interest in this particular matter, but it would be wrong to mischaracterise the Department as being reluctant in this regard. The Department of Finance and Personnel, while not a high profile Department, is very busy. We have been bringing forward a range of measures to both the House, and the Executive Committee. The policy on accommodation

and relocation is one example. It is a policy currently being developed, and when the paper is ready, I will consult with ministerial colleagues and the Finance and Personnel Committee. We will try to do that as soon as possible.

In case anyone misinterprets my remarks about the 20 jobs that will be relocated to Derry, I would point out that these jobs will be incorporated into the Civil Service Pensions Branch, which is already in Waterside House in the city.

**Mr Leslie:** By extension of his answer to question No 4, will the Minister agree that the best way of ensuring job creation outside the Belfast area, and, indeed, outside the eastern corridor, is by a series of measures under the Programme of Government to stimulate the overall rate of economic growth and not by fiddling about with the relocation of Government Departments almost certainly with no saving of money?

**Mr Durkan:** The broader economic strategy is obviously one that I, as a Minister, have shared responsibility for with all my ministerial colleagues. Civil service accommodation and location is a matter for which I am specifically accountable as a Minister. It is entirely legitimate for Members to raise questions in that regard. A redistribution of civil service jobs can ease a variety of problems. It can contribute to easing the congestion that has already been identified, and clearly that is something that has been pursued with some success in other jurisdictions, often to great applause from the people who have more room to breathe when civil servants move elsewhere.

Decentralisation could contribute to the quality of life and in a variety of localities across Northern Ireland. It is consistent, for instance, with such policy papers as 'Shaping our Future' et cetera. Obviously, we want to take account of targeting social need and equality considerations there, but clearly we cannot pursue such a policy without a proper and responsible regard to cost. We must be realistic about that.

**Mr Byrne:** I welcome the Minister's comments on decentralisation. Given that the Department for Regional Development is trying to put together a regional development strategy, does the Minister accept that decentralisation, as a core theme, could greatly contribute to sustainable, balanced regional development right across Northern Ireland?

**Mr Durkan:** A balanced distribution of public sector employment, and in particular a balanced distribution of civil service jobs, across the Northern Ireland region could make a serious contribution to the quality of services provided throughout Northern Ireland — and not just to the places where those jobs would be located. We are in an age where the case that was made in the past for centralising such functions no longer exists. The

Member is right to identify a variety of potential benefits. These are issues that I will be bringing forward, not just with an eye to the Department of Finance and Personnel's considerations, but also with a proper eye to the policies and commitments of other Departments and, indeed, of the Administration in its entirety.

**Mr Speaker:** I regret that we have come to the end of time for questions. I have transgressed beyond 4 o'clock because a substantial period, about seven minutes, was taken up with points of order. The Minister, however, does not escape at the end of Question Time, because he is now going to make a statement.

## **EUROPEAN UNION PROGRAMMES: NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL SECTORAL MEETING**

### **The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):**

I should like to report to the Assembly on the meeting in sectoral form of the North/South Ministerial Council in Dublin on Friday 16 June 2000. Mr Foster and I attended. The Irish Government were represented by Mr Charlie McCreevy TD, Minister for Finance, who chaired the meeting. This report has been approved by Mr Foster and is also made on his behalf.

The council underlined the important contribution to peace, reconciliation, regional development and cross-border co-operation made by European Union programmes and looked forward to the significant new role of the special EU programmes body (SEUPB) in the negotiation, management, monitoring and delivery of the programmes. The council expressed the firm desire that the new political context and the role of the SEUPB should ensure a higher level of expenditure on co-operative actions co-funded by the European Union, especially Peace II. The council agreed that the establishment of the SEUPB served as a tangible, further reflection of the support and solidarity that has been shown by the European Union in seeking to advance reconciliation and peace and of its commitment to the new dispensation heralded by the Good Friday Agreement.

The council received a verbal progress report from Mr Philip Angus, interim chief executive of the SEUPB, on the work of the body. The body currently has 19 staff drawn from central government Departments, North and South. It has its headquarters in Belfast, an office in Monaghan, and a further office will be opened in Omagh.

The council endorsed proposals for taking forward the responsibilities of the body, which will be implemented under the direction of the interim chief executive. The council also endorsed the initial staffing structure for the body and approved the formal procedure for the appointment of a permanent chief executive to the body.

The council noted a position paper on the Peace II programme and agreed that officials of the SEUPB would contribute, in accordance with its mandate, as appropriate, to the forthcoming negotiations on Peace II with the European Commission. The council noted a common text on North/South co-operation, which will be included in the respective community support frameworks for Northern Ireland and Ireland. The council approved a guidance framework for the SEUPB, which had been prepared by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Finance. It also

noted that further guidance on the role and functions of SEUPB and the Finance Departments was being prepared by the Finance Departments in consultation with the body.

The council agreed it would meet on a quarterly basis in this sectoral format and that the next meeting would take place in October in Northern Ireland.

The council agreed the text of a joint communiqué which was issued following the meeting. A copy of the communiqué has been placed in the Assembly Library.

**Dr Birnie:** The Minister refers to the Peace II programme. To what extent are the plans relating to Peace II soundly based on *ex post* evaluations of what happened previously under the Peace I programme?

**Mr Durkan:** We are trying to ensure that we take forward all the positive lessons of Peace I and that we drop any negative aspects. Obviously more evaluations are available in relation to some aspects than to others. Plans were being developed whilst there were still further evaluations to come in. The broad framework we have been taking forward at this stage has concentrated on the community support framework, which is a broad-band strategy and rational. We believe this takes forward positive aspects of Peace I whilst also trying to identify, and address, new opportunities afforded by the improved context we now have, especially the new political arrangements.

**Mr O'Neill:** Does the Minister agree that in the light of the need for open, public and transparent accountability, and given the problem of additionality in the past, we need to be particularly vigilant as to how we administer the funding from Europe. Would he consider the establishment of an all-party sub-committee to oversee the administration of these funds, especially Peace II?

**Mr Durkan:** Mr O'Neill rightly identifies the importance of transparency and due scrutiny with these funds, as with any funds managed in the public interest. Regarding monitoring, we already have the Interim Community Support Framework Monitoring Committee, and when we have the community support framework agreed, that will no longer be in shadow format. There will also be monitoring committees for the operational programmes under the peace programme and the transition programme. Those monitoring committees will involve a range of interests, including the social partners, local government, relative departments, etcetera.

The interim monitoring committee for the community support framework includes representatives of all parties in the Assembly. Mr O'Neill may have touched on a useful idea when he said that the Assembly might want to consider setting up a monitoring Committee of its own, not least in relation to Peace II. This would enable the Assembly to underline the importance of the

additionality requirements of the peace programme, as distinct from the other European moneys. It is a proposal that the Department of Finance and Personnel would not be averse to. We have touched on it in some exchanges with the Finance and Personnel Committee and I further discussed the possibilities with the chairman of that Committee. Clearly, it would be very important that anything set up by the Assembly did not in any way conflict with the role and responsibility of the Statutory Committee.

4.15 pm

**Mr Neeson:** The Minister referred to the Peace II programme, but I would like to raise the matter of INTERREG III. At present there is a consultation process being carried out. Would he accept that one of the key issues for INTERREG III would be the development of integrated infrastructure in roads, other transport and energy to support economic growth? Also, bearing in mind where the Minister comes from, will he give his personal support to seeking EU funding for an extension of the natural gas pipeline to the north-west?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his question. With regard to INTERREG III, we are required to submit forward programme proposals to Brussels by November 2000. Funding under that programme will not be available until next year. SEUPB has issued a consultation paper to some 800 organisations and individuals, and a consultation conference was held in Monaghan last week. Structures will be put in place to continue the consultation process as it develops and the particular characteristics, which Mr Neeson suggests should be evident in INTERREG III, would be welcome as an appropriate graduation in the nature and quality of the co-operation that the INTERREG programme should be developing and engendering. We are aware of particular interests from the various cross-border networks including the council groups.

With regard to EU monies for the natural gas pipeline, I would make the point that the transition programme, as it is currently drafted, would give a basis for using such EU funds to support energy projects both in the gas and electricity fields. For this to happen, the Executive Committee would have to decide that public expenditure would cover these projects. In relation to the natural gas project as indicated by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, we are awaiting the outcome of the proposals from the private sector before decisions can be made.

**Mr Poots:** Will the Minister indicate if discussions took place about the mechanism to be employed in the analysis of need, and will he confirm that the Robson index will not be used in distributing the Peace II money as it is now nine years old, completely outdated and has no relevance to the current situation?



*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair)*

**Mr Durkan:** The discussions in relation to the future use or non-use of the Robson index were not a direct part of the North/South Ministerial Council meeting. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, which is part of my Department, is trying to address the shortcomings of the Robson index and to see what alternatives there might be. Consultations are starting very shortly to see if we can agree a new basis for identifying and, in turn, targeting social need. That work is under way. I hope that the development of that work will inform decisions and effective performance in all the EU programmes and, indeed, in all public expenditure programmes.

**Mr Leslie:** I want to ask the Minister some questions about the identity of some of the money referred to in this programme. There is a tendency, particularly with EU money, for a lot of double counting to go on. We must be careful that we are identifying different pools of money. Equally, we need to be clear when we are talking about the same pool of money. Where EU money is concerned, the technique is rather like writing a history essay when you do not have much information: say what you are going to say, then say it, then say what you have said.

If I may, I will link the Minister's statement to the one made this morning by the Deputy First Minister, which dealt with the overarching programme for EU money. If I remember correctly, he said that the Peace II money would be worth an average of £75 million per annum for the next six years. I note that the cross-border sub-programme will have a minimum budget of 75 million euro, which I think is slightly less than £50 million at current exchange rates. Will the Minister confirm whether that money is part of the peace money mentioned this morning, or whether it is a further amount?

If it is part of the same money, does that mean that instead of being spent exclusively in Northern Ireland, which is the impression one would have gained this morning, in fact it may be the case that some of the money will be spent on the other side of the border? It seems to me that our money should be spent on our side of the border and their money should be spent on their side. I would be grateful for the Minister's clarification on that point.

I could not help noticing that the meeting was chaired by Mr McCreevy. I believe his nickname is "champagne Charlie". I wondered if he brought some champagne with him, before they changed around the exchange rates and issued the communiqué. Will the Minister also confirm that the chairmanship goes with the host, that is, that it will rotate according to the country in which the meeting is being held?

**Mr Durkan:** On the last point, chairing is the responsibility of the host Administration. That was why Mr McCreevy chaired the meeting on 16 June.

To clarify the question of the peace money and the cross-border priority, I refer to a point I made earlier. As well as having the distinct cross-border priority, which is there to ensure that at least that amount of money is made available for cross-border co-operation, and indeed wider east-west co-operation, we also set out to ensure that all Departments, when considering those aspects of the peace programme that fall to them, put a due premium on the need to ensure social inclusion and to use and support local delivery mechanisms and on cross-border co-operation itself. That is a cross-cutting theme as well as a single identifiable priority. In a sense, it is both. To use the jargon, it involves both a vertical and a horizontal approach. The cross-border money that I am talking about is clearly within the peace programme. All of the Northern Ireland moneys in the peace programme will be spent in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Byrne:** I welcome the Minister's statement. In relation to the role of the SEUP what is the timetable for putting together operational programmes, and how does the Minister envisage the cross-border dimension working in reality on the ground? I noted his earlier reference to the role of cross-border local authorities. Many such authorities are interested in helping to facilitate the outworkings of this new body.

**Mr Durkan:** The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister visited Brussels last week and, from the point of view of our Administration, the development of the community support framework is now complete. The Commission will publish the framework next month. The next phase will be the development of the operational programmes, and these have to be in place by October. SEUPB — the body with the role of managing and monitoring Peace II — clearly has a key role in that regard. We will be developing the operational programme framework in conjunction with the interim monitoring committee. There will also be a monitoring committee for each of the operational programmes — the peace programme and the transition programme.

Once the operational programmes are in place we have to produce programme complements which will bring forward the measures in specific and detailed terms. The deadline for this is no later than three months after the operational programmes have been agreed. We do not want to be in a situation where we run out of time at the end, so we have added on time at the beginning. We have been working on the programme complements in parallel with the work on the operational programmes. We want as much input as possible from all relevant interests and from all localities, be they at the border or elsewhere. We want

to ensure that everybody, including local government, has sufficient input into the process. To implement all the various suggestions and ambitions would cost a lot more than the total sum available. Therefore we need to use the consultation exercises, not only to weed out particular ideas or projects, but also to see how a more positive synergy and complementarity can be developed between the many different ideas and proposals.

**Mr Hussey:** There may appear to be a bit of telepathy between Mr Byrne and myself — I am raising the same issue. In point nine of the joint communiqué the council noted that the sub-programme would provide opportunities for the funding of cross-border co-operative action across the full range of economic areas. Point four states that the new programmes have the capacity to have a real impact on the lives of people in Northern Ireland and the border area. What role does the Minister see for the three cross-border bodies — the north-west body, the Irish Central Border Area Network and the eastern border counties body? I am a member of the north-west regional cross-border committee, and I am sure the Minister will agree that these bodies, via their secretariats, have built up a tremendous expertise. A vast local knowledge exists within each body which stems from the local council input. I want further clarification that these bodies will be respected in their input and that when the time comes they will be considered as very good vehicles for the implementation of the programme.

**Mr Durkan:** In the development of these programmes we want to apply positive lessons from other EU programmes such as Peace I. In response to a similar question from Éamonn ÓNeill a couple of weeks ago, I made it clear that in INTERREG III we would be looking at how local delivery mechanisms, particularly through representative partnership networks, could be used as a means of making sure that we had the best impact as far as that programme was concerned.

4.30 pm

The three cross-border networks represent 18 councils along the entire border corridor with some 100 elected representatives serving on the various cross-border networks. Obviously there is significant political support in the border regions, both North and South. I am aware that there is widespread support for their integrated area plans, and for the combined border corridor strategy, which consultants have been drafting on their behalf. We want to make sure that those networks can have as full an input as possible to the developing work on INTERREG III and, indeed, on some of the wider cross-border issues. As Mr Hussey rightly identified, there is a common chapter under the community support framework that will underline the importance of optimising the rate and nature of cross-border co-operation across the full range of social,

economic and environmental programmes. Any contribution that representative networks, such as the three cross-border ones, can make would be very welcome.

We will fully respect, and ask for, that input. That of itself cannot constitute a promise that what the networks bid for themselves, as to what they would directly administer, will automatically be granted. The Member will be aware that we have to proceed on an open basis, and I am sure that the three networks will be satisfied with the quality of that openness.

**Ms Morrice:** I have three questions for the Minister of Finance and Personnel. First, I was asked this morning about intermediary funding bodies. Will the Minister clarify what use will be made of the intermediary funding bodies in the new round of Peace II? Secondly, can he give a commitment that non-Government parties will be included in the monitoring process? Finally, what specific budget has he made available in Peace II for victims?

**Mr Durkan:** First, intermediary funding bodies are clearly going to be involved in the delivery of Peace II. However, I cannot speculate about, or anticipate, the precise bodies and areas of involvement. Those matters will be decided in conjunction with the Peace II monitoring committee. I appreciate that there has been concern in some quarters that local delivery mechanisms and partnership boards may somehow be relegated in relation to Peace II. That is not the case.

I understand that people were also concerned that intermediary funding bodies were going to be squeezed; that is not the case either. We are trying to learn and apply all the positive lessons of Peace II and develop them in ways that will be effective, so as to sustain these measures, not just for the life of the Peace II programme, but beyond that.

We want these benefits to continue into the future. Our European Colleagues, who gave this money, do not just want to see us spend it over a five year period — they want us to invest it and secure returns on it in positive peace-building terms, involving regeneration and reconciliation over a longer period.

I indicated that decisions about the precise bodies that would be used, and the areas of their responsibility, would be something that would be developed and worked on with the monitoring committee. Currently the Interim community support framework monitoring committee has places for all parties in the Assembly. Unfortunately, it is a pretty unwieldy body, and I am not sure that the added presence of the various political parties, and the rotating attendance that that tends to give rise to, necessarily helps the focus of the Committee as far as some of its other members are concerned.

I refer the Member to the point that Éamonn O'Neill made when earlier he suggested that the Assembly should have a separate monitoring committee of its own, particularly in relation to Peace II. That would be one of the ways in which the Assembly could underline the importance and distinctiveness of the additionality principle, and it is certainly something that I would not be averse to. If it happened, it might ease the overcrowding problem that can occur on the wider interim monitoring committee.

## **INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD: REPORT OF HOUSE OF COMMONS PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

### *Debate resumed on motion:*

That this Assembly welcomes the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report on the Industrial Development Board (HC 66) and directs that the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee give continuing attention to the issues raised in the report. — [Dr O'Hagan]

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** I must confess that the brass neck of those who have instigated today's debate, in reference to the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee Report on the Industrial Development Board, never ceases to amaze me.

Like many others, I have expressed concern over the years at the lack of real long-term employment brought into Northern Ireland by all the job creation agencies, the chief one of course being the Industrial Development Board (IDB). However, I also understand the difficulties that the IDB and other agencies have had over the years in attempting to increase employment and remove the scourge of unemployment, especially in areas west of the Bann. Those difficulties were made worse by 30 years of terrorism when IRA/Sinn Féin carried out a bloody campaign of terror against workers, against industrialists and against places of employment.

Many of our towns and villages have been blown apart. Tens of millions of pounds were wasted, and thousands of jobs were lost from the Northern Ireland economy. Magherafelt town centre, for example, was blown asunder; the banks were destroyed; shops were destroyed; the blood of an innocent bystander, Mr Johnston, flowed along the street — shed by the sectarian thugs of the IRA. There was also a young man in that town — a street cleaner — who was seen as a great threat to the community. He was blown up as he sought to do his work in our local town and community. He is still alive, but his legs were completely blown off. He has been left to wheel himself around in a wheelchair for the rest of his days, when he wanted nothing more than to be employed and to work to provide for the needs of his wife and children.

Who will forget the vanload of workmen coming down the Omagh/Cookstown road — men returning from a hard day's work, doing an honest day's work for a simple pay! Yet they were also thought to be a great danger to society because they happened to work in a security base — builders, bricklayers and the likes — returning from work one evening, coming to a place called Teebane. There is a memorial to those men along the side of the road and attempts have been made to disfigure that — the Provos even think the memorial to be obscene, just as they saw the workmen as obscene. They saw them as a threat because, unlike the Provos,

they did not lie about all day and then go and blow the place to smithereens at night. They simply worked all day and rested at night before they went to do another hard day's work.

It is rather obnoxious to find that party trying to use us to sanitise them — house-train, I think is the phrase — and make them look democratic. Somehow the party thinks that we are going to overlook the atrocities and vote in support of a hypocritical motion which would sicken any true democrat. I think of many of those people because many of them were my constituents.

Millions of pounds have been wasted west of the Bann, and thousands of jobs have been blown to smithereens, and now we hear pious platitudes and appeals for jobs from Members for the west of the Bann. Those are empty words, and I suggest that it will do no credit to the House to give any credibility to those who have no credit, decency, integrity or sense of democracy whatsoever.

It is against that backcloth of sickening, dastardly, atrocious and sectarian murders and bombings that the IDB has had to go across the world and proclaim the message of job creation in Northern Ireland. Its task was made a very difficult one because of those years of murder and mayhem.

It is true that the report of the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster highlights matters that have caused me concern for quite some time. The people of the Magherafelt and Cookstown areas have felt that the number of projects and real substantive jobs that they enjoyed was inadequate in comparison with the number that went to other areas. I know that many highlight the differences between east and west and that many say that that ought to be investigated. But I am not talking about that. I am speaking about the differences between jobs that are all west of the Bann. When I think of the jobs that are created west of the Bann and of the finance that is directed there, I cannot help but wonder at the massive difference in the amounts of money spent in one part of west of the Bann to the detriment of the rest of west of the Bann.

It amazes me that every time people talk about west of the Bann, they seem really only to be talking about a particular part of the city of Londonderry, and that is where all the money seems to be going. The Waterside area of that city and, of course, the rest of the west of the Province seem to be left out of any capital expenditure. Very few have been given the initiatives and the number of jobs that have gone into a particular part of the city of Londonderry, and that is wrong. When we talk about west of the Bann we are talking about more than the Bogside — other people happen to exist as well.

4.45 pm

There ought to be an investigation into why millions have gone into this one part. Why has so little gone into the remainder by comparison, especially when one realises the difference in the numbers of persons and the large geographical area in question. That is why many people in the Cookstown and Magherafelt areas feel deeply disgruntled and frustrated. It seems that this money, when it goes west of the Bann, goes in one direction. It is trundling over the Glenshane Pass and is not stopping in the areas about which I have spoken. It is heading straight to one particular area. In spite of all the money being pumped in to that area we are being told it has not affected the unemployment levels. Where is the money going?

There is an interesting fact in this report:

"It is clear that a substantial proportion of jobs promised were not in fact created and that a significant percentage of created jobs were of limited duration."

It seems to me that a large amount of money has been trundled into one area, and after the money has been received and the initial period is over, and they do not have to pay it back, that it is a case of 'Goodnight Irene'. They are ready for the next amount of money — but the jobs do not stay. There ought to be an investigation, and I would like to see the relevant Committee looking in detail at exactly how many of these companies have stayed.

Another investigation ought to be carried out. I remember the time when the Belfast Agreement was being sold. At that time I found getting to Belfast more difficult than ever before. I will tell you why. We never knew what road we would have to divert to, as there were so many lorries of money coming in through the airports and seaports. Announcements of these moneys and initiatives were made in order to buy off the people with the golden cord of the Belfast Agreement. It was the usual bluff and guff we have heard from the British Government since the process began. It is the re-circulation of the same money, but it rarely gets here. They re-circulate it by making an announcement that the money is coming in. However, they announce it again in a month's time, and then again in another month's time. I hope that some day the money will actually come.

It is sickening, because the people of Northern Ireland were sold a false story in the Belfast Agreement that if the people would buy into the system we would suddenly come into the Garden of Eden or the land of Canaan flowing with milk and honey.

According to the report it is clear that a substantial number of jobs promised were not in fact created. Therefore, I believe that we ought to see a more in-depth study of what has gone on in industrial



development. I applaud the IDB for their successes — and make no mistake they have had successes under difficult circumstances — and I rejoice with those who have gained. Why should I not do so? They have been successful. However, I also believe that there needs to be a spreading of the cake throughout the area west of the Bann, as well as considering the east and west differential.

I trust that, after the debate has died down, in-depth studies will examine the channelling of finances in this Province because I believe that there are corrupt practices going on. Many people who funnel the money do not produce the goods. That does no good to those genuine business people who come in and provide excellent employment for the good people of Ulster.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We do not need lectures here about violence or murder from the likes of McCrea. This is the man who stood with his arm around the late Billy Wright, whose stock-in-trade was murdering Catholics. We do not need him to lecture us about murder, he would know all about it.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. We will get absolutely nowhere if we are going to have this debate degenerate into calling each other murderers. Please let us make a vow not to go down this route at all. I call on Mrs Nelis to observe that.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The report clearly —

**Mr Morrow:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Member to point and address a Member by his surname? This is the first time it has happened, and you would need to make a ruling on this particular matter now.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I make that ruling. I made it, as you will recall, in another place, and that was observed. I call on Members, and Mrs Nelis in particular, to desist.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it not a fact that the old saying is that if you throw a stone in amongst a bundle of dogs, those that yelp the loudest have been hit?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That is the kind of language that I have said must not be used in this Chamber, and I call on the Member to desist.

**Mr Maskey:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I actually refrained from complaining to you on a point of order at the manner in which Mr McCrea, the former MP for mid-Ulster, lambasted my party colleagues because they did not want to engage in any kind of fractious or silly debate. I am just making that point. With all due respect, I think that you gave him too much licence in his earlier contribution.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The report contained a very pertinent question, a LeasCheann Comhairle, and I think Mr Gardiner asked it. He asked what exactly a job promoted looked like? He asked the IDB that question, and we might ask the same question because we see so few of these promoted jobs.

This House cannot seriously try to defend the IDB's record on foot of this report by referring to a conflict of the past 30 years. Even if some did try, perhaps we should remind them that ceasefires have been in place for the past five years and that the IDB must surely go into the record books for its efforts during those past five years. In north and west Belfast they created two jobs in that space of time — two jobs in that unemployment black spot.

Despite reports from various economic forums, and using the various indices, the area I have mentioned remains one of the most impoverished areas in Europe. The IDB failed miserably in its responsibility to address that situation, and it should hang its head in shame over the announcement that it could create only two jobs. We are debating this motion because the Public Accounts Committee was very aware of the failures of the IDB to discharge its responsibilities.

In the Foyle constituency, for example, the IDB has reduced its support to client businesses by 14% in the past year. This comes at a time when Derry City Council clearly indicated in its economic strategy report that the constituency needs to create 12,000 jobs simply to bring it up to the Six County average. The Public Accounts Committee — and I assert this here today — is doing what it is appointed to do, namely make public bodies like the IDB accountable for their use of public money. The IDB has never truly been held to account for its stewardship of job promotion. The closure of its offices in Derry, the selling of its land bank and its fatalistic attitude towards the near extinction of the textile and other traditional industries, with some exceptions of course, were not matters that we, the elected representatives, were informed of or consulted about. Nor did these decisions, fundamental to job promotion west of the Bann, merit an explanation. I should indeed like to be able to say the IDB did a fine job, but I cannot see the evidence.

This morning I heard a Member use the words “creative accountancy” to describe a combination of efficiency and class distinction. We could be charitable and say that the IDB perhaps mismanaged its brief. I should be more inclined to say that its brief was much influenced by its total lack of interest in explaining why it wasted public money on firms and companies which, to put it mildly, ripped us all off. They certainly ripped the IDB off.

I wish to draw Members' attention to the fact that we may be about to be ripped off again since, as some Members mentioned this morning, some of these jobs promised by the IDB's call-centre clients are now being moved to England before they have even been established. Two hundred and fifty jobs will be lost, though we in the Foyle constituency were promised 650 call-centre jobs last year. We are told that they are in the pipeline, that there are some difficulties, but we have not seen them yet.

I wish to support this motion. I hope that people read the Public Accounts Committee's report. It is valuable teaching for us all, and I hope that the transparency and accountability it advocates will become the hallmarks of Members of this Assembly. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Mr Beggs:** I am an Assembly Member for East Antrim, a constituency that takes in the borough of Carrickfergus, which has the fifth-highest unemployment rate of any council district in Northern Ireland, something which many people from the west of the Province appear to forget. As a matter of interest, it is also at present excluded from much of the IDB's financial support.

I am also a member of the Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee, so to a certain extent I have an interest both in that side of things and in the wise investment of IDB funds in Northern Ireland. I welcome the monitoring of the IDB by the Northern Ireland Audit Office, which, for everyone's information, actually took place in October 1998. Its initial report has been picked up by the Public Accounts Committee and highlighted at Westminster.

I too support much of the report's valid criticism of the IDB, in particular that which relates to the lack of value for money as a result of many of its decisions. However, I have several concerns about the motion before us today. As some Members have already said, there is an issue of protocol, since the matter has been investigated by the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons, whose procedures are currently ongoing. The Department has yet to make a response.

Secondly, we must take note of the fact that the report is only five-weeks old. What would be the point in the Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee's producing a subsequent report on the issue? In my opinion, we must await a response from the Department. Thereafter, time will be required to establish whether the recommendations will be implemented. It is pointless for the Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee to have an immediate investigation.

5.00 pm

The function of the Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee is to examine areas of concern and to bring accounting officers and other civil servants to account before the Committee and the Northern Ireland public. Its duty is also to highlight issues of impropriety and thus bring improvements to the spending of public money. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee is in the process of doing this, and the Northern Ireland Audit Office will automatically follow up many of the recommendations in the original report as a matter of course.

There are several existing means by which the Assembly can continue to take an interest. Individual Members can put down questions for written or oral answer. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, to which the IDB is accountable, can deal with the issues in detail. If that fails, and the Northern Ireland Audit Office advises us that improvements have not been made, it can be brought before the Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee. It would be inappropriate, to assume now that that is what will happen.

I am concerned at the directive element in the motion. I ask Members to note that of the 18 reports that the House of Commons PAC has published this year, this is the first which applies specifically to Northern Ireland. What about 17 reports, published by the Northern Ireland Audit Office, which require investigation by the Northern Ireland PAC? We have a responsibility to investigate those reports in detail, and to bring the accounting officers responsible to account. Road safety, suspected fraud in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and river pollution are issues, which have not been addressed in the past. It is improper at this time to give a directive on one particular issue. Time is required to see whether the advice will be taken and if there is any need for a subsequent report. It would not be putting the Northern Ireland PAC to best use by having it reinvestigate these issues now.

It is a surprise to see this motion coming from Sinn Féin. As other Assembly Members have said, the fact that terrorism has been going on in Northern Ireland makes this motion's coming from it hypocritical. I would appreciate the same amount of pressure and the same directive style coming from Sinn Féin/IRA to ensure that the so-called punishment attacks, mutilations and recent terrorist actions — the bomb in Ballymurphy, for instance — become things of the past. Whether Sinn Féin Members like it or not, such terrorist action make investment in West Belfast more difficult for the IDB to secure, and this is an important matter they should address in their constituencies.

I have sympathy with much of the content of the report. However, because I consider it inappropriate to

investigate the issue again and to give a directive at this time, I will not be supporting the motion.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** We have three more members to speak before the winding-up speeches by the Minister and Dr O'Hagan. I ask the three Members to limit themselves to seven minutes each.

**Mr Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to make a couple of points, but I will be quite brief. I am not sponsoring this motion and I presume that the sponsor will deal with some of the questions raised. I am just curious. Does Mr Beggs, for example, accept that the lack of success that the IDB has apparently had in Carrickfergus, according to his statistics, is due to the endemic, systematic sectarian harassment of Catholics in that community? Or, is it a reflection of the lack of ability or success of the IDB? I am not sure. It is a question that he needs to answer since he asked one of a similar kind about my area. I am putting it in Mr Beggs's context.

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It appears that the Member is not giving way.

**Mr Maskey:** I have no problem about giving way to him at all.

**Mr Beggs:** One of the reasons for the lack of investment by IDB in my area is the inappropriateness of its criteria for deciding where investment should be directed. Even though Carrickfergus has the fifth highest level of unemployment, it has been excluded from those criteria.

**Mr Maskey:** Mr Beggs was justifying the IDB's lack of success in my constituency for the reasons that he gave. I am merely drawing his attention to difficulties in his constituency, which have or should have affected job creation and other developments there. It is futile to be throwing these kinds of allegations about. There are difficulties in his constituency, which he appears not to be able to address. Anyway that is another discussion.

I do accept that IDB has faced difficulties over a long number of years. I am certainly not here today to put a lot of those difficulties at the door of the Minister, Reg Empey, because he is only recently in post.

I welcome the motion. I do not accept, or even understand, the arguments that people are putting forward that because the Public Accounts Committee in the British Parliament is dealing with this we should not. If that is the case, we will not be dealing with a lot of issues here. Just because they have already been dealt with in London or are in the process of being dealt with there, should we pack up and go home? The motion is self-explanatory. It merely says that there is an issue which has been aired in the Public Accounts Committee's

report, and Dr O'Hagan is asking the Assembly to continue taking an active interest in it.

I want to speak essentially for my constituency. The figures in the report show that in West Belfast there has been a net reduction in jobs in spite of all the money that has been spent by agencies, including the IDB. To try to evaluate this in the longer term, would it not be better if the IDB were to identify a budget for the various constituencies, building into that an identifiable element of targeting social need, which nobody ever seems to be able to quantify? I would like to see a budget which is identified, which is TSN proofed, which is related to the various industries and to deprivation, need and lack of employment opportunities, constituency by constituency. If possible, I would further like that money to be used by the IDB to work with local communities, district councils and local partnerships, et cetera, to try to develop and marry the various strategies to ensure that at least a portion of the IDB budget which has been allocated for constituencies is ring-fenced. A strategy should be developed in conjunction with the local communities, the success of which can eventually be evaluated. If people know the budget that is available to them, and are realistic with that budget, local strategies, working with the IDB and other Government Departments can give us a way forward.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

**Mr Morrow:** I will not be supporting this motion because there is a degree of mischievousness in it. If there is a perception abroad, which there is, that we cannot treat anything seriously that comes from the Sinn Féin/IRA Benches, it knows why that is the case.

I am not a great fan of the IDB and never have been. Indeed, the criticisms contained in the report are well-founded and need to be tackled and dealt with. Despite our best efforts, we were not able to move an amendment to this motion, but that is a matter for another place. I want to state quite categorically that — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Maskey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It is obvious that the Member is not giving way.

**Mr Morrow:** I will not be supporting the motion, and I am not giving way to Mr Maskey — *[Interruption]*

In relation to the jibe, I did not support it. I do not support anything that comes from Sinn Féin/IRA. It is not up to me to decide what is kept off the Order Paper as far as the business of this Assembly is concerned. The Member knows that very well; he was there when the whole matter was discussed. If he wants to make a few silly, stupid jibes, that is a matter entirely for him.



For 30 years Northern Ireland has been subjected to a vicious and ruthless terror campaign, much of which has been waged against economic targets. While I feel that the IDB should be subjected to a root-and-branch overhaul, I would be foolhardy and irresponsible not to acknowledge that their task was made more difficult by groups like Sinn Féin/IRA and other terrorist organisations.

On reading the report it is clear that many of the jobs promised were never created and, indeed, that a large percentage of those that were created lasted only for a very short time. It is also alarming to note that not all the costs were incorporated into the cost-per-job calculation.

In addition, it is surprising, to say the least, that the IDB does not use the Internet to market Northern Ireland. Mr Sammy Wilson made reference to this earlier, and I find it incredible that in this day and age the IDB has not been told that the Internet exists. However, I am sure that when they read this report, they too will discover that there are other ways of marketing Northern Ireland which they have not pursued to date.

I certainly agree with my Colleague, Ian Paisley, when he cited the IRA; his criticism of Sinn Féin is well placed. I am not a fan of the IDB, and, having read the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report, I have to say that my feelings have not changed.

The IDB undoubtedly has an extremely difficult task in job creation and no one — and I include myself here — should underestimate that, but the litany of concerns expressed throughout the report cannot be ignored. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey, will, no doubt, have given this report his careful consideration. Can this Assembly look forward to his considered response detailing what action he will be taking to ensure that such a report will not be necessary in the future? I hope that the Minister will take particular interest in the cost per job, which, though planned to be £37,900, was, in fact, £56,200. That is 50% more than the figure first suggested. I accept, of course, that the IDB is at the cutting edge of risk taking and is always going to be vulnerable to criticism, but I think it has to learn, if it has not done so already, that it is very easy to cut whangs off another man's leather, but while they are custodians of public funds, they should keep that very much to the fore.

Billy Hutchinson made an excellent point regarding job announcements. We often hear announcements about thousands of jobs, but do we ever see thousands of jobs being created? When you look at the fine print you discover that thousands dwindle to hundreds or, indeed, to around 50. We need jobs that support the job creation schemes, targeting real areas of social need. Rural constituencies, like mine, that have very high unemployment figures must be looked at more carefully

in the future. Let us see a fairer distribution of job creation. I believe, like Mr McCrea, that Londonderry has had more than its fair share. Other areas of Northern Ireland must also get their fair share of job creation and have money spent on them.

**Mr Shannon:** I am also unable to support the motion for one simple reason, and that is that the organisation proposing it is the same one that for 30 years, has subjected this country to all sorts of bombing, and as a result, our economy has been badly affected. That having been said, the IDB has not endeared itself to the people of the Province, and certainly not to the people of Strangford especially. The people of Northern Ireland have had to sit back and watch as the IDB has failed majestically to justify the amount of taxpayer money which was being spent on job creation to comparatively little effect.

5.15 pm

Events on the ground have had a major economic impact on areas of Northern Ireland during 30 years of a terrorism and bombing campaign. In Newtownards we had a bomb a few years ago that caused £5 million worth of damage. Where could we have invested £5 million in Newtownards? We could have opened further food-processing units to create employment; we could have used it to help the farming industry; we could have used it for the fishing industry; or we could have used it for the textile industry — all those industries that needed help. But, instead of being able to help them, the Government had to pay out £5 million plus to the people who had suffered as a result of the bomb; a bomb planted by the IRA; a bomb planted to destroy the economic life of the centre of Newtownards.

At the same time, over the last few years, the people of Strangford have had other large economic blackspots to contend with. The backbone of our rural economy is farming. It contributes a lot to the life of our constituency in both rural and urban areas. It has been devastated in recent years while a substantial part of the urban industry has been in textiles. Both industries, agriculture and textiles, are now under enormous pressure. The situation appears to be spiralling out of control, and we are now in the midst of a crisis, which will not only affect the individuals who have been told that they are to become redundant but will have an immensely negative impact upon the whole local economy.

Losses from the Bairdwear, Hawkes Bay and Lamont Holdings, (a Regency Spinners Group) have had a huge impact on the local economy. We have witnessed the loss of over 600 jobs within the clothing industry in the space of just a few months. From being a solid base for the industry, the Ards area now finds itself struggling to maintain any presence whatsoever.



What about the land that has been set aside by the IDB for development in Newtownards and Strangford? Firstly, not enough land has been set aside for development. Secondly, the land that is set aside is owned by the IDB and some of it is on a hill. It is going to be very difficult to build a factory on a hill. It is going to be almost impossible to prepare that site, and what is the IDB doing today? It should be preparing the ground so that if any factories do want to come in, we will be in a position to react. The conduct of the IDB at best has been unprofessional and at worst downright discriminating.

Financially, the loss of 600 jobs can only have a devastating effect upon the local economy and, as a result, it is estimated that £6.5 million will be lost. The picture is the same right across Northern Ireland. From an internal point of view, part of the problem lies with the Robson index. There needs to be an urgent review of targeting social need as results do not appear to produce an accurate indication of social deprivation within any given area. There must be parity of social recognition between a disadvantaged person living in an area that is perceived to be affluent and a disadvantaged person in an area which is perceived to be disadvantaged.

Areas such as Ards and Strangford are perceived to be affluent, but one just has to look at the local housing estates to read a different story. The new system should be more effective at locating areas of social deprivation, but because this system will continue to work alongside local government and ward boundaries, a large number of areas in our constituency will continue to be ignored, being part of a ward which is perceived to be affluent when the reality is that a large proportion of that ward is anything but.

With the crisis in agriculture and the disintegration of the textile industry, unemployment figures for the borough are higher than the Northern Ireland average. I have heard some Members talking about unemployment today. Unemployment in our area is rising dramatically. Where the proportion of people claiming benefit is 5.7% in Northern Ireland as a whole, and 5.2% in the Belfast travel-to-work area, the figure for the Ards borough is 6.7%, a figure that does not even take into account the most recent redundancies within textiles. The final figure is believed to be around a staggering 9.6%—almost 10% in the Ards borough perceived to be an affluent area, but is anything but. There must be flexibility in Government policy or this system of TSN will continue to punish the people of Ards. These figures hardly show that the Ards borough or Strangford is an affluent area, a place where job opportunities are available, where everything is going well.

Even though the IDB played an important role in securing the future of Northern Ireland Spinners Ltd in Killinchy, it is clear that they have not delivered on their obligations to the people and the economy of Northern

Ireland. They have done people in Strangford and across this Province a great disservice. Great swaths of jobs have gone, with few subsequent options or opportunities being made available to those laid off. This dreadfully unsatisfactory situation cannot be allowed to continue. Change is urgently required. Resolute and necessary action must be taken in order to enhance and rebuild the economy of Northern Ireland.

#### **The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey):**

It has already been acknowledged that I find myself in something of a dilemma this afternoon. On one hand, I welcome the interest of the Public Accounts Committees of the House of Commons and of the Assembly in the work of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in pursuit of better public services. On the other hand, with a memorandum of response to the Public Accounts Committee report not yet compiled, let alone agreed with the Department of Finance and Personnel and returned to the Committee, I am unable to enter fully into the debate or to inform Members as I would wish. I deeply regret this, because so many points have been made, and the debate has been of such a nature, that detailed answers are required.

It is not my intention to be discourteous to the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons, which has made it clear that there is a procedure laid down for such responses. They are to be made within eight weeks. At this stage, IDB and the Department of Finance and Personnel have not yet completed the compilation of a response, and I cannot anticipate that response. I certainly cannot give detailed answers until that response has been handed to the Public Accounts Committee. I hope hon Members do not expect me to put the House in that difficult position.

However, in the light of what has been said today, and without wishing to prejudice in any way the memorandum of response or to seem disrespectful to the Committee, I feel I must say something in general terms, if only to retain a sense of perspective.

The Public Accounts Committee report covers the period April 1988 to March 1997. As will be seen in due course when the IDB makes its response, much progress has been made since then. Secondly, the difficult political and economic climate in which the IDB operated throughout most of this period is a factor that has been acknowledged by the Committee. The IDB's approach to measuring the economic efficiency of new inward investment cases now mirrors that undertaken elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The issue of jobs promoted was referred to on a number of occasions. It is a common means of measuring the performance of industrial development agencies throughout the United Kingdom. The actual rate of conversion to jobs created by IDB inward

investments is 76%, which compares very favourably with Scotland and Wales. If Members refer to the report, they will see that this point is acknowledged.

Pay-outs on letters of offer are triggered by each company's performance in delivering agreed targets. There seems to be a perception that, just because a deal is struck on a certain number of jobs that are to be created, the money agreed is automatically paid over. That is not the case. The money is only paid over when certain targets are actually met. If they are not met, funds are not paid to the companies concerned.

Finally, the IDB has worked very hard to maximise job creation in TSN areas. Again, this has been acknowledged. I agree with Members who said that this in itself is a subject for debate. I hope shortly to come to comments made by individual Members, including Mr Shannon.

The PAC report on inward investment raises important issues and will receive my full attention. Where there is room for improvement, I will ensure that progress is made. The IDB has an important role to play in helping to build the local economy, and I look forward to working with the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee and the Public Accounts Committee to maximise its effectiveness. I do not wish to get into a blow by blow account of every point in the report. A number of comments were made throughout the debate and I would like to refer now to some of those.

I begin by referring to the comments by the hon Member for North Antrim, Ian Paisley Jnr, when he specifically referred to the Moyle area of his constituency and what he considered to be an inadequate response by the IDB to the difficulties there. I am very much aware that Moyle has taken over from Strabane as the highest unemployment local council area in the Province. That is something I deeply regret. The hon Member for North Antrim will be aware that, in the short period since devolution has been restored, I have visited Moyle because of an unfortunate incident at the Giant's Causeway visitor centre. I believe there is considerable potential for employment, especially out of that tragedy, which has the potential for a significant investment.

The Member for East Antrim, Mr Neeson, made some remarks about 'Strategy 2010' and tax-raising and tax-varying powers. I know that he and his party have been advocates of this policy for a long time. While it is something that we will have to come to on another day, my concern is that tax-varying powers would equate to tax-raising powers, because the temptation to increase taxes for public expenditure would be inevitable. One needs to be very careful not to create a disincentive to investment, because the stresses and strains between demands for public expenditure and competitive rates

will be very strong. As Members know, the Republic has attracted companies on the basis of a lower rate through its corporation tax. My concern would be that if we had tax-varying powers that were not corporation tax-varying powers, these would become tax increases and therefore a disincentive, doing the very opposite of what the Republic has been successful in doing by using its corporation tax variants.

A number of Members have referred to the circumstances that the IDB and, indeed, LEDU find themselves in with regard to the issues surrounding violence and disorder. Though he is not in the Chamber, the hon Member for North Belfast, Mr Hutchinson, seemed to make light of this, that it did not matter so much what the IRA or the Loyalists did. You cannot ignore these things. When I was Lord Mayor of Belfast I had visitors and potential investors in the parlour when the windows rattled, and I had to try to explain that to them. Nobody in their right mind could imagine that a terrorist war, which has waged for three decades, would not have any impact whatsoever on inward investment. It is absolute nonsense to suggest it. Most of today's investment is mobile and it can go anywhere. Nobody is going to be content to invest in an area which is patrolled by armoured cars, where buildings are surrounded by cages, and where people are constantly sweeping up the rubble and the glass and having to spend hours upon hours of management time on claims and trying to rebuild their businesses. So to say that this is of no account is patent nonsense. That would be obvious to anybody. A number of Members have made that point. I do not propose to refer to each one of them individually, but it is important that we understand that that has been a consistent factor.

5.30 pm

The other issue that must be understood is that the morale of the people who are going out to market and sell Northern Ireland, whether as a tourist or industrial destination, has to be taken into consideration. Whether we like it or not, the pattern in North America and other markets for years has been that whenever you say you are from Northern Ireland the people look at you and start to talk. What do they talk about? They do not start by talking about the Giant's Causeway or the great weather — they ask "Is the war on?" and enquire about people's safety. There are questions like that before one even gets to discuss the investments.

Thank God, I believe that that is changing. However, this report covers the period from 1988 onwards, and therefore covers some of the worst periods of the troubles. To imagine that this could have taken place without any reference to difficulties is clearly wrong. The hon Member for East Belfast, Mr Sammy Wilson, referred to the Internet. It may well be that that hon Member chooses to spend his time on the Internet on

other matters, but I can assure him that the IDB is very much on the Internet. If I could tear him away from some of the other sites he might be visiting, I suggest that he visit the site because in January this year I launched an upgraded site for the IDB. It is a very good site, and I would commend it to Members. The hon Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone also referred to it, and, if he chooses to look it up, he will find a very positive site there presenting a very positive image of Northern Ireland. Indeed, our Internet marketing is moving forward very strongly. There is a team in IDB House that takes this matter very seriously, and I believe that when the Member looks up the site he will be impressed by what he sees.

**Mr Morrow:** I thank the Minister for giving way. We are simply quoting what is in the report. Is he telling us that the report is wrong? The report's authors say that they would like to introduce the IDB to the Internet. If the Minister is saying that that part is wrong, then we accept that. However, he would need to clarify that and correct the report if that is the case. Thank you.

**Sir Reg Empey:** I do not want to get into a blow-by-blow account on the actual report, but I can assure the hon Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone that there is an IDB Internet site. I have given him its address, and I suggest that he take up my suggestion to have look at it.

**Mr Morrow:** I am happy to do that.

**Sir Reg Empey:** I appreciate that, and we will come back to it on another occasion. The hon Member for South Belfast, Dr McDonnell, talked about more risk taking, refocusing, and a more comprehensive debate. One of the criticisms I have of the motion is its timing, because we are in a position where, for parliamentary protocol reasons, I am replying in this debate with both hands tied behind my back; I regret that. The other matter is that the IDB and the Department of Finance and Personnel do not yet have their major piece of input in front of this Assembly. I know that Committees will want to engage in that, and that Members will want to have a full, free and open debate. I repeat that I do not intend to insult Members of Parliament and the Committee structure at Westminster, because I believe it would be a very short-term gain to do so.

Some people have perhaps misunderstood what has been happening, even in their own areas. Although this report is specifically about the IDB's performance, Members must remember that the largest performance and most significant number of jobs created are by the private sector and the public sector, in the natural course of events and under their own steam. IDB client companies and LEDU client companies only represent part of the economy. Not every company receives money and not every company asks for money. Indeed,

the majority of companies do not do so. That, of course, is where most jobs are actually created.

**Sir Reg Empey:** I want to refer to a number of points that were made by the hon Member for Mid Ulster, Mr McCrea, who, unfortunately, is not with us at the moment. He was very concerned that west of the Bann got a particularly raw deal and he claimed that a large part of the money was going into a particular part of one constituency. Indeed, listening to the complaints of the hon Member for Foyle, Mrs Nelis, you would think she did not get daylight up there. She should have known better because I sent her a reply to a written question recently. I have been looking at the Foyle constituency's slice of the cake in the five years from 1995/1996 onwards.

In 1995-96 the Foyle constituency's selective financial assistance from the Industrial Development Board (IDB) totalled almost £21 million, and that left Foyle in number two position in Northern Ireland. In 1996-97 it received £8.1 million, leaving it in eighth position. In 1997-98 it received £51.6 million, leaving it in first position. In 1998-99 it received £3.9 million, leaving it in eighth position. Last year it received £5.6 million, leaving it in fifth position. On average that puts it in the top quartile in every one of the last five years, and I do not consider that as paying scant regard to the area. In terms of Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU) performance, it is averaging 7% over the last six years as well. In other words, it is very much on a par there as well.

In relation to what Mr McCrea was saying about his constituency, sadly, it did not receive any selective financial assistance from the IDB last year. But in 1995-96 it was in third position with £15 million; that dropped to £2.3 million in 1996-97; £1.3 million in both 1997-98 and 1998-99, and nothing in the last financial year. Therefore, he probably has a point about more recent years. But take some other constituencies, Strangford, for example, which in 1995 received nothing, in 1996 received £1.5 million, in 1997 £1.4 million, in 1998 £0.16 million, and last year just under a million. There are many other constituencies in weaker positions. In terms of LEDU —

**Mr Tierney:** The Minister must look at the unemployment figures as well. Taking those into account, the Foyle Constituency's assistance level was one of the lowest.

**Sir Reg Empey:** The impression was given clearly in the debate that there is considerable grievance that the Foyle Constituency is doing very badly out of all of this. I am simply saying that the arithmetic in front of me does not sustain that. That is the reality. It is there in black and white. Of course you must relate things to unemployment, as you do to a range of other matters too. This is because deprivation can take a range of



forms. The point I am making is that it is perfectly clear that both LEDU and IDB recognise the difficulties that constituency has.

What people must remember about all of this is that the demand for selective financial assistance comes from companies. Projects and expansions have to be there and coming forward. The IDB cannot unilaterally produce a result and cede money going to a particular Constituency. It has to come from demand from particular companies, and I believe there has been a significant response over recent years in that Constituency. It is in the reply, which is in the public domain.

**Mr Hussey:** I am sure the Minister will agree that the MP and MEP there probably did a lot of the good work in attracting business. It is a pity that the same Member of Parliament, prior to reorganisation, forgot that Strabane was part of his constituency.

**Sir Reg Empey:** That is what you call an up-and-under. A former rugby commentator used to come out with that one. I take seriously the difficulties the hon Member has in his constituency, and he knows that I will see some of his Colleagues this week in regard to some of those matters. I visited the area when I was in this position the last time we had devolution, and I am conscious of the difficulties. Although this was an answer to a particular Member, it might be useful to have this set of statistics, broken down into district council areas, submitted and circulated to all Members. It would be a reference point, and it might be useful for Members to have a ready reckoner at their disposal so that they could refer to it and see how things are moving.

The Member for east Antrim, Mr Beggs, referred to the difficulties in his area, and I direct my response to him and Mr Shannon, from Strangford. North Down, Ards and Carrick have some of the highest male unemployment rates in the Province. There is a hidden problem in areas in the Greater Belfast commuter belt; a two-speed constituency is developing. There are those who are indigenous to the constituency, who work and live in it, and there are those who reside in the constituency but do not work in it, and I have noticed this particularly in the Strangford area.

I visited Strangford as a result of the crisis in the textile industry to liaise with the borough council over their difficulties in that regard, and it was obvious that many of the staple industries (agriculture, fishing and textiles) have been taking a hammering, but because there is a growing proportion of the population in those districts — and this applies equally in North Down — of those who reside in the constituency but do not live in it, that disguises the underlying difficulties in the economy in those two areas. A lot of that also applies to the constituency of East Antrim. When we look at the Robson index and the indices of deprivation, we see that

this is one of the pockets of deprivation that are located in the middle of areas of apparent affluence.

When we come to deal with the new TSN issue these are matters we will have to address and be honest about. Instead of taking the global statistics, which can be misleading, we must remember that it does not matter where a person is, if that person is in a situation where he is being deprived and has no opportunities or skills, then we are tasked to do our best to provide him with opportunities. It does not matter whether he is in Upper Malone or in any other ward, everybody should have an equal opportunity to improve and get themselves out of a particular difficulty. That is not going to be done simply by using a blunt instrument such as some of the statistical methods that are currently at our disposal. But perhaps that is a debate for another day.

For reasons that I have made clear, I have not been able to be as responsive to the matters referred to during the debate in respect of the IDB's performance, and I apologise for that. I hope we will return to this in the next session when we will have had the opportunity to go through the report with the clear advantage of a response from the IDB and DFP and with the knowledge of the considered position of the Public Accounts Committee in London. The reasons I have stipulated together with the matters referred to by the hon Member for Lagan Valley, Mr Bell, mean that I am therefore unable to support this motion.

**Dr O'Hagan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, I would like to share the Minister's hope that we will return to this debate during the next session. I would like to thank the people who contributed and who made serious and sensible contributions to the debate. There are a number of issues the first of which is the timing and tabling of the motion. I welcome the Speaker's ruling that this was a competent motion, which we were perfectly entitled to debate in the Assembly.

5.45 pm

The reason the motion was put down, as I said in my opening speech, was that the Assembly is going into recess and this is too important an issue to be left until September. As Esmond Birnie said, this debate can be used to flag up a number of issues regarding the IDB.

Turning to some of the comments made, I am disappointed that the Chairman of our Public Accounts Committee intends to wait for the procedure to go through Westminster. The wording of the motion was chosen carefully in the light of the recommendation from the Select Committee at Westminster to our Public Accounts Committee asking it to keep a watching brief on the matter. That recommendation still stands and is very pertinent.



Some good comments were made, and overall people showed serious concern about the performance and activities of the IDB. The concern is mainly about the figures for job creation and job promotion, the lack of accountability and the lack of response to Committees, such as that at Westminster, but it also centres around the lack of adherence to equality issues and TSN.

I was glad to hear John Dallat say that he is on the Auditor General's committee. He said that the Auditor General is not only capable but willing to deal with this and other issues and that our Public Accounts Committee has a critical role to play.

Some very sensible comments were made, and I was glad to hear that contributors like Ian Paisley Jnr agreed that this was an indictment of the failure of the IDB and a catalogue of shame. Unfortunately, Mr Paisley, along with other Members of his party, then reverted to type and came out with comments that were typical of the DUP — for his information I have read the report, and that is why the motion is worded as it is.

With regard to the other comments about my part in putting down the motion, I would remind some parties that they have sailed very close to the wind. I need only mention the DUP's involvement with Ulster Resistance and its support for the Orange Order and others in their attempts to bring this place to a standstill. Given that economic development was linked to political stability, it might be helpful if Mr Paisley and Mr Wilson's Colleagues took their seats in the Executive and projected a more positive image. The DUP's response to

the motion was interesting. It shows its difficulty in dealing with sensible and normal motions — the DUP always has to bring everything back to the confrontational politics with which it is most comfortable.

As time goes on, the stresses and strains in that party will increase as normal politics begin to bed down. By way of a reminder to that party, and to the other people who questioned our putting this motion down, my party and I are here because of an electoral mandate. We are entitled to be here, and we are entitled to bring forward and debate areas of concern, and that is something my Colleagues and I will continue to do.

In winding up, I thank the Minister for his reply. I am pleased that he said that he will be giving the Public Accounts Committee's report his full attention. Perhaps he will reply by way of a written answer to my question.

We were talking about statistics and I think it is true that you can have "lies, damned lies and statistics". How much of the overall IDB budget is spent east of the Bann and how much is spent west of the Bann? I am glad that these issues were raised. They are very serious issues. The IDB has been in existence since 1982 and there has been little accountability and I think that it is important that the Assembly begins to take control of issues such as the IDB. I am glad that this motion was made and I urge people to support it. Go raibh maith agat.

*Question put and negatived.*

*The sitting was suspended at 5.50 pm.*



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 27 June 2000

*The sitting begun and suspended on Monday 26 June 2000 was resumed at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).*

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

**Mr Byrne:** I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the poor state of the public transport system in Northern Ireland and proposes that the Minister for Regional Development should urgently implement a comprehensive and integrated public transport policy to redress this problem.

There is a great debate among the public about the state of public transport. Over the past week the depth of the underfunding crisis in public transport — in particular, the railway network — has been brought into sharp focus by the media, including the ‘Belfast Telegraph’. The severity of the problem has been highlighted, as Members are aware, by Translink’s managing director, who has warned in a letter to employees of Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) that most of the North’s railway network may close down — the exception being the Belfast-Dublin Enterprise line — with the loss of 700 jobs, because of the gravity of the crisis.

This has served to illustrate the gross disparity between Government funding of Northern Ireland’s public transport system and their funding of Britain’s, which is the accumulated result of years of sustained neglect by successive Governments, both Labour and Conservative.

In Northern Ireland, 30% of households do not own cars. The continued fall in the standard of public transport provision is an issue which goes to the heart of the core principles of social justice and our obligation to create a new society rooted in inclusivity, equality of opportunity and access as described in the Good Friday Agreement.

Unfortunately, the present Labour Government’s attitude towards public transport in Northern Ireland is particularly disappointing. It is totally at odds with their own stated policy and their commitment to ensure that public transport becomes a more attractive and accessible option.

The Government’s White Paper on the future of transport, entitled ‘A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone’ and published in 1998, stated that there was consensus for a radical change in transport policy. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, John Prescott, said that motorists would not be prepared to use public transport unless it was significantly better and more reliable.

However, in the comprehensive spending review which followed, no extra resources were provided for public transport in Northern Ireland. Public transport is now a devolved matter for which the Assembly has responsibility. It is the remit of the Department for Regional Development to implement for this region a public transport policy which is balanced, sustainable and socially inclusive and has clear and realistic objectives.

The Department’s draft regional strategic framework for Northern Ireland marks an important starting point. It acknowledges that a strategic focus is needed for future transport development. It correctly recognises that the greater travel choice offered by car ownership is not enjoyed by all. The lack of a car can contribute to social exclusion and reduce access to work opportunities and services, particularly for those in rural and disadvantaged urban areas. However, we appreciate that there are no easy solutions to this problem. The Regional Development Committee has been discussing the issue over recent weeks.

Real change in Northern Ireland’s public transport system will be achieved only if more money is made available and can be allocated within the context of a public transport policy which is receptive to other sources of revenue. It must also be sustainable and integrated with the public transport system on the island as a whole to maximise the most efficient use of scarce resources. It is this sort of comprehensive and balanced approach to public transport which will not only improve the economic regeneration of the region but will also — and this is important — protect the environment and enhance the quality of life of the population generally. We had a better railway system at the start of the twentieth century than we have at the start of the twenty-first century, because of the number of lines that have been closed.

As someone who comes from Omagh, I remember when the railway from Derry through Strabane and Omagh to Portadown closed in 1964. I contend that that brought serious disadvantage to our area.

The state of our railway network dramatically underlines the extent of the current problem. According to several public surveys, customer satisfaction with the quality of service still leaves much to be desired. For example, the spring independent monitoring update conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers on behalf of

Translink revealed a decrease in the performance ratings for NIR with respect to overall customer satisfaction with both trains and the conditions of stations. Trains are now running with fewer carriages, and passengers are travelling in overcrowded conditions. Although at the moment Translink operates a relatively safe railway network, this cannot continue indefinitely given the present lack of investment. There is a risk to public safety. Recently Translink commissioned a report into safety. The reality is that our railways are safe, but only because trains move quite slowly.

Back in March the British Government announced a massive £52 billion investment in Railtrack over the next 12 years. Similarly, the Government in the Republic followed the advice in a report produced for them by International Risk Management Devices and acknowledged that £500 million was needed to upgrade safety systems on the CIE network.

Public subsidies in other EU member states are also significantly higher than those in the North of Ireland. For example, the level of subsidy in Germany's rail network is more than 10 times the amount accorded to NIR. There is a glaring gap between the Government's rhetoric on public transport and the reality of the issue. According to Translink's submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, Northern Ireland Railways sees only a fraction of the financial support given to the privatised companies in Britain. For example, in 1997-98 the rail network in Britain was subsidised to the level of £33·20 per capita, whereas the level in Northern Ireland was £5·50 per capita. Other comparisons show further disparities. For example, in 1998 NIR received 5·28p per passenger mile, by comparison with Scot Rail, which received 22·1p per passenger mile. Railways operating in the Cardiff area received 35·8p per passenger mile, those in Liverpool 41·5p, and those operating in the Isle of Wight 64·5p.

Overall, the public money payable by the Government to NIR has declined by 3% in recent years from a low base. The impact of this lack of investment upon the rail network is far reaching and has serious implications for the quality and safety of the service that Translink is able to provide. The report commissioned by Arthur D. Little, experts in rail safety, which was published in March, contained 121 recommendations. It concluded that £183 million was needed for new passenger rolling stock, trains, repairs to bridges, sea defences and new signalling and safety equipment. Almost half of the rail network needs to be relaid. The sum of £72 million is needed for new trains and six new bridges; other structures are needed at a cost of £67 million; and £25·5 million is required for the modernisation of signalling equipment, safety systems and the upgrading of crossings.

The financial position of NIR is stark. Northern Ireland estimates for the year 2000-01 allow only £8·27 million for capital expenditure. According to Translink, it cannot afford to purchase new trains and is allowed to spend only £3·4 million on the minor refurbishment of carriages, which will extend their useful life by approximately three years at the most. Taking into consideration the withdrawal of trains for repairs — and it is Translink's stated policy to maintain services — this will mean running trains with only two or three carriages, instead of the normal five, and less frequently. Inevitably, this will cause disruption to services and, in the long term, could result in the eventual closure of part or the entire rail network, except for the Dublin-Belfast line.

The effects of the closure of the railway network on Northern Ireland's overall transport system would be enormous. Every year approximately six million passengers use the train to get to work. Traffic volumes in Belfast are already increasing by 4% per annum. If sufficient investment is not forthcoming, thousands of cars will be added to our roads. It is estimated that over the next 25 years 70,000 additional cars will be on Northern Ireland's roads if the present trend continues. It is estimated that every morning an extra 3,000 vehicles would be added to the M1, the M2 and the Sydenham bypass. Closing the Bangor-Belfast line would add an extra 1,000 cars onto the roads at peak times.

Closure of the railway network is not a viable option. The people of the North of Ireland deserve a better deal. The railways task force, which is due to publish its interim report in July, can come to no conclusion acceptable to the wider community other than to recommend a substantial programme of Government investment. This is needed to address the public safety requirements and to ensure the survival of the network.

Although in not quite as severe a crisis as that afflicting our railways, Northern Ireland's bus services also suffer considerably from a lack of investment. In recent months we have had fare increases of an average of 4·5% — almost twice the rate of inflation — and services have been cut by 3% or 4%. This increases the sense of isolation, particularly in rural areas, among disadvantaged groups, such as the disabled, the unemployed, students and the elderly, who may not own a car, and causes even more traffic congestion in urban areas. Approximately 71% of commuters still opt for a car instead of a bus or train.

*10.45 am*

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close as there is a substantial list of Members wishing to speak.



**Mr Byrne:** The crisis in public transport is such that we in the Assembly must work with the Department of Regional Development and the Executive to face up to the stark reality. I hope that when this debate is concluded there will be successful negotiations to try to bring about a long-term resolution and to develop a strategic framework for public transport in Northern Ireland.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Perhaps you would confirm that the real nub of this debate — finance — cannot be put to the Assembly because of the legislation that governs the matter of moneys here.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the Member for raising this question. It is clear that there is not always a full understanding of what matters may be tabled and what matters may not. As Members may recall, section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, upon which the Assembly is based, makes it clear that no sums may be required from the Consolidated Fund and that no sums may be appropriated by vote, resolution or any other means, except with the approval of the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Therefore, in the event of a motion being laid, or an amendment to a motion, without the approval of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, the Assembly could not vote upon it if it would increase a sum that had been appropriated or require funds to be brought forward.

I can understand that Members may regard this as a restriction when dealing with such a matter, as has been said by Mr Byrne. However, it is the legal basis upon which we must function. The Member is right to draw it to the attention of the House at this time.

Before we move on, may I draw two or three other matters to the attention of the House. All Members will have had circulated to them the text of a private notice question in the name of Mrs Mary Nelis. Private notice questions are taken immediately before the Adjournment debate, which under Standing Orders begins at 3 o'clock. The only way we can square that circle is, in effect, to stop the procedural clock at that point to allow that private notice question to be taken. It is taken in the usual fashion: the question is put, the Minister responds, a supplementary is taken from the questioner, and other supplementaries are permitted for a time.

I mention all this because this is the first private notice question we have had, and, of course, it is not on the Order Paper. I also want to remind the House that there is a statement from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the fire service. That will be taken at a convenient time, after a number of other debates and before the debate on the Equality Commission this evening. The time is difficult for me to estimate; it will depend on the rest of the discussion.

That takes me to the question of timing for this debate. At the start it was not possible to indicate timings as I did not know how many Members wanted to speak. In the course of the proposer's speech it became clear that the number is very substantial. Therefore I have little option but to restrict the time available to five minutes for each Member who will speak, 10 minutes for the Member who proposed the motion to wind up, and 20 minutes for the Minister to respond. The Minister will, of course, be given the opportunity to respond at the usual point, which is at the end of the debate, prior to the winding-up speech.

I will have to keep Members to five minutes. If more Members come forward they will not necessarily be able to speak. I may not even be able to get through the list I already have. However, we will do our best.

**Mr McFarland:** Members will know from listening to the radio in the morning that traffic is a problem in the Province. All will be familiar with Sandyknowes, Tillysburn, the Westlink and the M1. Every single morning there are reports of congestion at those points.

Traffic conditions are getting worse all the time. Car ownership in the Province has increased by 400% since 1960, and there are currently over 700,000 cars on the road. Ninety-eight per cent of goods are moved by road. Those who have recently travelled by train will know that most of our trains are old, shabby, prone to breakdown and, certainly on the Bangor line, extremely crowded. From this one can deduce that transport is in crisis, and this has come about as a result of a sustained lack of funding over a number of years. When times got tough transport was regarded as one area where money could easily be saved. We can ask for more money, but, sadly, although there may be some relief in the short term, there probably is not much more available, so we have to look at other solutions.

We need a plan, and, indeed, there is a plan. A regional strategic framework and an integrated transport policy are on the go, and it is to be hoped that they will be with us by the end of the year. Of course, there is a price to pay, and we and the Minister will, I suspect, have some hard choices to make. The regional strategic framework sees a settlement network of the hubs of the two cities, Belfast and Londonderry, with a series of hubs and clusters — the main towns and villages — in a key transport network which will link all these areas, allowing people to move from one to the other quickly on the key transport corridors and, of course, the gateways that lead from the Province, the ports and airports.

Over the next year there are terms you will learn to know and love, because they will govern how most Departments will be dealing with regional matters. For example, the strategic framework includes planning and

housing and social development, as well as a number of other areas.

There is a need to reduce car usage and pollution. Government policy accepts this, as was evidenced in a recent report which recommended a 60% reduction in greenhouse gases within 20 years. How do we get out of our cars and into some other form of transport which is less dangerous in terms of pollution? It is very difficult. In rural areas we are, perhaps, looking at small buses, a subsidised taxi system or some other better way of providing rural transport. What happens to school buses during the day when they are not collecting pupils? We are paying for them. Could they not be put to better use? In rural areas people have to use their cars, but in the Belfast travel-to-work urban area it is different.

Here is an opportunity to look seriously at some form of public transport. Every day people travel from Larne, Antrim, Lisburn and Dromore to work in Belfast, and a rail system would be logical; a fast, rapid transport system could be provided which would get people to work quickly and in comfort, allowing them to leave their cars at the station. This happens elsewhere in the United Kingdom and in the Republic, but until we introduce a public transport system that people want to use, they will not abandon their cars. It is a chicken-and-egg situation. The answer is either leasing or some form of public/private partnership. That is the way we must go.

**Mr R Hutchinson:** I welcome this opportunity to speak on the steady decline and lack of investment that has become all too apparent in the public transport system and the roads network throughout Northern Ireland. Roads funding has declined. Real public expenditure on transport has fallen at a rate of 14.5% over the last five years. Independent analysis has revealed an estimated shortfall of £40 million per annum in structural maintenance.

Today's society simply cannot function without roads. In the last 10 years traffic volume has increased by an average 2.8% per annum. This is reflected in traffic volumes on many of our roads. This morning I drove the A8 Belfast-Larne route, on which traffic varies from over 18,000 vehicles per day near Corr's Corner to approximately 10,500 vehicles per day south of the A757 junction. That does not include freight traffic from the ports of Larne and Belfast. It is staggering that, by 2005, car ownership in Northern Ireland will reach one million. There is a need for an improved roads infrastructure and transport system Province-wide.

Northern Ireland has a £13 billion roads network. That is one of our most valuable assets. Major structures such as bridges, which make up 10% of that asset, are inadequately funded. The structural maintenance of that network is of paramount importance to the economic

and social well-being of our Province. There is a need to identify, maintain and develop our main commercial routes, giving priority to the key transport corridors. There is no doubt that substantial investment is required in order to promote economic growth and to improve road safety by bringing about a reduction of one third in the number of fatalities and serious injuries that occur on our roads. Higher priority must also be given to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and those using public transport, particularly in a climate of spiralling fuel costs and increased taxes on car users.

However, it makes little sense to encourage motorists off the roads and on to an inadequate rail system. Lord Dubs, a former Environment Minister, described Northern Ireland's rail system as a complete shambles. Concern has grown over declining levels of service across the Province. This week's fact-finding exercise by the railways task force will no doubt confirm the public's lack of confidence in the current provision. Miles of track needs to be relaid. Many trains are 30 years old. It is anticipated that 29 train sets are needed to maintain existing services, but by the end of next year only 24 will be available, thus resulting in a reduction of services and the possibility of line closures.

Talk of the truncation or withdrawal of railway lines such as we have had in recent weeks conjures up negative images of this important medium of transport and reinforces the idea that the public perception of the rail system is very negative. A D Little's safety report tells us that the Northern Ireland railway system is just about safe. It also says that there is a need for an investment of £183 million to be phased in —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I fear that your time has passed.

11.00 am

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. When I heard the discussions about this debate on the radio this morning I was worried that the issue of whether the DUP is in the Executive — and the impact this could have on funding — was in danger of obscuring this vital debate on the crisis in public transport.

I raised this issue with the Minister of the Regional Development Committee at the start of the year. I was encouraged to hear that he was initiating a comprehensive 10-year strategy to tackle the issue of public transport instead of the ad hoc approach which has been adopted by direct rule Ministers in the past. There is no doubt that there has been massive under-investment in public transportation over many years. This is in contrast to patterns both in Britain and in the South. The draft regional development strategy does not give enough consideration to the operating of the railway network, or to the provision of bus lanes, bicycle lanes, or park-and-ride services. There is an absence of achievable

targets for shifting transport patterns from cars towards public transport. In the urban areas in particular, restrictions on car use would enhance the demand for public transport.

The knowledge that car ownership will double here in the next 25 years should give a sense of urgency to this. The free transport system piloted in the Castlereagh and Newry and Mourne council areas, and which also exists on the North/South line, should be quickly extended to the remainder of the Six Counties. Public transport must be easily accessible to disabled persons and to parents with small children. Attention should be given to the upgrading of rural public transport systems in the draft strategy, and any future public transport strategy must be integrated on a North/South basis. These policies should also take into account the particular developmental needs of the west and south of the Six Counties — something that appears to be lacking in the regional strategic framework.

A Cheann Comhairle, the current traffic congestion and the anticipated traffic nightmare over the coming years dictates that a grooming of the public transport system must take place as a matter of urgency. I look forward to an imaginative public transport strategy being produced by the Minister and to its early implementation. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Ford:** I welcome this debate, and I congratulate Joe Byrne on putting forward the motion. In his introduction he mentioned the needs of rural areas. As somebody whose summer holidays used to begin with a trip on the GNR to Newtownstewart, I agree entirely with the need for decent public transport in rural areas, as found in his constituency.

He also mentioned the needs of deprived inner-city areas. He actually left some areas out of the equation — areas which are, to some extent, suffering the greatest problems of congestion at the moment. I am talking about suburban areas like my constituency in South Antrim. It is absolutely clear that we will not have a decent system to enable people to commute into Belfast from areas like Newtownabbey and Antrim unless a decent public transport system is developed. There is supposedly a good motorway connecting this constituency with Belfast, yet all Members who live in the north or the north-west complain about the congestion at Sandyknowes, which they experience every morning coming here. These problems have been exacerbated by the development of housing in commuter towns and in suburban areas without any commensurate increase in the public transport infrastructure.

I have a few suggestions which I would like the Minister to consider. He has heard a few other suggestions from me and will doubtless hear a few more over the coming years. There is a fundamental problem with the way the Treasury operates. I know we are not

supposed to be talking about that this morning, but I will get my cheap jibe in anyway. The fact that Translink is handing cash reserves back to the Treasury at a time when it cannot buy buses and trains is a scandal. That is the only conceivable word for it. It is time that we in the Assembly decided whether we have the power to judge those decisions. We need to tell the Treasury that we think this is a scandal, and we need to do so with a united voice.

We clearly need to move much further with regard to integration. Combined bus and rail tickets should not be too difficult for Translink to introduce. Last week a senior officer of the Assembly said to me in Donegall Square that it was nice to see a public representative using public transport. However, like most of us, I am a bit of a hypocrite because I do not use it very often. I discovered last week that to come from Templepatrick on a Ballymena express bus and go back to Templepatrick on an airbus requires two tickets. One cannot use a return ticket on the two different services. It is really time that Translink introduced integrated ticketing to include railways and all bus services and put an end to this ludicrous situation.

We need to stop giving lip service to the public transport system and start getting real about the problems of private cars. We seem to run frightened of the roads lobby, but we need to go out and talk to our constituents. There are plenty of houses, I know, within my constituency with two cars sitting outside.

The people wish that they did not need both the cars — one staying at home during the day for family use, and the other being used to get to work in Belfast.

There is no doubt that until we start to provide an element of the stick alongside, and preferably slightly behind, the carrot of improved quality of public transport, we are not going to deal with that issue. We need measures like quality bus corridors, but we also need to tackle the issue of congestion charging by parking charges or other means. We need to consider some of the ideas that people like Transport 2000 have advanced on the issue of out-of-town shopping centres and the associated major problems of free parking and the destruction of town and city centres.

I have one specific suggestion to put to the Minister, and I understand that it is entirely within his remit. It is time that public transport policy be no longer regarded as an adjunct of the Roads Service. It is time for the Roads Service to be an agency administering an integrated transport policy, or part of an integrated transport policy, for his Department. It should not be something in which buses and trains are subservient to the car. We need to get the mindset right, and Members in the Chamber should start doing something about it. If we do not, we will be a little hypocritical in preaching at others. We need to set the example.



**Mr Dallat:** Some time ago I visited Berlin. The whole road and rail infrastructure was being rebuilt following the collapse of Communism in the east. Roads and railways were being linked up again to create a modern network, bringing immediate economic and social benefits, and protecting the environment from the pollution of the past. Above all, the new investment was designed to target the social needs of the east, which had been so neglected under the communist system.

In Northern Ireland much has been done since the ceasefires. Border roads have reopened, and the new Enterprise trains have transformed rail travel between Belfast and Dublin, with obvious advantages for the towns in between. The City of Derry Airport is slowly but surely building up new business which is adding to the value of the north-west as an attractive place in which to invest. However, there is a downside. Officials from the Department for Regional Development are currently touring council chambers showing a set of slides to elected members. The slides would be an embarrassment to any Government Department. They tell the sad tale of a rail and road infrastructure in serious decline and, in some cases, literally disappearing. They show rusty old trains, with matching tracks and bridges, and roads that are breaking up without the money to replace or repair them.

Councils are being asked for their views in helping to pay for these. Are we back to the tollroads of the medieval past, or is someone going to get serious about the problems confronting us? Why can Northern Ireland not build up its infrastructure that has been so badly neglected under 30 years of direct rule? Why does the Minister for Regional Development not have the same vision for the future as the people of Berlin? Why is he not sitting down with his fellow Ministers in the Executive? Why is he refusing to take part in the North/South bodies with his Colleagues from all parties, so that, together, we can begin the process of creating a new, modern road and rail infrastructure that will give life to our economic and social development strategies for the future? Instead, he is creating uncertainty by telling us that he will resign from his post. Of course, we have now learnt that even if he wants to stay the newly appointed "Pope" will sack him anyway.

How can this nonsense help the people of Northern Ireland, who have a right to expect political leaders to rebuild what has been destroyed or neglected? A modern transport system is vital to the country's future. We cannot deliver on our promises to target social need, create equality or protect the environment if large parts of the North are suffering from serious decline. The Belfast to Derry line is critical to the success of the North and the north-west. There is a strong case for developing fast and modern road transport corridors between the west of Ireland and the North. We need to do what the people of Berlin did and

seriously begin to rebuild and develop what has been neglected.

Yes, there was a time when it was customary to boast of the modern roads of the North and to scorn the winding, twisty roads of the South. But that is the past.

The Republic of Ireland is currently spending £2 million per day on roads alone. Most of the money is their own; it is not European Union money. They are planning to upgrade their railways to the highest European standard, because they know that that is the only way to build a modern economy — one which addresses social need and delivers prosperity to everyone. We can do it too, but we cannot afford the luxury of a Minister who is hopping in the corner, or worse still, out in the cold. Let us take a leaf out of the book of the Germans or, indeed, of the Irish, and get real. We have lived in the world of pretence for far too long.

**Mr Leslie:** I welcome the opportunity to address this motion. For reasons already pointed out, it is of particular interest to myself and anybody living in the North Antrim constituency who needs to travel to Belfast. As we look forward to the reopening of the Bleach Green line, it would be a great shame if the opportunity for a faster rail link to the north and north-west — which would appeal to many people — were not properly seized because of the poor state of the rest of the infrastructure relating to it. However, the possibility of greater demand for that service would lead to the prospect of extra revenue being generated, which in turn would help ease the obvious capital spending problems. Those of us who live north of the dual carriageway build line on the A26 are acutely aware of the attraction of being able to use the railway as an alternative.

I suspect that the Minister, in his response to this debate, will be quite tempted to start with the refrain "Well, if you have the money, I have the time," because essentially we are looking at a capital spending problem. We have to be aware, however, that should more money become available for capital spending, there will be immediate competition between all the capital spending departments to get their hands on it. Therefore the prospects for the transport system would be much better if that Minister were present to fight his corner in the Executive Committee. For that reason I think that it is incumbent upon those Ministers with major capital spending programmes to investigate all the avenues of private finance to see what can be done to stretch the public purse further. The fact that there is a bottleneck of commuters coming from the north into Belfast creates an opportunity in itself. I believe there is now a sufficient volume of people trying to travel in and that there is a commercial opportunity to provide an



alternative — probably on rails, but possibly by bus — that deserves serious investigation.

Another aspect of the transport issue relates to some of the points raised in yesterday's debate on the Industrial Development Board. The Minister, Sir Reg Empey, made the point — and it needs to be made again and again — that it is not, and should not be, the business of the Government to tell business where it should go. Business makes that decision for itself. What government can do is to enable people to go to where the business, the jobs and the opportunities are, and that is a key role of transport policy. Take as an example the world's most successful economy — the United States. Perhaps the defining characteristic of that economy is the complete mobility of labour. People go to where the work is; they do not expect work to be brought to them. We should take the same attitude in Northern Ireland. That does not mean that there are not opportunities to create work more widely throughout the province. I believe that there are. It is a question of being able to move the other ingredients that are required in and out of those areas. That is the job of transport policy.

Finally, I wonder whether this Assembly should set an example in relation to flexible working hours. In other cities where I have worked, that is one of the ways in which bottlenecks have been dealt with. There has been a willingness, particularly in the service industry, which has the scope to do this, to offer people different working days and different start and finish times. I have referred to this before in debates in the Assembly. The Assembly and its staff frequently have to work on Sunday as a consequence of the rather optimistic start time on Monday. This causes great difficulties for your office, Mr Speaker, and for the Whips' office. I wonder whether the Assembly should not contribute to easing the rush hour problems by starting later and finishing later.

11.15 am

**Mr Hay:** I support the motion. We were all elected to the House a few years ago. Most who came here were councillors, and some of us still are. The underfunding of our roads and our public transport system is no surprise to councillors. It was only when we came here that we realised the seriousness of the underfunding. When Roads Service officials came on their annual visits to councils we lobbied them for more funding for our areas, and rightly so.

The Roads Service has a budget of £163.3 million for this year, and that only represents 50% of what is needed. That is very serious. We have significant growth in car ownership and funding has been decreasing for many years. We need to look seriously at the development of our main commercial routes and give priority to key transport corridors in Northern Ireland.

We were told a number of months ago that a lot of these projects right across Northern Ireland could only be funded by the sale of Belfast port. We should congratulate the Minister and his Department. Decisions have not been made on Belfast port, but nevertheless work is about to start on some of the projects and others are included in the programme.

Our public transport system is in a serious crisis, and the Minister for Regional Development has been making the Regional Development Committee aware of the seriousness of the situation. He has been to the Committee on a number of occasions. Many documents have been drawn up over the last number of years on funding public transport. The Little report has been mentioned, and it is going to take £183 million for some of the recommendations in that report to be funded. We are now waiting for a report that was commissioned by the former Minister, which was a total waste of time — we have had enough documents. We know what needs to be done, and we can only get a properly funded public transport system in Northern Ireland through additional funding.

Over the next months difficult decisions will have to be taken on raising additional funds. We will have to explore other ways of raising funds, and Members will find that to be painful.

**Mr Speaker:** I am afraid that your time is up.

**Mr McHugh:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish to speak in favour of the motion. The subjects of roads and transport are interlinked with investment, economic development services, health, hospitals and equality of access for the disabled and the aged, and I make a case for the area west of the Bann against a mindset that seems to believe that the world ends at the M1.

There is a need to decentralise, rather than centralise, jobs and industry to allow an equal spread of investment and jobs right across the area. We face an increase in population to 1.7 million by 2025. We have one of the fastest growing regions in Europe and the most youthful population in Europe, with an estimated increase of 180,000 persons by 2025. An additional 100,000 jobs will be required. There will also be a corresponding demand for services, infrastructure, jobs, housing and hospitals. The number of vehicles will rise to over one million by 2025, with an accompanying impact on the environment, traffic congestion and the quality of life. Traffic in Belfast is rising by 4% year after year.

In the west, the strategy for development is relevant to a cross-border area of around two million people. Indigenous industries such as agriculture and textiles have been eroded. Local jobs are needed to counteract this with development hubs at county level. We need investment in infrastructure as the car is a necessity in

rural areas. There is no choice. No other type of transport is available, and it is unlikely that there will be any in the future.

While bids for funding have been made for railways, there are no railways in the west. My Colleague Pat Doherty has been working to try to develop something of this nature via the South. If jobs are not to be located locally, can we have the option of the west as a commuter belt? Is this what we want: a region in the west that is dormant, and another in the east that is overdeveloped? Or do we want a society where people have real choice and equality?

Fermanagh's seriously underfunded roads budget for both maintenance and major projects — although we have had no major projects there for many years — is £150,000. This compares with about IR£8 million per year for Cavan, which is just across the border. Fermanagh has more miles of roads than any other of the six counties. All we are asking for is our fair share — that is all that we expect. There are cross-border strategic gateways and corridors that could be funded collaboratively with the Southern Government.

In conclusion, we need to achieve a balance of sustainable development through a strategic approach to the future. Fundamental to the overall success of a regional development strategy is the need to develop a modern integrated transport network. It is important that this strategy provide, through implementation of 'Shaping our Future', a balanced spread of development that meets the needs of everyone, east, west, urban and rural.

The Minister for Regional Development, Peter Robinson, broadly endorsed the strategy published in 'Shaping our Future', but he needs to ensure that it will be implemented equally across all the areas, east and west. Although he does not sit in the Executive, I ask him, since it is his job, to ask those in the South for any funding he can obtain. Councillors are making similar types of bids.

That is the direction in which we should be going. We should be looking for funding from any source that can help us to provide gateways and corridors which access border and cross-border areas that are relevant to us all and which will make the budget go that much further. Go raibh maith agat.

**Ms Morrice:** I support the motion, and I publicly endorse all statements describing the dire state of our public transport network and the dire need for urgent action to allow us to catch up on 30 years of serious, unacceptable and dangerous neglect.

I could raise many issues this morning, but because of time limitations I prefer to focus on a prime example of the type of neglect I have described. That, not surprisingly, is the Bangor-Belfast railway line.

A few months ago I attended a public meeting on the rail crisis in Bangor. I was shocked to hear the extent to which passenger needs have been totally disregarded.

The stories involved schoolchildren left waiting in the dark when the train broke down — we are not talking about minutes, but hours. Worried parents did not know where the children were. There were also stories about overcrowding and serious delays, sometimes on a daily basis, and about the lack of communication with passengers when problems arose.

The most important criticism is the serious compromise to the standards of safety posed by outdated, outmoded rolling stock that has been running longer than 99% of the cars on our roads. Is it any wonder that thousands of commuters travelling from Bangor to Belfast every day prefer to use their cars, rather than public transport? You have only to look at the Bangor road at rush hour to see the result — cars bumper to bumper, traffic jams and many of those cars containing only the driver. There is something wrong with our system.

The Roads Service is building a cycle lane on the Bangor-Belfast road, and I welcome that. However, those cyclists will soon be wearing oxygen masks as they travel up and down the road.

When we talk about the need for better public transport I do not need to remind anyone of the dangers that traffic congestion poses in terms of road accidents, fatalities and the devastating effect that it has on the environment. We need a major injection of funding for all public transport systems. I am not just referring to the Bangor to Belfast line. We need to open up other routes, reinstate old routes and have, as has been suggested, integrated transport networks, integrated ticketing, innovation, and new ideas coming into this system.

The public must be encouraged to use public transport. It should be fast, efficient, clean, cheap and accessible to all — a simple recipe. The use of European funds has been mentioned, but I believe that our public transport system should have the support of direct government funding. These matters should not be left to Europe alone. It is true that, when it comes to public transport, the continental Europeans understand people's needs. I was in Barcelona recently and I took a train at 11.30 pm. It was packed with young people, and classical music was being piped to them.

Why do we always have to accept second best? We deserve better. This issue undoubtedly unites the Assembly. Our Regional Development Minister has the power and the ability to do something fast and do something now. Let us go for it.

11.30 am

**The Chairman of the Regional Development Committee (Mr A Maginness):** Undoubtedly, public transport has been the Cinderella of Government policy for the past three decades. When we look at how public transport has been treated — the severe underfunding — and at the result of under-investment, in terms of road congestion and severe transportation problems, we see a baffling history of neglect on the part of Government. We see how short-sighted Governments have been in relation to public transportation. Public transportation was starved of adequate funding. It was by deliberate Government choice. It was not accidental — it happened because Governments wanted it to happen. Governments emphasised the private motor car at the expense of a proper public transportation system.

We have an opportunity to put right that historic wrong, given our new Assembly and Administration. We can create a state-of-the-art transportation system — the most modern public transportation system in this part of Europe — if we put our minds to it and if we get the necessary funding.

We have heard about the underfunding of our transport system. We know that it will take at least £183 million to bring our railway system up to an adequate standard. We need at least another £40 million for new buses and we need more money on top of that. We have a real problem with funding, but it can be done if we bring an imaginative approach to the whole problem of transportation. That is the task that the Department for Regional Development should set itself to, ably assisted by the Regional Development Committee, and I hope we can persuade the Administration to provide the necessary funding. If we do not do that we will create an even worse situation in the future. We need a good public transportation system because it is pivotal for economic growth in our society. It is not a luxury, an add-on or an extra. It is vital to economic growth.

However, I am disturbed by a number of things. First, the European money that has been earmarked for Northern Ireland does not seem to include an allocation for transportation, whether public or otherwise. I view that matter with grave concern. Secondly, the inherent conservatism in the Regional Development Department in relation to dealing with the problem is also of concern. Thirdly, I regret the fact that, under present accountancy rules in the Department of Finance and Personnel, moneys are clawed back from Translink — that is absolutely and utterly wrong.

We need a novel approach to those accountancy rules and a more imaginative attitude to the whole question of leasing, which is vital to the development of our system. The task force has blighted the development of our public transport system. I shall end by saying —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am afraid the time is up. I must be extremely strict with everyone.

**Mr A Maginness:** Mr Speaker, I was going to say —

**Ms Morrice:** Could the Assembly give the Member leave to finish his speech?

**Mr Speaker:** No, it would not be correct to say that the Assembly may give such leave. The decision on time allocation was made at the beginning of the debate, and we must stick to it.

**Mr Davis:** I should like to begin by congratulating the Minister on the start that he has made in his Department. As previous Members have said, given the lack of Government funding over the past few years, it is good to see a home-grown Minister in that Department.

I should like to endorse the thrust of the motion, particularly its emphasis on the integration of transport, not only so the left hand knows what the right hand is doing but to anchor transport within a holistic approach to regional development.

A transport debate may not set the Assembly alight in the way that other issues can, but it is an essential element in realising the goal of a more prosperous Northern Ireland that pays ever more attention to the preservation of natural habitat. Over the past few years, Northern Ireland has had to cope with the twin problems of a decline in our traditional industries and the effects of terrorist violence on economic investment. Diversification will counter the worst effects of the former, and we trust that we shall see a permanent end to the latter one day soon. However, if our inherent disadvantages as a peripheral region of the United Kingdom and the European Union are to be minimised, local industry's competitive costs must be maintained. An aim, for which the realisation of an efficient transport network is key.

We should value the integration that already exists between the bus and rail networks under the Translink umbrella. I dread mainland privatisation being visited on us here. The bus and rail systems must be built up to improve the use of public transport, and improvements to the road network should not be seen as an alternative to public transport, but as complementary to it. In particular, I am conscious of the Belfast metropolitan area's poor performance with park-and-ride schemes compared with the performances of cities of a similar size elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I hope that the Department at least, will look at parking provision at railway stations so that an entire journey need not be made by car.

Like other Members, I have priorities for transport spending, and I realise that there is no bottomless pit of resources. As we all know, in my area of Lisburn we



have been very supportive of alternative funding mechanisms to pay for necessary improvements. We can no longer expect the public purse to provide all the improvements we wish to see. Companies in Northern Ireland must provide cheap, quick access for business to ports and airports to facilitate the import and export of goods and raw materials, particularly from east to west. The easiest access to ports and airports is also essential if we are to enhance Northern Ireland further as a tourist destination.

In particular, we should be paying more attention to the role of our ports and airports in addressing the economic, transport and environmental needs of the Province. To make the best use of them we need to see more integration between travellers and public transport systems. For instance, although the main airport at Aldergrove is well situated in terms of the economic hub of Northern Ireland, it is poorly served by public transport. Equally, roads and rail links to our main ports are in need of further improvement.

I am sure we would all encourage the wider use of the public transport network. However, I am glad that there is at last a growing realisation in Government circles that the needs of rural and urban areas are different. I am convinced that through increased integration and more use of private finance, Northern Ireland can maintain its economic progress and meet the needs of its rapidly growing population.

I support the motion, and I trust that the Department will pay full attention to the views expressed by the Members here today.

**Mr Carrick:** The subject matter of the motion has been much reviewed. There have been at least five reports since 1995. We have had 'Transportation in Northern Ireland: The Way Forward', which was followed by 'Developing an Integrated Transport Policy' in 1997. In 1998 we had 'Moving Forward', a Northern Ireland transport policy statement, 'A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone', and then 'Shaping our Future', which also refers to transport issues. There have been many fine words and, of course, many laudable objectives, and the problems have been well and truly identified.

Nevertheless, public transport in Northern Ireland is still in a state of crisis, and as the motion before us says, it is in a poor state, no matter how you look at it. The infrastructure is poor, existing roads need upgrading and trunk road links are required. There are 210 miles of track that need to be upgraded — the system is now reduced to five lines. There are 58 railway stations and halts that need to be upgraded, and additional premises are required. I welcome the investment in the A1 outside Banbridge. I thank the Minister for that but remind him that a railway halt is required at Craigavon,

and station improvements are needed at Portadown and Lurgan.

Not only is there poor infrastructure; there is also poor equipment. Due to chronic under-investment the railway system is literally falling apart. One only has to look at Northern Ireland Railways' background information to the railways task force to have that confirmed. The position is dire. Safety is at risk, and it is imperative that we do something and do it soon.

As well as poor infrastructure and poor equipment, there is also poor service. I have complained about unreliability — trains arriving late and not being able to make the connections — and dilapidated furnishings. Some of the trains are dirty, and there are timetabling problems. All these issues have to be addressed. Of course, people in rural areas do not have these problems because there are no trains running in some of those areas. The people there are disadvantaged.

There have been five important transport publications by the Government, and there is another one in the making. All have identified the need and concluded that further substantial investment is required. For instance, the 1998 document 'Moving Forward' noted that

"substantial further investment will be needed in the strategic roadwork in the first quarter of the next century."

We are now in the next century and still we need to get the funding in place. The underlying thrust of the motion is that additional funding is required. Doing nothing is not an option; we must move from policy into reality. An integrated, sustainable transport strategy will only succeed when viable, efficient, alternative modes of public transport are available, and this will only come about with substantial investment.

There are, of course, a number of other contributory factors which, if implemented, will assist in the delivery of an integrated sustainable transport system.

11.45 am

A fundamental part of the strategy should be to reduce the need to travel by planning developments closer to services and amenities, by using brown-field sites and by encouraging a willingness among employers to accept, and indeed promote, flexible working arrangements, including working from home.

The key to improving public transport systems is the funding issue. The 1998 'Moving Forward' document refers to better buses and services, better railways, better transport for tourism, better movement of goods, better taxis and better access to transport by air and sea. This cannot happen without substantial investment. We have thought about this, written about it and spoken about it — it is now time to act.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Chomhairle. In addressing this issue, it is clear from the



comments made today that there is considerable common ground between all of the parties on each side of the Chamber. We are clear on the problems that we must address. We are of the view that we are adequately served, at present, by the continuing development and expansion of our seaports and the international and regional airport system. It is when we come to the question of the road infrastructure and the rail systems that we can see the consequences of years of neglect and underfunding.

The Minister for Regional Development has recently commented that the transportation system is simply unacceptable. Whether or not this is the first occasion, I want to state publicly my agreement with that view. The infrastructural deficiencies are strangling our economic potential, and that has been commonly reflected in all of the contributions this morning. We are all only too aware of the significant capital funding and revenue issues that arise while we are discussing adequate responses to this. The Minister has a genuine difficulty in formulating an effective response within the spending limitations.

The problems in our public transport systems are longstanding. In my view, they emerge from the old Stormont regime. There was an inadequate pattern of regional development policy at that time. That is clear when we consider the history of the development of the motorways. However, that is in the past. Consistent underfunding and under-resourcing during the subsequent period of direct rule has exacerbated these problems.

If all parties indicate a common assessment of the problems, and given the effective capping of capital investment by the British Treasury, then new thinking is required. I urge the Minister, as my Colleague did, to acknowledge the unacceptable nature of the public transport system. He should be prepared to engage in some lateral and innovative thinking. I urge him to take an early opportunity to meet with his counterpart in the Irish Government, to discuss a partnership approach and a strategic development plan for a public transport system for the entire island which would serve the interests, economic and social, of us all. Such a creative and innovative approach would provide unique and effective leverage to access the European Union funding that has been set aside for this specific policy area. I urge the Minister to consider that. That is not meant to be provocative. It is meant to be a reasonable, legitimate and constructive suggestion about how we can resolve this problem, which, we all agree, is strangling our potential for growth. Go raibh míle maith agat.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** Many points have been covered today, and I do not want to reiterate them. I do, however, want to lend my support to some of them, particularly those that Mr Ford made. There is no

question that we need an integrated transport policy; the question is how long we have to integrate it so that we can meet the objectives and have them written into Assembly policy. We need to focus on a ten-year period for achieving this, but we could make a start, and quite quickly too, as David Ford said, with ticketing. Mr Ford came up with the good example of the Ballymena express at Templepatrick, but this is not just about buses. We should also be able to get a ticket that can be used on buses and trains. If those were dovetailed, it would be quite good.

The Little report talked about needing investment of £183 million. What shocked me about that £183 million is that it was for safety measures alone. To improve the railway system overall, we need £300 million, not just £183 million. That is a point we need to look at.

I talked to a colleague of mine from Coleraine who travels by car and by train. He tells me that if one travels from Coleraine to Belfast, it takes two hours or more on the train. The same journey can be done by car in one hour and twenty minutes. I do not know whether that involves breaking the speed limit or not, but at least it is in the comfort of one's car. He also tells me that the train is cold, damp, unattractive and uncomfortable.

We continually talk about wanting to get people out of cars, but how can we do that? We need to have attractive alternatives. I suggest that we need adequately funded public transport. We need priority bus lanes and dovetailing timetables so that public transport can work.

In south Belfast a few weeks ago, Translink decided to introduce new bus stops and a new timetable. The new timetable showed the new bus stops, but the old ticket prices. People got irritated when they found out that they were going to have to pay another 20% per ticket. Also some of the timetables were old ones, so people were at the wrong places at the wrong times. These are just some examples of the problems. There are things that we can do at the very beginning.

We also need to do something about our airports. It has been said that our airports are strategically placed in economic terms, particularly Aldergrove. However, to get from Aldergrove to the city of Londonderry, I understand, is difficult. If one wants to get to Belfast, one can go by the airbus, which is quick. The Minister needs to talk to the management of the airports to find out if they are prepared to pay some of the costs. I think that they would be interested in looking at the costs and at putting some of their money into a rail link. We could have rail links with, for example, Londonderry airport and also the airport at Belfast harbour. We need to pursue those sort of things that would not just help businessmen, or the people who live in Northern Ireland, they would also encourage tourists — many tourists find it hard to get around the Province.

**Mr Poots:** This is an interesting debate, and I thank Mr Byrne for bringing it forward. Some Members seem to want to use this debate as a “whinger’s charter”. I refer in particular to Mr Dallat’s very poor and inept contribution. He seeks to blame the Minister for the problems that the railways and roads have had over the years.

We might as well blame Minister Rodgers for the BSE crisis, Minister Farren for the tuition fees, and Minister Durkan for the lack of money from the British Exchequer. I do not intend to go down the same silly line as Mr Dallat. It is time that he got real, grew up and moved away from council-chamber politics. He should realise that he is now in a place where he can make decisions, not just whinge and moan about what is going on.

We need to back up what we are saying today. We can tell our local newspapers that we spoke in support of public transport, but did we? Do we support public transport? Are we prepared to put it on the record that we will not take the money that John Prescott will allocate to Northern Ireland for its railways and distribute it to health, education, agriculture or some other budget? Are we prepared to earmark that money for the sole purpose for which it was intended, or are we prepared to let it be diverted to other areas? Do we make a statement today but not back it up? I believe we would be failing in our duty if we were to do that. It is evident that public transport needs massive investment — £2 billion over the next 10 years for the railways alone — and one would then have to look at the bus service.

We have a lot of space in Northern Ireland for the development of our roads and public transport. We cannot do without the roads network. Another £200 million a year is needed to maintain our roads in their current condition — never mind carry out major improvements. Are we prepared to pay for this? Are we prepared to do what is required, or are we going to sit back and blame the Minister? There is a saying in our part of the world that you cannot whistle without an upper lip. The Minister needs the money if he is to deliver a good rail network and a good bus service, not only for taking children to and from school, but one which will be used by people travelling back and forward to work. If you want decent roads throughout the Province, the Minister needs the money to implement this. *[Interruption]* He definitely can whistle. I welcome the commitment to major safety improvements and the undertaking that the railways will not operate unless they are safe. Safety issues are important and the general public may feel that our railways are unsafe. They are not what they should be, and we need to look at safety management, safety culture, operations, structures, the permanent way, signalling and telecoms, level crossings and

engineering. All these matters need to be dealt with and improved.

I would like to find out how much terrorism has cost the railway service over the years. I vividly recall, morning after morning, switching on the radio to hear that the Belfast to Dublin line was not running that day because either a device had been planted at Killeen or the trains had been attacked at Lurgan. Various attacks have been carried out over the years, and I would like to know how much it has cost to replace all the buses that were burned out during riots in Belfast and other places.

I would also like to know if this task force serves a useful purpose. My Colleague indicated that there have been five reports over the last five years — it is not reports we need, it is action. Does the task force serve a useful purpose, or did the previous Minister for Regional Development introduce it as an excuse not to make the decisions that needed to be made?

I want to support the motion, but we need more than that: we need the money to back it up.

**Mr Speaker:** Although a number of Members still wish to speak, we have come to the end of the time allocated for contributions. I therefore call the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Peter Robinson.

12.00

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr P Robinson):** Many points have been raised during the debate. If I cannot touch on all of them in the course of my response, I shall, of course, do so in writing. I welcome this debate and am grateful to Mr Byrne for availing of the opportunity to raise this issue and start a debate in our community as a whole about this vital issue.

There is common ground among all Members. We have inherited a transport system that is in an appalling state. I am determined to bring about major improvements in public transport and to provide Northern Ireland with the system that it needs and deserves. Substantial additional resources will be required. Members will play an important role in ensuring that public transport receives the necessary share of the Northern Ireland cake. I will return to the matter of resources later.

First, I want to differentiate between funding for buses and for trains. Bus transport receives a relatively low level of subsidy, whereas rail transport requires to be heavily subsidised. This is the case, not just in Northern Ireland, but in Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and throughout Europe. My Department gives grants to the bus companies to cover fuel duty payments and 50% of the cost of new buses. Our aim is that vehicles be replaced as they reach their target replacement ages: 12 years for coaches, and 18 years for buses.

Over a period this would give average fleet ages of six and nine years respectively, which would be similar to the English average fleet age target of seven and a half years. Our problem is that currently we do not have sufficient resources to grant-aid bus replacements at the rate needed. Consequently, the bus companies have to keep buses in service long after they reach their target replacement age. This is clearly unsatisfactory in terms of customer comfort and bus reliability. In the current year my Department has only £1.7 million for bus purchase grants, while over £20 million would be needed to meet our objective. That gives some idea of the shortfall.

Turning to the more intractable problems of the railways, I am sure that all Members have known for some time that the railways face serious problems. The release of the A D Little review of railway safety last March brought home the scale and immediacy of these problems. Briefly, the review said that while Northern Ireland Railways was currently operating at not unreasonable safety risk levels, an estimated £183 million, plus or minus 30%, would be needed over the next 10 years to maintain safe operation. The review went on to say that most of that £183 million — £117 million, to be precise — would be needed in the next three years. To put these sums in context for Members, last year Northern Ireland Railways — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr C Murphy:** Apologies.

**Mr P Robinson:** Last year Northern Ireland Railways received grants and subsidies of just under £20 million. Now we are looking for £117 million over three years. Obviously, if we are to keep the current railway network operating, the Assembly will have to allocate substantial extra resources to it. I will come to the Member's point in a minute.

When my predecessor, Mr Adam Ingram, was presented with the A D Little report last March, he decided to establish the railways task force to identify the costs and benefits, both monetary and non-monetary, of a range of options for the future of the railway network in Northern Ireland. I suspect that Adam Ingram was wearing his finance and personnel hat, rather than his regional development hat, when he devised those requirements. Be it Adam Ingram or Mark Durkan, the Minister of Finance and Personnel would require any Minister to make a business case for any proposal they were bringing forward that required such substantial finance.

The work of the task force includes a large-scale public consultation exercise, which is currently under way. There have been some complaints about the limited period allocated for the consultation exercise, but Members should realise that the task force must

complete its work in time for its conclusions to be considered in this year's spending review.

The stark reality is that if we do not succeed in obtaining more resources for the railways in the spending review, then a large proportion of the railway network will close down in a piecemeal fashion. Northern Ireland Railways has repeatedly said that it will not run trains unless it is satisfied that it is safe to do so. It has my full support on that.

Unless more resources are allocated to improve the infrastructure of the railways, it will become unsafe to run trains on many lines. Unless Northern Ireland Railways can purchase new trains, the level of service will deteriorate as old trains repeatedly break down and are taken out of service permanently. The motion calls for a comprehensive integrated public transport policy to be implemented. I am in complete agreement with this sentiment, and I will explain the steps I am taking to deliver such a policy.

The preparation of the regional development strategy is nearing completion. It has become clear that the provision of a modern, sustainable, integrated transport system which will facilitate the rapid, efficient, predictable and safe movement of people and goods is a key factor in the successful implementation of the strategy.

Within the Department for Regional Development I have established a dedicated regional transportation division which is tasked to formulate a 10-year regional transportation strategy. I agree with Mr B Hutchinson's remarks. It is essential that we do this on a 10-year basis, which gives us the opportunity to implement decisions taken by the Assembly. The transportation strategy will set out a bold vision for transport, including the expected outcomes and the necessary steps required to achieve these. The strategy will serve as a daughter document to the regional development strategy. Subject to the ultimate approval of the Assembly — and necessary resources — it will have the potential to transform transport in the region, to get the public back on public transport and to provide a modern integrated transportation system that will strive to rival the best in other comparable regions of Europe.

I have alerted the Regional Development Committee to the fact that a sum in the region of £2 billion over the next 10 years — additional to the wholly inadequate current budget of just over £200 million per annum — will be required to transform transportation in the region. This is in the context of a comprehensive presentation which I gave to the Committee on 14 June. My Department will happily provide copies of this to Members on request, particularly to those who are seriously interested in tackling these important issues. I have allocated significant departmental resources to service the railways task force established by Adam



Ingram. Some 21 sub-committees are working on the completion of an interim report, which I will receive at the end of July.

With regard to the future of railways let me be very clear. I have a presumption towards rail. It is an important strategic regional asset, but I will not compromise on the safety of the travelling public and Northern Ireland Railways employees. Either the Assembly will decide to have a modern and positively subsidised rail service that we can all be proud of, or we will, de facto, end up dramatically curtailing that network. The days of indecision are over. The A D Little review simply confirmed what we have known for years. It is time to put up or close up. For our part we will ensure that the Assembly has the earliest opportunity in the autumn to consider the importance of the railways task force interim report. I trust that the remarks made in support of rail in the House today will, by that time, have been translated into practical action.

I will respond to some of the comments made during the debate. Mr Byrne, happily, set the scene so well in moving the motion that he has enabled me to leave out many elements of the transport issue as he had already covered them. He made a strong case. He outlined a history of neglect which many Members have agreed with. Under both Labour and Conservative Governments, the money that should have been going into our public transportation system has gone elsewhere. Now we face the consequences of 30 years of neglect of the system.

I acknowledge the important role that the Assembly Committee responsible for the scrutiny of the Department for Regional Development has played in regard to this issue. I trust that it will continue to do so as we deal in detail with transportation policy.

The Member referred to the possibility of an additional 70,000 vehicles being on our roads over the next 25 years. It is going to be something like 10 times that. It will be about 700,000. In the next 20 years we expect the number of vehicles on our roads to double. If people consider that there is congestion now, then let them imagine, as the Member for North Down did, what congestion will be like in the future.

Mr McFarland referred to the congestion problems that presently exist. He also wisely related the issue of transport to the regional strategic framework. He pointed out the conundrum that we all face in wanting to get people out of their cars and onto public transport, but that they are not going to get onto public transport until we provide them with a comfortable, regular and dependable service. That requires funding. The Member for East Antrim, Mr Roger Hutchinson, brought us back to road issues. He was right to do that, because the majority of our public transport users use buses and the road system and that, therefore, is a key and vital issue. It is an issue that must figure prominently when it

comes to the necessity for funding. He mentioned one of my predecessors, Lord Dubs, referring to the shambles. I do not think that a much more appropriate word could be found for what exists, although I can imagine the effect that it had in the Department when he used the term.

In relation to the railways, the Member for East Antrim was right to say that the trains are 30 years old, that in many cases the lines need to be relaid, and that if this did not happen, a reduction in services would result.

**Mr Gibson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr P Robinson:** If the Member is brief.

**Mr Gibson:** I welcome the debate. I also welcome the £15 million for the A5 road. The SDLP and its cohorts in Sinn Féin grudgingly did not acknowledge it. They said it was only a line on the map. I welcome the provision of the Toome bypass. I further welcome the fact that the A5 is to include the Strabane bypass, the Newtownstewart bypass and the Omagh throughpass, which were all predicted not to happen. Thank goodness for a progressive Minister.

**Mr P Robinson:** I am glad that I gave way. *[Laughter]* I shall be quite happy to give way again if anybody else wants to make similar comments.

The Member for South Antrim, Mr Ford, made a very useful contribution. I agree with him entirely that, on one hand, I am looking for more funds for railways and buses in Northern Ireland, and, on the other hand, through the Chancellor's initiative £25 million is being clawed away from the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company and Translink. It just does not make sense, and clearly that issue needs to be addressed. However, I think that the Member will recognise that the emphasis of the Chancellor's package was one of putting money into roads. The whole emphasis of what I am doing is on telling people that we need to get off the roads and into public transport. Mr Ford also gave me a very good cue when he referred to quality bus corridors.

In the early hours of this morning, while the Member was still in his bed, I was travelling by bus along a quality bus corridor. I recommend it to all the people on the Saintfield Road. The Saintfield Road is the fourth busiest road into Belfast, after the two motorways and the Sydenham bypass. We had a very smooth run on the most up to date transport in a new, quality bus lane. I hope that the public will take advantage of this method of getting into Belfast cheaper and faster than by car. That is the only way that we are going to get people onto public transport.

I thought that some of Mr Dallat's remarks dragged the debate down a little, and I will leave them to the side. However, I will deal with his comments relating to transport and the comparison with the Irish Republic.



Proportionately, I wish I had the resources to put into public transport and roads that my counterpart in the Irish Republic has. Do not take the colour coding as being indicative of anything else, but I am green with envy at the funds that are available. It is probably the kiss of death to have a Sinn Féin Member saying that he agrees with me during the course of the debate and I will probably be cross-examined by my party leader afterwards.

12.15 pm

Mr Dallat raised a number of issues about public expenditure. In the Irish Republic, public spending is supplemented by European structural funds, and a substantial amount of money comes in from the private sector. If I had had more time I would have gone into that issue and how it has contributed to our situation in Northern Ireland.

As regards the issue of being in the Executive, let me make it clear to Members — and I know they like to make party political points — that the neglect that we have had for 30 years comes as the result of Ministers who were in joined-up Government. It did not help them in the past. Perhaps we need somebody outside the Government blowing the whistle, saying what needs to be done on the railways and not being compromised by loyalty to other Colleagues in the Executive. Perhaps Members should rejoice in the fact that they have a Minister who is not tethered by responsibilities to Colleagues in an Executive.

One of my Colleagues asked a question about the cost of terrorism. Apart from the emotional cost to the staff and employees of Translink, £300 million has been lost as the result of the destruction of buses, trains, and bus stations. That is without even touching on the issue of the cost of disruption and the loss of money that would have come in using those services. That money would pay for A D Little, and you would have plenty left over to buy buses as well. It is an important matter.

The issues involved are complex, and the cost implications are considerable. The immediate public transport funding problems can only be solved by increasing the public expenditure allocation from the Northern Ireland block. In this year's spending review I am seeking an additional £250 million for public transport, and that will be necessary for each of the next three years. Expenditure on this level will enable us to start improving public transport from its current poor state, and set us on our way to providing a public transport service of a standard which the people of Northern Ireland desire and deserve.

Within weeks the United Kingdom Government will announce the 2000 spending review figures, which will likely signal a significant increase in funding for transport. There has been press speculation that up to

£140 billion will be made available over the next decade, half of which might come from the private sector. It is essential that we advance the Northern Ireland transport agenda in tandem with any new priority in Great Britain. We must insist that Northern Ireland at least receives the Barnett hypothecation. Northern Ireland must secure the maximum possible benefit from any such public expenditure decisions taken at national level to advance transport. On the assumption that the Barnett hypothecation can be secured for Northern Ireland, those funds must be allocated for the purposes envisaged and not diverted elsewhere. This autumn we will begin to rectify the years of under-investment in transportation and we will thereby reinvigorate our railways, modernise our bus fleet and services, and improve our strategic roads network.

After reading the motion, it is clear that the proposer has managed to get round the constraints, which you referred to earlier, about financial matters. That is because the motion contains a commitment to follow a comprehensive and integrated public transport policy. The commitment is contained in the word "implementing". The motion does not ask for the preparation of a policy because the Member knows we were preparing it. It does not indicate anything about an amount of money because the Member knows that. It calls for implementation, which is the putting in place of financial funds to allow the Minister to carry out the task.

**Mr Byrne:** I would like to thank everybody who has spoken in the debate. I think there is a consensus of support for the sentiments of the motion. There is no doubt about it, every one of us here and the wider public are extremely concerned about the current state of the public-transport system.

A number of common themes have run through the debate, the most important being public safety. Many referred to the Little report and the areas of concern it flagged up. Translink have stated that on the Bangor to Belfast line, trains that should be able to do 70 miles an hour currently cannot travel at that speed for safety reasons. They are currently restricted to doing 50 miles an hour, and by the end of next year, if there is no new investment in that line, that speed will be reduced to 30 miles an hour. That is the extent of the crisis on one line. Our railway network is small — we have railway lines from Derry to Belfast, from Belfast to Bangor, from Larne to Belfast and the southern line to Dublin — and if it were to be reduced further, it would be a joke.

Public transport is currently very much in vogue. Members and the public at large are talking more and more about the quality-of-life issue; they are talking about the environment, and they are talking about traffic congestion. Several hundred thousand new cars are

going to be adding to this congestion over the next 20 years, especially in the Greater Belfast area, and so I am glad that this sort of debate is now opening up and that we are beginning to focus on the real issues.

As someone who comes from a constituency that has no railways whatsoever, I could be asked why I get involved in such a debate. I am the regional development spokesperson for my party, and there is an onus on all of us to consider the problem throughout Northern Ireland and not just in our own home patch.

Northern Ireland's economic potential was referred to by a number of Members, and I fully agree that if we are going to develop this regional economy, then having an adequate, integrated public transport system is essential. Inward investors are greatly influenced by communications and by transport networks, and those of us who live 75 miles from Belfast know the handicap of having a poor transport system in our part of the region and appreciate how that affects us.

A number of Members, including the Minister, made reference to the regional development strategy. This is the most crucial issue that has been raised in Northern Ireland over the last 10 years. We are beginning to look at the future. 'Shaping Our Future' is the phrase that was used on the original document. There is an onus on the Department and its civil servants to listen to the issues and the concerns of elected representatives, be they councillors, Members of this Assembly or, indeed, MPs. Reference has been made to this dichotomy between bus and rail. Many Members, including David Ford, mentioned the fact that there needs to be a common ticketing system between rail and bus services — something which should certainly be feasible, since Translink owns and manages both. I hope that that is something they could introduce.

Jane Morrice mentioned the problems that passengers have on the railways, and I fully endorse her comments. Many people have said that timetabling is difficult and that there is no co-ordination between bus and rail. Again I hope that this is something Translink could improve upon.

However we need to pay tribute to Translink, who have been operating for 30 years with very little public investment. They have been doing a stitch-up job in managing to keep a system going despite 30 years of the troubles, during which buses and trains were bombed. We should, therefore, pay tribute to the Translink staff who managed to keep a public transport system going through the bad times.

There has been much discussion about funding, and we all recognise that massive public investment will be required to address the needs of the public transport system. I contend that, in the past, Ministers in charge of Northern Ireland's public transport did not fully reflect

the concerns and wishes of people who wanted to see greater investment in it. We now have a new devolved Assembly, and this is something that Members will have to face up to.

Mr Robinson is the Minister with the luxury of this job, and no doubt he will be the person who will have to lobby strongly for the necessary investment. The Regional Development Committee is convinced that we need investment in public transport, but we do not have executive authority. It is the Executive Committee and the individual Ministers that have to make the case and lobby for this funding. I hope that that will happen and that the funding will be achieved.

A number of Members mentioned the many reports on transport that have been produced, and I fully accept that. Mervyn Carrick said that there have been five reports since 1995. One could almost say that we are suffering from "reportitis", since there have been so many. But every Member is looking for action.

It is remarkable that the only part of the railway network that has improved has been the Belfast-Dublin railway line — the Enterprise. It has received substantial investment over the past 10 years. The moral is very clear: if there is adequate investment in the railways and buses, more people will use them. With the necessary investment, there is the potential for more people to use public transport. People need to be encouraged to get out of their cars and use public transport, but they will only do that if the alternative meets their needs and is attractive.

We all know — this is especially true of those of us who live in rural areas — that the public transport system is inadequate. For many years I have commented about five bus fleets — education and library board buses — that are largely idle. They are only used in the mornings and evenings, and it seems to me that this is rather wasteful.

A number of Members, including Mitchel McLaughlin, mentioned North/South co-operation. That is one of the benefits of real co-operation on an economic and social level. We cannot run our public transport in isolation, especially those of us who live in the border areas. There needs to be greater co-ordination between services in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland so that they complement each other, and it will require much greater collaboration to realise that.

The amount of resources required is probably our biggest challenge, but since Mr Prescott is the Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and since the Labour Government regard the use of public transport — the previous Government's policy favoured road transport — as a desirable policy, we should be able to make a strong case. I hope that the Minister can get together with other Ministers in the Executive,

including the Minister of Finance, Mr Durkan, and make this strong case. We are all looking for equality of treatment, and, if the application of the Barnett formula is around 40-1, surely we can make that case.

The European Union was referred to in the context of the structural funds, which are extremely important. The Belfast-Dublin railway line was upgraded largely because of European structural funds, and I believe that the Belfast-Bangor line is going to be improved with 75% grant aid from them. I hope that there can be some examination of the transitional programme's application to Brussels, something else that will require the presentation of a strong, co-ordinated case. I thank Members for their support.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly notes with concern the poor state of the public transport system in Northern Ireland and proposes that the Minister for Regional Development should urgently implement a comprehensive and integrated public transport policy to redress this problem.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.30 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair) —*

## ULSTER CANCER FOUNDATION REPORT

*1.00 pm*

**Mrs E Bell:** I beg to move

That this Assembly welcomes the Ulster Cancer Foundation's document 'Cancer Services — Invest Now' and urges the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to implement, as a matter of urgency, the recommendations contained in the report.

May I start by saying that a delegation from the Ulster Cancer Foundation successfully lobbied at Westminster last week, and were promised support for the document that we are now debating. A delegation will make a presentation to our Health Committee tomorrow. However, we thought it appropriate to debate this motion today so that all Members can hopefully express their support for the funding needed for cancer services. I am delighted, as co-chair of the cross-party group on cancer issues, to present this motion today.

In the Ulster Cancer Foundation's offices some weeks ago we had the public launch of the document 'Cancer Services — Invest Now'. It was a moving experience for all who attended. Among the speakers, who included Assembly Members, were patients and carers who told their own stories and experiences about when their cancer was diagnosed. From their contributions, it was obvious that early diagnosis and treatment was vital, and that it was also necessary to have greater support and more information.

It was made clear that proper financial and manpower resources are dangerously — and I use that word deliberately — inadequate for the prevention and treatment of the many types of cancer that are prevalent in Northern Ireland today. It is widely expected that deaths from cancer will outstrip those of Northern Ireland's other killer, heart disease, in five years time.

Cancer is a condition feared by many, and with good reason. One in three people will be diagnosed with some sort of cancer; one in nine before the age of 45. More males than females die from cancer, and one of the reasons for this is the reluctance of men to go to clinics, which could lead to early detection and successful treatment — a publicity campaign some months ago illustrated that point. Statistics are sometimes misleading, but unfortunately those stating that we have had 8,700 new cases and approximately 3,700 deaths from cancer each year are facts, and if the situation is to change, it is likely that it will not be for the better.

At the risk of being overdramatic — although for the numbers of Members presently in the Chamber it may not be too overdramatic — there is not a Member here today who has not, or will not, experience one form of cancer either personally or through their family or friends.

This was also the case at one of the first meetings of our cross-party group, when each of us gave our reasons, based on our personal stories, for supporting the Ulster Cancer Foundation, which has given 30 years of commitment, help and direct support to cancer sufferers and their families. I know that other organisations are also engaged in similar work, and credit must be given to them as well, since without them, even more research and equipment would be needed than is the case at present.

I come now to the terms of the motion. The document 'Cancer Services — Invest Now' is a response to the recent report by Dr Henrietta Campbell, 'Cancer Services — Investing for the Future'. The Ulster Cancer Foundation's report was drawn up in association with leading cancer clinicians such as Prof Roy Spence and Prof Patrick Johnston from Belfast City Hospital's cancer centre, from cancer units and from the excellent patients' forum of the Ulster Cancer Foundation itself. It heartily supports the Campbell report's major recommendations, but states that investment for the reorganisation and development of cancer services should happen not in the future, but now. This opinion is based on the day-to-day knowledge and experience of clinicians and on research which clearly points out that patients living in the United Kingdom have approximately a 20%-30% worse survival rate than their counterparts living in countries such as Switzerland and Holland and the USA.

The objectives of the Campbell report are also welcomed, and it is acknowledged that these major changes would result in significant benefits for cancer patients, including, among other things, on-site access to a full range of acute services and a high-quality patient environment, something which is extremely important. Many aspects of the report are being implemented, but there are still problems with the proper training of staff and with providing specialists in, for instance, chemotherapy treatment.

There is also a clear need for more oncologists for actual diagnosis. There are 10 oncologists rather than the 20 or 30 necessary to enable the number of patients we have here to be dealt with expertly and quickly.

Great strides have been made in the reduction of deaths and in the increase of successful outcomes in breast cancer cases, and work is being done on the early detection of other common cancers such as stomach and prostate. The most common type is, of course, still regrettably lung cancer.

Resources must be ring-fenced. I know that the Minister is aware and supportive of this, but expert staff and resources must be put into the new cancer centres as quickly as possible to save lives. We cannot afford to wait. It is estimated that proper implementation of the Campbell report will require £24 million instead of the current £13.9 million. Such an increase, although massive at first sight, will be well worth it for every family in the Province.

Such investment would directly save lives and improve the situation for cancer sufferers. That is the bottom line of which we must never lose sight. I hope that Members will support the motion.

I have said enough about what is happening, but it would be fitting to end my address by stating the conclusion of the Ulster Cancer Foundation's document 'Cancer Services — Invest Now':

"It is no longer acceptable for us as a society to accept a situation where a set of diseases that affects one in three of our population and results in the death of one in four people is not adequately resourced and tackled in order to bring our survival figures for cancer up to those seen in the best European countries such as Switzerland and Holland or indeed that seen within the United States. It is therefore imperative that we as a society speak out about the inadequacy of resourcing, both in terms of personnel, and the provision and development of this clinical service for patients until such time as this issue is properly addressed."

I hope that Members will support the motion.

**The Chairman of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee (Dr Hendron):** First, I would like to thank Mrs Eileen Bell and Mr Paul Berry for bringing this most important subject before the Assembly. Mr Michael Woods, the chief executive of the Ulster Cancer Foundation, who is sitting in the Gallery, has given many years' service in the fight against cancer and is about to retire. I know we all wish him well.

I have no doubt that every Member welcomes the Ulster Cancer Foundation's document 'Cancer Services — Invest Now'. We most certainly urge the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to implement as a matter of urgency the recommendations in the report. I would like to thank the Minister for being here for the debate.

The facts are there for all of us to see. The professional experts and statisticians have spoken and action is needed now. Furthermore, I guess that every Member has someone in his immediate or extended family who has cancer or who has died from it. Therefore, we can no longer be complacent. The Ulster Cancer Foundation, Action Cancer, MacMillan Cancer Relief and similar organisations, all deserve our thanks. I cannot help but think of Dr Gerry Lynch who worked for so many years in Belvoir Park Hospital — it used to be called Montgomery House. He played a major role there and has himself succumbed to cancer.



A key concern of patients is waiting time and the uncertainty that produces. I am not just talking about waiting time for the first appointment but about the time spent waiting for test results, for further appointments and for treatment to start. The Calman Hine Report, to which Mrs Bell has already referred, was the first major report in these islands that attempted to draw the various strands of cancer, diagnosis and treatment together. It was a major report and it led to a re-organisation of cancer services throughout the United Kingdom. Following that, our own Chief Medical Officer, Dr Ella Campbell, produced her report, which has also been referred to. Many of her recommendations have been or are being implemented.

The Belfast City Hospital as everyone knows is to contain the main cancer centre for Northern Ireland and be supplemented by four cancer units. Patients should be managed by multi-disciplinary cancer teams. That is a key point in all this re-organisation. That was the reason the move was made to Belfast City Hospital, and those who had loved ones treated in Belvoir Park Hospital felt very strongly about that. Indeed, at one time I supported retaining all the services at Belvoir Park, but I was wrong. The experts on the subject were totally correct, so services including radiotherapy and chemotherapy, are to be situated at the City Hospital. Its cancer registry, on which there has been a major move forward, is to be adequately resourced. It is only in recent times that we have had a register of cancer in Northern Ireland and, indeed, on the island of Ireland. Dr Anna Gavin is leading on this. Since we now have a standardisation of the figures for cancer, proper comparisons can be made with the figures of other countries.

With regard to cancer research, Members will know that last year a memorandum was signed at Stormont by the then Health Minister, George Howarth, the Republic's Health Minister, Brian Cowen, and by the Secretary of Health from the United States.

Dr Ric Klausner, Director of the National Institute for Cancer at Bethesda in Maryland, played a pivotal role in these matters as did Prof Patrick Johnston, professor of Oncology at Queen's and Prof Roy Spence, senior cancer surgeon at the City Hospital. I am delighted to see the Minister of the Environment here, Mr Sam Foster, as he was a spokesperson for health at that time. He and I played some small role in promoting that.

While this development is to be warmly welcomed, we must nevertheless face the fact that the amount currently spent on cancer services in Northern Ireland is around £13.9 million, yet it would take about £24 million per year to provide the type of services needed. I agree with the conclusions in the Ulster Cancer Foundation's document, and this point was also made by Mrs Bell. It is no longer acceptable for us as a

society to accept a situation in which so many people are dying of cancer.

We must bring our survival figures for cancer up to those in other countries such as Switzerland, Holland and the United States of America. Prevention is better than cure and early diagnosis usually leads to a much better prognosis. In comparison with cardiovascular disease, it is projected that within the next five years cancer will be the biggest killer in our society.

*1.15 pm*

The Health Promotion Agency and health action zones must be properly resourced to teach our children and young people to have a healthier lifestyle. Much will be said over the coming months about health action zones. Each child and young person should be encouraged to know and understand the European code against cancer. It should be mandatory in the education system that each child be taught the cancer code. I pay tribute to our Chief Medical Officer, Dr Etta Campbell, in whose annual report a lot of these matters have been highlighted.

Apart from genetic factors, smoking is by far the biggest cause of cancer in Northern Ireland. Excess and persistent alcohol intake is another factor. Research throughout the world has consistently shown that increasing your daily intake of vegetables and fresh fruit results in better health. I do not have a share in the production of fruits and vegetables, but five portions of fruit and vegetables, in whatever combination, on a daily basis can play a major role in cancer prevention. That point is accepted round the western world and parents should emphasise that to their children. For years, cereals with high fibre content have also been known to help prevent cancer.

Then we have the sun and suntan. A dermatologist in the Belfast City Hospital gave a talk one time on the subject of melanoma and the many deaths that result from melanoma in Northern Ireland. Years ago we remember people in movements in the United States of America saying "Black is beautiful". In relation to melanoma, white is beautiful and people should remember that. I have never seen a happy face lying in the sun on my many holidays. I would love to elaborate on that point, but I am sure that I would be ruled out of order.

Obesity is another factor, and we need to limit fatty foods. Physical activity on a daily basis is very important. These points are all known. Young people nowadays do not participate in enough physical activity. Certainly, families that queue up for burgers and such rubbishy food — and I have been guilty of this many times — are preparing their children for atherosclerosis in their coronary arteries in later years. They are also setting up the conditions for cancer.

At least two out of three cancer-related deaths are preventable. I said at the beginning that action is needed now. I know the Minister wants to do everything she can, but I do implore her to take that action and to make sure that the necessary resources are ring-fenced.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Given the number of Members who wish to speak, we can afford 10 minutes for each, 15 minutes for the Member winding-up and for the Minister. That will keep us within the two hours allocated for this debate.

**Mr Foster:** I am also a member of the all-party group on cancer care, and I am keen to contribute to the debate as cancer care is an issue of the utmost importance to us all. Responsibility for cancer care falls to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. As future funding for health has yet to be decided by the Executive, I wish to make it clear that I am speaking from the Back Benches as a Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone and not as a Minister or a Member of the Executive Committee.

In spite of the research and technical advances, which have been made in almost every other area of medicine, the stark fact remains that cancer affects one third of the local population and results in the death of almost one person in four. The death rate from cancer in Northern Ireland has almost tripled since the state was founded in 1921 and has even doubled since the introduction of the National Health Service. In the past 30 years we could have argued that we were at war with terrorism. It is now time to declare a new war on cancer, which will soon be the biggest killer in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland more people are killed by cancer in one year than have died during the past 30 years of the troubles. Each year three thousand seven hundred people die due to cancer. If you break this figure down it is the equivalent of 308 people dying each month, 71 each week and 10 each day. That is frightening — in fact, it is terrifying.

As many of you know, I was my party's former spokesman on health, and I was also a member of the Health Committee in the Northern Ireland Forum. During that period, I was directly involved with Prof Roy Spence, Prof Paddy Johnston and Dr Joe Hendron in securing a tripartite agreement with the National Cancer Institute in the USA and with health representatives in the Republic of Ireland to initiate greater awareness of cancer and to promote excellence in cancer care in Northern Ireland.

My involvement increased my admiration for the tremendous work of Prof Spence, Prof Johnston, Mr Michael Wood and his colleagues in the Ulster Cancer Foundation. I am well aware of the competing claims from various sectors for public funding but I believe

that the case made by the Ulster Cancer Foundation report is very well founded.

Everyone accepts that there is presently no cure for every case of cancer, but there is a great deal of evidence which shows that survival rates could be much improved if we funded and provided services and facilities flexible enough to meet the ever increasing demands. Service provision will be expensive, and the implementation of the report would require that we almost double the current spend on cancer services from £14 million to £24 million per year. However, the implementation of the report would, if we go by evidence from America and some European countries, result in a 20% to 30% improvement in survival rates. From a political, social, medical and moral perspective that would indeed be money well spent.

Questions will be asked about where the money might come from. The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, received over £22 billion from mobile phone licences. If that money were directed into cancer care in the United Kingdom there would be no great problem.

The Ulster Cancer Foundation is not calling for money to fund cancer services from other parts of the health budget to facilitate this but is, in fact, calling for an increase in the block grant from Westminster. As things stand, and in the continuing absence of further funding, it is calculated that in a decade cancer could be the number one killer in Northern Ireland, responsible for almost 30 deaths in every hundred.

As an Assembly, we cannot, we should not, and we must not accept a situation where a set of diseases, known under the common name of cancer, continue to either kill or seriously impair an increasing number of our population. The motto of the Ulster Cancer Foundation is "from care to cure". The Assembly cannot provide the cure for cancer but we do have the responsibility for ensuring that cancer services are given the highest possible priority in the allocation of funds to provide the necessary care. I am pleased to support the motion.

**Mr R Hutchinson:** I welcome the debate on this timely and very important issue. I support the motion and thank the Members for bringing it to the House. Unique is the man or woman who can stand here today and say that he or she has not been affected by cancer in some way whether through personal experience or the loss of a loved one. We have heard how one in three people can expect to experience cancer at some time during their lifetime. Given such alarming statistics, 36 of the 108 Members in the Chamber can expect to have first-hand experience of this illness at some time during their lifetime.

One in four of the population will die from this disease. This is the reality that we must seek to confront.

In my constituency of East Antrim, as in others, the death toll is rising on an annual basis. Between 1993 and 1995, 1,827 new cases were reported in the Northern Board area; 816 deaths were confirmed, and concern is growing. By 2007, cancer will have overtaken heart disease as the number-one cause of fatality in Northern Ireland. I am glad that much progress has been made in recent years to break down the wall of silence that previously surrounded cancer and cancer deaths.

MacMillan Cancer Relief, with its open-space campaign, pointed the way towards identifying a need to talk, and thankfully we are doing that here today. The Ulster Cancer Foundation's 'Invest Now' campaign has much to recommend it. However, while promoting itself as a comprehensive document is not a solution to providing a better oncology service in Northern Ireland, it is a tentative first step in the right direction. The document is a broad overview of the optimum funding that must be secured to ensure an equity of access to high quality care for all.

The document raises many questions which must be answered. How much of the money will go towards primary care? How much has been earmarked for palliative care? How many posts is it anticipated that this additional money will fund? What is the intended timescale for phasing in these appointments? The need exists not only to treat the number of new cases arising in the population more quickly, but also the number of prevalent cases — that is the number diagnosed in previous years who are still alive. What percentage of the funding will be used to allow these patients to have treatment near their homes? Each year more people are surviving due to new treatments, but many may need help in coping with the psychological and physical aspects of life after being diagnosed as having cancer.

In our race to find the ultimate cure, we must not forget those who have fought this battle and won. One key concern people have is waiting time. I want to see this money invested in the re-design of services to meet the needs of patients, to reduce waiting times for referral, investigation and treatment and to tackle head-on the shortage that presently exists in the number of specialist medical and skilled nursing staff in Northern Ireland.

The Calman Hine Report of 1995 agrees with the Ulster Cancer Foundation's recommendation for a cancer centre plus four cancer units based on the view that specialisation will improve outcomes. However, we must ensure that all four units receive an adequate share of the funding and that training initiatives are put in place to provide the necessary skills for doctors, nurses and other professionals allied to medicine. Northern Ireland is well below its European counterparts in standards of care and rates of survival, all too often

ranking alongside eastern block countries. By supporting this motion today we can at least begin to redress the balance.

I support the motion.

1.30 pm

**Mr O'Connor:** I too support the motion. The statistics are that in Northern Ireland, one in three people will get cancer; one in four will die from it; and that 3,700 deaths per annum are cancer related.

We in Northern Ireland are disadvantaged. Our survival rate is between 20% and 30% lower than countries such as France, Holland and Switzerland. We are supposed to be part of the developed world, yet we still rank alongside Latvia and Poland when it comes to cancer treatment. We are not as advanced as we like to think.

The Campbell report, which Dr Hendron mentioned, proposes a regional cancer centre and four cancer units. Today we are thinking about a regional cancer centre based at the Belfast City Hospital. Although I support the motion, I question the necessity to have everything in Belfast. Only 20% of the population live there. I am concerned about putting a regional cancer centre in the City Hospital to the detriment of the rest of Northern Ireland. Cross-border co-operation is increasing. Perhaps there is potential for an all-Ireland centre of excellence, possibly in Armagh. We could charge the Southern Government for treating their cancer patients. That would help subsidise cancer services in our own area.

Cancer-related expenditure is £13.9 million when we really need £24 million. Three years from now we will need £31 million to adequately resource cancer treatment. The projected spend for the next three years does not come near to meeting those requirements. Throughout Britain, less than 1% of the drugs budget is spent on cancer drugs. Taxanes have had considerable success in stopping cancers. In particular, combinations such as Taxol plus platinum are very effective in arresting ovarian cancer. The cost is £1,500 per treatment, and normally eight treatments are required, so it costs £12,000 to treat one patient.

We only have 10.5 cancer surgeons. We really need 25. Are we going to continue to sell the people of this country short? We were elected to deliver. As Mr R Hutchinson and Mrs Bell said, everyone has a relative or friend who has suffered or died from cancer. We need to deliver. People's lives have to be worth something. If we continue to underfund this service, people will not get the treatment they need. Every year 3,700 people die from cancer in this country. That is more than the number of lives lost in the whole 30 years of the troubles.



The Minister of Environment — I know he was speaking in a personal capacity as the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone — said that there is a lot of co-operation. The point I want to get across is that Dr Hendron and Mr Foster's tripartite agreement to improve the situation in Northern Ireland is all well and good but if the money is not there to deliver the services, that is where it hits home. Those 3,700 people are being sold short. The Minister said that not all cancers are curable, and we accept that, but much can be done to relieve suffering and many people can be cured.

My Colleague, Dr Hendron, mentioned problems resulting from smoking, alcohol and diet. I am not very qualified to speak on that matter because I am a smoker. However, socially disadvantaged areas tend to have a greater proportion of people who smoke, drink and have poor diets. When we talk about targeting social need, we need to consider those people at the end of the social scale who have poor diets and who do smoke and drink more heavily than people on higher incomes.

The Minister has just left, but there are also a number of environmental concerns which need to be considered. Several questions were raised concerning emissions from Sellafield. We have heard about emissions such as sulphur dioxide from power stations. All these emissions are carcinogenic. These problems need to be investigated; our people cannot continue to be pushed aside.

We were elected here to deliver and if we cannot deliver an extra £10 million this year — which is a tiny proportion of our whole expenditure for Northern Ireland — then there is something drastically wrong with us. I think there will be very few dissenters here on the question of making the extra money available. The Minister will have plenty of support in the House if she takes this forward to the Executive, which I hope she does. Finally, 41% of men and 36% of women will get some form of invasive cancer. It could be me, it could be any one of us. The decisions that we take now are going to impact upon what may, or may not, happen to ourselves. I urge people to support this motion.

**Ms Morrice:** As a Member of the Assembly cross-party group on cancer care, I support the motion. Like my Colleagues, I urge the Minister to act on this issue as a matter of urgency. I want to congratulate the Ulster Cancer Foundation for persisting with its message. The increased awareness of the issues involved is very valuable and is an important part of learning how to tackle the problems. The foundation's document 'Cancer Services: Invest Now' is an agenda for action which none of us, and I repeat, none of us, can afford to ignore.

The statistics have been mentioned over and over again in this Chamber. Whether it is one in three, or one

in four, the fact is that each of us will be touched by this terrible disease at some time. More than 8,000 people in Northern Ireland and their families are affected by cancer every year — there are more than 8,000 deaths in a year. What I like to do often is to compare our situation with that of our European neighbours and the rest of the world.

If we consider the survival rates then all we can do is bow our heads in shame. The survival rate in the United Kingdom is 20% to 30% worse than that in Switzerland, or Holland, or the United States. We have just 10 consultant oncologists, whereas other European countries would have 30 oncologists caring for that size of population. What are the problems, and how do we go about resolving them? Obviously, as we have seen from the figures, there is a lack of funding and resources, a lack of medical oncologists, a lack of multi-disciplined teams, an inability to access — and quickly access — new drugs, and a lack of structure for clinical funds.

Current spending on cancer services is £13.9 million but the services require some £24 million, perhaps even £30 million. An extra £10 million at least is definitely needed.

I want to conclude on a note of optimism. Yesterday, President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair announced a medical breakthrough which, believe it or not, has been ranked alongside landing on the moon and the creation of the wheel in terms of the impact it will have on society. What happened yesterday was tremendous and I am slightly surprised that it has been bypassed in a blink of an eye. As a result of the discovery it is said that our lifespan will increase by 25 years as of yesterday. There might well be an element of hype in its presentation, but I think that we have turned the key and opened the book of life. Through this discovery I hope that scientists will be able to find cures for the major diseases facing society today. I hope that a cure for cancer will be top of the priority list.

**Mrs Carson:** Some words strike terror in people's hearts and none more so than the word cancer. It is one of the most dreaded words in our language and is on a par with what tuberculosis was in the 1930s, '40s and '50s. Cancer engenders a fear of the unknown, a fear of the treatment involved, a fear of surgery, of chemotherapy, of radiotherapy — and perhaps of the possibility that there might be no cure. Tuberculosis was eliminated by penicillin and people hope for a similar cure for cancer. Cancer is the second largest cause of death in Northern Ireland, cardiac problems being the first. It accounts for 26% of all deaths. Statistics show that this disease is on the increase. It shows no sign of decreasing, mostly due to the ageing population and our lifestyles. Northern Ireland is an example in Europe of poor health and under-resourced services. I wonder if the under-



resourcing is a consequence of direct rule and the lack of funding for research a result of no direction from locally elected people. It might be the case.

Assembly Members must take responsibility to ensure that adequate funds are found to deliver the necessary service. At the moment, there are only 10 oncologists in Northern Ireland and we are told that we require 30 to provide effective treatment. To have more oncologists we need more money. At the moment there are only 10 oncologists in Northern Ireland, but we are told that 30 are required to ensure effective treatment of the community.

1.45 pm

Expenditure is currently £13 million, but we should be spending £24 million. Every area of the Health Service is competing for funding, but it is clear from what we have heard that more money is needed for cancer services. In Northern Ireland we are privileged to have a centre of excellence for cancer research in Belfast City Hospital. The excellent pioneering research of its staff must be commended. If, however, they are to continue the work of finding a cure for this dreaded disease, they will require additional funding. I am encouraged by yesterday's news, which Ms Morrice mentioned, that the Genome Project has successfully mapped the human genetic code. It is to be hoped that this will provide an important step forward in the search for an eventual cure for cancer.

Any advance in medicine has a financial cost, and it is clear that the projected figures for the financing of Northern Ireland's cancer services fall short of what is necessary. As our population lives longer it is clear that our lifestyles must change. Public education is required on an ongoing and urgent basis, especially with regard to smoking, sunbathing and our national food habits. A change of habit may help reduce the incidence of cancer, but this is not enough. A concerted effort must be made by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and by all agencies to eradicate this disease. This requires extra financial input for all cancer services — education, research, staffing, training, and modern facilities. We must see that this is available. I support the motion.

**Mr Boyd:** Regrettably, due to poor diet and under resourcing of services, Northern Ireland has the worst cancer survival rates in Western Europe. One in three people will develop cancer in their lifetime, and one in four people will die from it. Sadly, both old and young have lost their lives through cancer. It can strike anyone at anytime. The worst survival rates are for Ulster men — just over half with the most serious cancers are still alive after one year, and 80% of our lung cancer patients die after a year. These are the worst figures in Europe.

In a recent report the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Henrietta Campbell, said that most cancers were preventable because lifestyle factors played an important part in their development. Tobacco-smoking and an unhealthy diet are responsible for two thirds of all cancer deaths. In Northern Ireland smoking claims 3,000 lives every year and causes illness, suffering and hardship to thousands more families. It is the single greatest preventable cause of ill health in Northern Ireland. Ulster people spend a staggering 55% more on cigarettes than the average for the United Kingdom as a whole. A 1998 survey revealed that households in Northern Ireland spend £8.50 a week on smoking, a massive £3 more than the UK average. Sadly, more children and young people are starting to smoke every year; recent research for Northern Ireland shows that 18% of teenage boys and 34% of teenage girls now smoke.

There is a responsibility, particularly for elected representatives, to reduce smoking and save lives. Smokers also have responsibilities to people who do not smoke. There are a small number of people who smoke in the corridors of this very Building which has a non-smoking policy. More funding must be made available to help educate the public, particularly young people, about the dangers of smoking. Such measures include controls on tobacco advertising, tough enforcement on under-age sales and changing attitudes to smoking through a major campaign. Attitudes and behaviour need to change to encourage a healthier lifestyle. In addition, increased funding is clearly required as a matter of urgency to combat cancer as a whole.

Four key steps need to be taken in order to tackle the disease. We need to put in place the best preventative measures; we need to provide the best treatments available; we need to ensure that people with cancer are given the highest standard of care and attention at all stages of their illness; and we need to invest in high quality research and development.

In Northern Ireland approximately 8,700 people develop cancer each year, and around 3,700 deaths from cancer occur each year. Cancer currently accounts for approximately 26% of all deaths in Northern Ireland, and this trend is increasing. It is projected that in the next five to seven years cancer will be the biggest killer in our society. By 2007 it is likely that cancer will overtake heart disease as Northern Ireland's number one killer. This is as a result of our ageing society as well as improving outcomes for people with cardio-vascular disease. Therefore cancer and its treatment will become a major burden on society for the foreseeable future.

We need an extra 140 specialist nursing staff plus a range of new screening and education programmes. We already have some of the best clinicians, surgeons and

oncologists, but they need resources and finances to carry out the necessary treatment. Prof Patrick Johnston, Head of Oncology at Belfast City Hospital, has stated that we need to increase the number of oncologists from 10 to 30. The current spending for cancer services in Northern Ireland is approximately £13.9 million per annum. However, in order to provide the type of service that is required, funding of approximately £24 million per year is needed. That is almost double the amount currently allocated.

In Great Britain just 95p per person is spent on anti-cancer drugs. In Germany it is £6.24. The critical issue of funding for cancer services highlights graphically the current folly of public funds being used foolishly by the Department. I refer to the United Kingdom taxpayers' money being wasted by the Sinn Féin Health Minister. Much needed health funding is being spent unnecessarily on the Irish language. It must also be highlighted publicly that the amount of resources which are being used up due to paramilitary beatings and shootings could otherwise be directed to cancer and other much needed services if these illegal activities did not occur. We heard pleas for public funding in the debate on transport, which is a very worthy case. However, there is no greater case for increased public funding than that of cancer treatment.

I want to publicly thank the various cancer charities for their tremendous fundraising work and for the help that they provide to those who suffer from the effects of cancer or whose families are affected. Society owes them a great debt and we, as elected representatives, must continue to support them in every way possible.

**Mr Shannon:** I support the motion. It says that the Assembly welcomes the Ulster Cancer Foundation's document 'Cancer Services — Invest Now' and urges the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to implement, as a matter of urgency, the recommendations contained in the report. That is a recommendation that we can all support. Indeed, Members have unanimously supported the motion and the call for a substantial and significant financial contribution to cancer services in the Province.

Cancer will touch most of us, if not all of us, at some time in our lives. Some Members mentioned that their families have been affected by it. Indeed, my family has been touched by it too. If we do not develop some form of cancer it is highly likely that a loved one or a close relative will. Some of us have watched family or friends suffer and perhaps even die from this illness. Consequently most of us are only too well aware of the traumatising nature of this disease.

The Ulster Cancer Foundation's report 'Cancer Services — Invest Now' is welcomed by everyone in the House. It is sad that there is an ever growing need for such services. Sadder still is the fact that the Ulster

Cancer Foundation had to produce this document calling for adequate funding. It felt it had to because it is impossible to provide an efficient and effective service with the present inadequate funding.

The fact that the Ulster Cancer Foundation felt constrained to produce this report is an indication of its concerns. Cancer is a disease which crosses the boundaries of class, colour, race or creed. Young and old can all be affected by it. The document outlines the very frightening statistic that there are 8,700 new patients every year and that 41% of males and 36% of females will develop some form of cancer at some stage in their lives.

There are about 20 people in this Chamber at present, and if one in four were to die from cancer, then there would be five people who would not be in this Chamber in one year's time. These are startling statistics, but they bring home how cancer will affect us. As other Members have pointed out, there could be 35 to 40 Assembly Members who could pass away from cancer, but that does not mean that they will. Rawls' theory of justice states that the only fair way to make a decision or choice is to do so in the "original position" where we know nothing about our status or abilities. The layman's interpretation is that those who participate in this debate may not necessarily get cancer, but there are those in this Chamber who will.

We should put ourselves in the position of the people who will, or could, be cancer sufferers, and, if we do that, then we will hit upon what this debate is all about. It is essential that we do so and then ask ourselves how we would like to be treated. What drugs would we like to be made available? What standard of care and research would we expect or want to have been done? If we were to place ourselves in this position, I believe that we would all reach a similar conclusion — that we would want the maximum standard of care, the maximum standard of drugs, the maximum standard of research and the full implementation of Henrietta Campbell's report entitled 'Cancer Services — Investing for the Future'.

The motion is explicit and refers to a matter of urgency. I hope that all Members have either read, or have some knowledge of, the document and will be well aware of its recommendations. The Ulster Cancer Foundation calls for the full implementation of the 'Cancer Services — Investing for the Future' report, which is concerned with the reorganisation and improvement of services. There is no doubt that the Minister, the Department, and all of the elected representatives support the ethos of the report, but we need more than words, we need urgent action, and we need money — the words that were used earlier during the transport debate.

The document states that the current spend for cancer services in Northern Ireland is approximately £13·9 million. This is grossly inadequate to provide the type of service required. The foundation suggests that in order to have an effective and adequate service, at least £24 million a year is needed, but the Government's allocated funding falls well short of that.

The foundation also highlights the fact that as treatments become more complex, the required spend will most likely need to be significantly increased. In just a few years, it is likely that cancer will become the major killer in Northern Ireland — overtaking heart disease.

The concluding statement of this document is particularly significant, and I reiterate it and firmly support it. Its ethos is that it is entirely unacceptable that we, as a society, must accept such grossly inadequate resources to combat cancer.

The United Kingdom has long prided itself on its western civilised status, and yet statistics reveal that the survival rate in Northern Ireland over the past five years was approximately 20% to 30% worse than that of Holland or France. Cancer survival rates for the UK have been consistently low and are comparable to countries in the previous eastern European block. When we consider those figures, it gives us an idea of how bad the incidences of cancer are in Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately, statistics tell us that the problem will only get worse. Now is the time for action to reform and improve cancer services in Northern Ireland. Inadequate funding will be the direct cause of death of the many patients who, with improved facilities — doctors, drugs and research — may have survived their illness.

At this juncture I will highlight the wider issues involved when Ministers take decisions about life and death, and it is important to bear in mind the human rights and European context. The impending implementation of the Human Rights Bill and its effect will mean that we must consider the convention rights when passing any Bill or making any decision. Possible litigation could arise out of a Minister's decision if it were allowed, or if adequate funds were not provided, that would be a violation of Article 2 of the Convention — the right to life.

In a recent case the European Court of Human Rights held that Governments have a positive duty to protect life and a duty not to make decisions that will cost the lives of those that they have a duty to protect.

2.00 pm

There is no direct analogy to illustrate the problem of inadequate funding, but many human rights experts feel that it is only a matter of time, and considering the state our health service is going through, the scale of

potential litigation would be wide and far reaching. That aspect should be considered carefully when any decision is made.

In conclusion, I call for all Members to support the motion and I would urge the need for increased funding. I would remind Members that this issue potentially affects approximately 40% of our constituents. Consequently, we have a duty to use our position to urge the Department to make the only realistic option available and implement, as a matter of urgency, the recommendations contained in the report.

**Mr McCarthy:** I support the motion brought forward by my Colleague, Mrs Bell. I pay tribute to all the organisations in Northern Ireland that have been working tirelessly for many years to combat this most terrible of diseases.

It is extremely sad to remark that with so much time, effort and money being utilised in research, treatment and provision, Northern Ireland still has an unacceptably high incidence of cancer.

I have said, on many occasions that the incidence of cancer in people living on the east coast has been higher than the national average. Some people might attribute this to the radioactive material that has been, and still is, discharged into the Irish Sea by the British Nuclear Fuels Ltd at Sellafield. If those discharges are causing, or partly causing, the unnaturally high level of cancer in this region, that dangerous operation should cease immediately. The concerns of my constituents in Strangford must be addressed now, as this problem has been ignored by the authorities for far too long. People have a right to know what is causing the appalling increase in the number of cancer incidents in Northern Ireland.

A recent report shows that Northern Ireland has the worse cancer survival rates in western Europe. That is totally unacceptable, but genuine efforts are being made to redress the situation. The Chief Medical Officer has stated — and this has been said already — that most cancers are preventable. Tobacco smoking and an unhealthy diet are responsible for two thirds of all cancer deaths. Surely, with regard to those two particular areas, much more should be done through education and by cutting back consumption of tobacco products. Efforts have been made, and are continuing to be made, to reduce the level of tobacco advertising, but we must go much further. Tobacco is a deadly drug. How does the Government deal with other deadly drugs? The answer may lie there.

The Minister, in her recent reply to my request to fully implement the Ulster Cancer Foundation document, stated her Department's commitment to the Campbell Report. She also informed me of the provision of a further £8 million for the improvement of cancer



research and treatment services in addition to an extra £7 million provided last year. The money is most welcome, but more is needed. The Minister also said that she wished to see more specialist staff, oncologists and nurses being introduced into this branch of the health service. I reiterate the urgent need for the authorities to face this disturbing problem, but at the same time recognise the strain currently placed on the Health Service. The people of Northern Ireland must receive the best cancer services possible and we in the Assembly must not fail to provide them. I appeal to the Minister to adopt the Ulster Cancer Foundation document. I support the motion.

**Mr J Kelly:** A LeasCheann Comhairle, I support the motion. I should like to say at the outset that I congratulate and thank Eileen Bell and Paul Berry for bringing this motion before the House. We must also congratulate Michael Wood, who is in the Gallery, for the tremendous work he and his colleagues have done in promoting the Ulster Cancer Foundation, and of course, Prof Roy Spence and Prof Patrick Johnston.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, I have been in a cancer hospital both as patient and visitor, and it would be remiss not to pay tribute to those in the medical profession — nurses and doctors — who service that most sensitive area of hospitalisation. At this juncture we should also pay tribute to the hospices for their tremendous work in caring for people in the last weeks, days or hours of their lives.

I was not here yesterday, a LeasCheann Comhairle I was at a funeral. A young woman of 55 died on Saturday after battling cancer for a year. It occurred to me that, within the last 18 months, I have been at 11 such funerals of young women within a 20-mile radius who have been afflicted by the dreadful disease, cancer, and who have died from their affliction.

One cannot help but notice the sorrow and hardship that the loss of a mother brings to her young family and husband, and the community in general. Echoing what other Members have said, there is no doubt in my mind that cancer is a growing killer in society. Cancer literally eats away at lives throughout the community. It eats away at those upon whom the community depends so much — young mothers who, perhaps having reared their children to school-going or university age, are taken away from them by this disease.

Jane Morrice has mentioned the genetic breakthrough we read about this morning, which was compared to man's landing on the moon for the first time. Yet already controversy is arising from the billions spent on coming to what we hope will be an extremely worthwhile genetic breakthrough. Indeed, other medical people question the wisdom of this expenditure when we do not yet have a solution to simple problems like the pollution of water.

However, we cannot be begrudgers, and we must welcome this breakthrough and hope that it will not be misdirected for commercial reasons or at disadvantaged people perhaps found to be genetically imperfect. I felt we might put down a marker on that. As I said, we support the Ulster Cancer Foundation report, and we are convinced by the argument that cancer is the greatest killer in society.

We have a number of concerns about the approach taken in the document. Our first relates to the somewhat narrow focus on the requirements for the curative service, and while we do not wish to downplay the importance of these services, we should all remember that most cancers are preventable diseases, resulting from the material, environmental and lifestyle factors already referred to. We do not believe it is enough simply to note the rising number of cancer cases and then to ask for adequate curative services in response. A more long-term but effective approach would be to concentrate on the question of why the rates are rising, and what society can do to halt, then reverse this trend.

Resources will need to be divided evenly between curative and preventative services. Moreover, we do not believe that responsibility for tackling cancer and other health issues should be confined to the Health Service. All Government agencies should be required to take responsibility for the health impact of their policies, and that goes back to the argument on the environment.

We also note that the report, whilst it takes note of Campbell's recommendation to develop multi-disciplinary teams, emphasises the number of consultants, oncologists and surgeons required. So, we are saying to the Minister, and to you, a LeasCheann Comhairle, that the response to the cancer service is to "invest now."

The Assembly lacks fiscal autonomy, and we depend on the block grant allocated by the British State to the Assembly and subsequently to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. We believe that it is only by instituting democratically controlled tax-raising powers that services such as this will be provided with the financial resources required. Nevertheless, we hope that this report will provide further pressure for the provisions of adequate funds to invest in services essential to our community's well-being.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, I hope my comments will be taken in the spirit in which they are meant, and that is with the desire to do everything possible to rid society of the scourge of cancer. We applaud the Ulster Cancer Foundation again for putting its case so clearly and we earnestly hope that this document will have the desired effect of leading to improved cancer services in the area. Thank you a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** I believe that this subject deserves the support of every Member of the Assembly.



I appreciate that the Chamber is not full because of the staggered lunch arrangements, meetings, and Members attending different functions. However, I genuinely believe that there is unanimous support for action to be taken as suggested by the Ulster Cancer Foundation.

I would like to express my appreciation to Michael Wood, Director General of Ulster Cancer Foundation and the other members of that organisation for their presentation and the copy of the report given to each Member. I trust that Michael knows that his excellent service has been deeply appreciated and will be appreciated in the coming years.

I would also like to thank Mrs Bell and Mr Berry for bringing forward the motion because it is important that we discuss a matter that is causing great concern. Many people fear even the mention of the word, and when they feel ill and go to the doctor, one of their fears, if they cannot attribute the pain or the sickness to any other disease or sickness, is that the doctor will say it is cancer.

Many people fear the mention of the name, and many fear even to talk about the disease because they want to close their eyes, somehow, to the reality of their sickness, or to the pain that it will cause to their family circles. However, I believe that whenever the doctor does diagnose cancer that does not necessarily mean that the next word is death.

It is right to say that, because of the excellent scientific advances, many cancers can be cured and we would urge people to help doctors in the early diagnosis of the disease. This is one very important point: we should urge people to get tests done rather than carry a cross on their shoulders about what it might be. They should get treatment as quickly as possible.

2.15 pm

There are alarming statistics in the report, but statistics do not do justice to the individual stories of pain and suffering behind them, and I say that as someone whose father-in-law and mother-in-law were both diagnosed as having cancer inside a matter of days. My wife and our family circle nursed them as best we could, ensuring that they spent the rest of their days comfortable, and with a meaningful life until it was in the purpose and plan of God to call and take them home.

We are talking here about something that affects every grouping. The age or the sex of a person means nothing. Every group in society, and nearly every family in society, can, at some time, put a hand out and touch someone, among their loved ones, who has suffered from cancer, and sitting here today, not one of us knows exactly what that word might mean to us or what such an experience might mean to our families.

We are talking about something that is very real, not something imaginary. We are facing a great reality. The other reality is that we need resources to fight this disease, to get the necessary research done that will enable scientific and medical progress. Some people do not have access to particular drugs because they are very costly. People have come to me about the drugs they need, or believe would help. Some are told that in their cases, they might not be of great help, or because of uncertainties some are denied them. If cancer comes to our homes or family circles, we will want to ensure that everything humanly possible is done to save the life or lives of our loved ones.

I thank my Colleagues and Friends in the Assembly for moving this motion. I trust that we have highlighted a very human problem today and, indeed, that action will be taken and the financial resources made available to let our people live.

**Mr Hussey:** I congratulate those who have brought this to the attention of the House. The motion has been well and widely debated. We are talking about 'Cancer Services — Invest Now'. We can all concur with the remarks made by Dr McCrea that cancer does not necessarily mean death, though too often it does. Through the provision of services we may be able to ensure a higher survival rate, and that is vital. If one life can be saved, a good job will have been done today by this Body.

I do not want to broaden the issue too much, but I do want to move to one small area of prevention. Causes have been mentioned such as smoking and radon gas et cetera. A small reference was made to the large amount of money that was brought in by the sale of mobile telephone licences while there is concern about the possible effects of mobile phones. I request that the Minister, in addition to this motion, take serious note of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's Report of 22 September 1999. It was the 'Scientific Advisory System: Mobile Phones and Health'. If there is a means of prevention, that report should be taken into account in the considerations that the Minister will be making.

I refer to one of its recommendations:

"We recommend that the Government ensures that a higher priority is given to a research programme into the health impacts of mobile phones".

One does not want to scaremonger, but it is highlighted that much research is needed in that area. I do not want such research to detract from the immediate investment in cancer services to prevent deaths, if possible. I support the motion.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** Go raibh maith agat. Fáiltím roimh díospóireacht seo agus gabhaim buíochas leis na

Teachtaí a bheartaigh ar an ábhar seo a thógáil. Tá mé sásta a fheiceáil go bhfuil an t-Uasal Michael Wood i láthair agus ba mhaith liom an deis seo a ghlacadh le buíochas a ghabháil leis agus le Fondúireacht Ailse Uladh agus leis na heagrais dheonacha eile a d'obair go crua thar na blianta in aghaidh na hailse.

I welcome today's debate, and I thank the Members who have raised the issue and brought it before the House. I am also glad to see that Mr Michael Wood is present, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him, the Ulster Cancer Foundation and the many other charitable organisations that have worked throughout the years, with the services, in order to tackle this terrible disease.

I firmly believe that people here are entitled to internationally accepted standards of treatment and care. I welcome the report from the Ulster Cancer Foundation, an organisation which has provided much needed care and support for cancer patients for many years. It also provides resources for research and has funded the cancer registry. I am glad that the Ulster Cancer Foundation's report strongly supports, and endorses, the recommendation of the Campbell Report on the reorganisation of cancer services. These services have changed out of all recognition over recent years. Indeed, the Cancer Foundation notes, as have Members during the debate, that many aspects of the Campbell Report are being implemented. Cancer units have been developed in our area hospitals where patients with more common cancers are being treated by specialist multi-disciplinary cancer teams.

In addition, Belfast City Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital have been developed as a regional cancer centre. In line with the Campbell recommendations, radiotherapy and chemotherapy services, currently provided at Belvoir Park Hospital, will be relocated to the Belfast City Hospital. This will result in a state-of-the-art oncology centre, which will include the latest facilities and equipment. Work on this project is on course to be completed by 2003, and there is no doubt that this will be a world-class facility.

The new oncology centre is being developed as a public and private partnership, and we expect the preferred tender to be announced in the near future. In conjunction with this, a new day hospital for people with cancer will be established in the existing Tower Block, and it is expected that this will be funded by my Department on approval of the final business case.

During the course of the debate much mention has been made of the number of oncologists, and, indeed, there has been progress, and further progress remains to be made.

At the time of the Campbell Report there were only eight oncologists, and it was recommended, at that time,

that this figure be increased to at least 13 by 2005. Currently there are 14 oncologists in post, with plans to increase this figure to 22 by 2005. However, there is a world-wide shortage of trained oncologists. These specialists take a number of years to train, and this raises difficulties in attaining the number we would wish. It is not simply a matter of resources.

Furthermore, while it is vital that we have a sufficient number of oncologists, a quality cancer service depends on having a wide range of other staff, including specialist surgeons, physicians, pathologists and nurses. In the debate questions have been asked as to why everything is in Belfast, but what I want to see is a network of care that ensures that people, no matter where they live, have access to good quality care and this network must encompass the cancer centre, cancer units and primary care. I recognise, as does my colleague Sam Foster, the pressure on the public purse and, obviously, any increase in the block fund would be very welcome indeed.

As many Members have indicated, there is no doubt that every one of us in this room felt a personal impact as a result of this terrible disease and the toll that it takes. I am very aware of the toll for cancer sufferers, their families, carers and those throughout the service who work closely with them. I also pay tribute to the courage shown by all of those people who are battling against cancer. We need to do all we can to provide the best possible level of support. We all know someone who has suffered from cancer, or who has died from cancer. I can attest to that as it has been the case in my own experience recently. People do survive this disease and go on to live meaningful lives. Again I can attest to this from my own family. The courage people show in coming through this acts as a beacon to others going through times of difficulty. I also hope that people realise that Irish speakers are not immune to cancer and that people from all parts of our society suffer equally from this disease.

There has been mention of the 'Eurocare Study'; this was an important study which revealed that there were great variations in outcomes from cancer treatment throughout Europe. What the study actually showed was that outcomes in England and Scotland were not significantly different from the European average. Irish cancer registries were not included in the study, however we have no reason to be complacent. I want to see cancer outcomes in our country being similar to those achieved in Switzerland, Holland and the USA. This will depend not only on having high-quality cancer hospital services but also on having excellent linkage and support for primary and palliative care. I fully support the work of the National Cancer Institute, the establishment of the important linkage between cancer specialists in Ireland and the USA. That is already bringing benefits to patients, as oncologists and

specialist nurses on both sides of the Atlantic collaborate in caring for patients with cancer. It has also facilitated the collection of information on cancer incidences and outcomes on an all-Ireland basis through the cancer registries.

I also recognise that the death toll is rising, and this is why we must direct our energies to implementing preventative action as well as ensuring good quality primary, acute and palliative care. The percentage of funding going into the various sectors will, in many cases, depend on local need, and I think that this will be best determined at local level.

I am also fully aware of public concern about radioactive waste, leakage and pollution, and this is an issue that needs to be kept under close scrutiny.

I certainly support the focus on prevention and education, and I would like to see this kind of initiative developed on an all-Ireland basis. Indeed, I think there is a need for a greater focus on prevention, particularly on initiatives to reduce tobacco smoking — another point that Members frequently mentioned during the debate (including those who recognise they need to give up smoking). Last year, my Department provided £0.5 million for smoking cessation programmes, including a major publicity campaign. Programmes for this year are currently being evaluated, and this will inform a strategy and action plan on smoking, which we hope to publish in the autumn.

2.30 pm

Cancer treatment waiting times are an issue of great concern. I am determined to reduce the length of time cancer patients have to wait for outpatient appointments. I am pleased to announce that a target of two weeks will be introduced for breast cancer patients from 1 August. I intend to extend this target to other cancers within 18-24 months. Tackling our waiting list problem is a priority issue. There can be no overnight solutions. Long-term strategies are required. The same applies to in-patient waiting times. I intend to bring forward in the near future a regional waiting list action plan, which will put in place the necessary strategies to reduce unacceptably long waits for all treatments, including cancer treatment.

I note the important point that early diagnosis is essential. To ensure that, public and professional education is vital. The new breast cancer waiting time target, which I have just announced, will be accompanied by guidance on early diagnosis of this disease. Further guidance will follow in the next 18-24 months.

We all welcome the success of the human genome project. I have no doubt that, within our lifetime, this will result in the development of completely new ways of preventing and treating cancer.

To come back to the question of funding, we need to ensure that allocations are such that the general health of our population is improved and, specifically, that we have funding to tackle this particularly terrible disease. I support the Ulster Cancer Foundation's wish for an adequately resourced cancer service, as do we all. Many of the required changes will take time to implement, because of the need to have adequately-trained and skilled staff in place. This year, an additional £8 million has been provided for cancer services, on top of the additional £7 million last year. That shows the priority that we attach to this vital question. I am confident that the new funding will make a substantial contribution to the continuing development of our cancer services. I want to ensure that, in the years ahead, cancer services have and retain a high priority within my Department.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Everyone will be very pleased — although, as I am in the Chair, perhaps this should be regarded as being off the record — to hear your announcement of a two-week target for breast cancer, and also the considerable increase in the number of oncology specialists, which should be a tremendous improvement.

**Mr Berry:** I thank Members for their kind words about Eileen Bell and myself. While we accept those kind words, I feel strongly that it was our duty to bring forward this motion and back the Ulster Cancer Foundation document. At the outset, I commend the tremendous work carried out by Mr Michael Wood and his staff at the foundation. There is no doubt that they have carried out tremendous work, over a number of years, in an effort to defeat this serious disease.

Few issues in modern society are as emotive as cancer. The very word provokes fear and worry on a considerable scale. Such statistics, if they are to be believed, do not present a very encouraging picture. It is clear from what has been said that Members have studied the Ulster Cancer Foundation's report, and I want to make some further points with regard to that.

We all have a one in three chance of getting cancer. One in four will die from cancer. About one in nine are diagnosed with cancer before the age of 45. Men are more likely to die from cancer than women, and men are more likely than women to develop invasive cancer. Jim Shannon, Rev William McCrea and Derek Hussey have all made it very clear that cancer does not just affect the elderly. It happens to young people, to the middle aged and to many other people. When I went on a tour of Belfast City Hospital this really hit me. There is a perception in Northern Ireland that it is mainly women who get cancer. From the evidence in this book, it is quite clear that cancer affects, not only women, but men and young people. When I visited Belfast City Hospital I looked at one ward in the cancer unit, and I



saw in front of me only young fellows, around my own age, who were all being treated for that terrible illness.

It is extremely important that cancer is diagnosed early. This point has been raised several times. While recognising that there are many problems with data — in terms of determining if there is a real increase or simply better quality data — the figures present adequate evidence of a major health problem in this country. Perhaps what is most alarming is that the survival rate in Northern Ireland is not only very low in comparison to other countries, but also in comparison to the United Kingdom as a whole. While recognising that there are heavy demands on the taxpayer's money across all levels of the Health Service and that we will never eliminate this terrible disease, or deaths from it, we should not be deterred from making a case for proper investment in this particular area.

Now is the time for us, as elected representatives, to lay down some markers as to where money should be directed in this country. We should not be deterred when we are confronted with the reality that efforts to prevent and cure cancer have been intensified as well as increased. There is a very real success story and many people, who in the past would have died sooner, are now able to live longer. Others whose quality of life would have been very much poorer now have an enhanced quality of life, thankfully. Research into both diagnosis and the forms of treatment has greatly improved. Today we aim to demonstrate to the Assembly that it is essential that the 'Cancer Services — Invest Now' is not merely heeded but, more importantly, becomes part of the planning within the Health Service and that it is catered for within the allocation of resources.

However, having laid down the foundation, there has been very little progress towards getting the structure in place. That failure has been due to the lack of resources. Some may be tempted to think that this report does not matter too much since cancer treatment is ongoing. Others may be tempted to think that this is simply another reminder of the importance of the Health Service to all of us. This is not the case. The reality is illustrated in the following ways. First, cancer patients are being denied access to the very drugs required for their treatment. This is the equivalent of having a car without wheels. Secondly, there is a shortage of specialists to treat cancer patients.

That shortage is directly attributed to the lack of funds to employ specialists' time. An injection of resources would increase the number of cancer specialists. That is necessary to meet current demand. Cancer patients are being denied access to high quality treatment when they need it because there are not enough specialists to deal with them. Thirdly, there is a very real need to ensure that the Campbell report is fully

implemented. Until that is done, we will continue to have a less than adequate health quality cancer service. I have listened very closely to Members today. I listened closely to my Colleague Mr Roger Hutchinson as he enquired about where the money would be allocated. Only the Ulster Cancer Foundation can lay that out, as it has specific areas to allocate to. I have no doubt that the points that the Member raised will be taken on board by the Ulster Cancer Foundation when it goes to lobby the Health Department. The Member made very good points about primary care, palliative care, the shortage of specialist medical and nursing staff, and the need to reduce waiting times for patients. These, and many other issues, need to be addressed in the field of cancer services.

All Members taking part raised very important points. Can we expect the taxpayer to keep on picking up the tab for providing medical services for those who show no interest in their own lives and who do not look after themselves? Members have mentioned the problems of smoking and alcohol abuse, and how people should try to help themselves more. They are very valid points and are very controversial matters in themselves. However, there is a need to remind people that certain activities can increase the likelihood of developing cancer. It is important that the message "Look after your health before you have to be looked after" continues to go out.

There are many areas where the people of Northern Ireland can help themselves, but we must also commend the work of other cancer organisations across Northern Ireland and, indeed, the UK. We welcome this report, and it has been an honour to bring it forward today with Eileen Bell, but I must also pay tribute to Macmillan Cancer Relief. It has also contributed to the cancer services and in the effort to defeat this terrible disease over the years. It must be brought to Members' attention that Macmillan Cancer Relief has invested £5 million across the four board areas in recent years. That includes specialist cancer and palliative care nurses. That is a great grant scheme available to cancer patients, which must also be supported. Members, and the Department of Health, must look carefully at, and listen clearly to, what has been said today. Waiting times must be dealt with, and proper information must be supplied to support cancer patients. Support, with the opportunity to talk to cancer patients, is another important issue.

I have no doubt that every Member in the Chamber has had loved ones and relatives who have died because of this terrible disease. There are also Members who have had family members who, thankfully, have been successfully treated because of early diagnosis. We do not want to be scaremongers, but I believe that supporting this motion welcoming the Ulster Cancer Foundation's document 'Cancer Services — Invest Now' will go a long way in defeating this terrible



disease. £13.9 million is currently spent on cancer services. There is a need for £24 million to bring services up to proper standards, and I believe that the Health Department must find that money urgently. Then, there will be light at the end of the tunnel for the people of Northern Ireland who are suffering because of the terrible disease of cancer, and also for their families.

2.45 pm

It has been an honour to bring this motion forward, and I ask the Assembly for its support.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly welcomes the Ulster Cancer Foundation's document 'Cancer Services — Invest Now' and urges the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to implement, as a matter of urgency, the recommendations contained in the report.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I was delighted to hear my friend Michael Wood being commended by so many people, including the Minister. I have known him for many years. He was a distinguished and active member of the Institute of Directors when I was director of that body, and I have no doubt that his advice and example have kept many people alive.

*The sitting was suspended at 2.47 pm.*

*On resuming —*

**ASSEMBLY:  
PRIVATE-NOTICE QUESTIONS**

3.00 pm

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I have received notice of a private notice question to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment under Standing Order 20. Before I call the Minister I would like to explain how private notice questions, PNQs, are to be handled, since it is the first time that this matter has been dealt with in the House.

A PNQ must be tabled in the Business Office before 10.30 am on a Monday in the week during which an answer is sought. In accepting the question, the Business Office will consider three important issues: the urgency of the subject in question; the scale of importance to the public in having an answer; and whether sufficient notice has been given to the Minister to enable him or her to respond.

The question will be taken immediately before the start of the adjournment debate on Tuesday of that week. At that time I will call on the Minister to provide an answer. At the end of the answer I will call the questioner to pose any supplementary, and other Members may also indicate their intention to pose supplementary questions. However, given the limited notice of these questions I will be paying close attention to the relevance of any supplementary to the subject matter of the initial question. I will stick very firmly to that. There will be no excursions into matters that do not relate to this question. I will rule out of order any question without a direct and clear relationship to the original question.

In total I would expect to dispose of these matters in 15 to 20 minutes, although in future it might not be unusual to take two or more PNQs together. In the case of the question before us, I am grateful to the Minister for agreeing to respond against quite tight time constraints and also given the lack of precedent for how these matters are to be handled.

**Private Notice Question**

**TRANSTEC STAFF:  
EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS**

**Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to clarify the current position regarding the employment of staff at Transtec and its subsidiaries in Northern Ireland and to outline the steps being taken to safeguard the future employment of these workers.

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey):** The Transtec group, including its Campsie operation, has been in administrative receivership since December 1999. The employees at Campsie continue to be employed under the terms of their existing employment contracts. Intense discussions are currently ongoing regarding a significant investment proposal that could secure the majority of the jobs at Campsie.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish to thank the Minister for his answer. Is the Minister aware, and he has touched on this in his answer, that there was to have been an announcement on 12 May on a possible takeover of Transtec by another company, and if that is the case, can he state that the jobs of the 300 workers employed in the Campsie factory will be safeguarded?

**Sir Reg Empey:** I cannot confirm that that announcement was due on 12 May but what I can say is that I am aware that intensive negotiations are currently ongoing with a very reputable automotive industry company that would instil confidence in us that they are very significant players in their field. As you know, the Ford Motor Company is also the principal customer at Campsie and the receivers, Arthur Andersen together with the IDB, are rigorously pursuing the negotiations. These negotiations are at an advanced stage, but we cannot say for certain when there will be a result. Similarly, it would be wrong to go further than to say, as I did in my original answer, that, should the negotiations proceed well, there is certainly a possibility of retaining a majority of those jobs, but this is a private, commercial set of transactions.

The IDB could well be involved and stands ready to assist with the objective of ensuring that there is a viable manufacturing unit on that site. As Members are probably aware, the product made is cylinder heads for the Ford Motor Company, and the particular vehicle or engine for which these cylinder heads are being made is enjoying extremely buoyant market conditions at present. The potential exists therefore for a satisfactory outcome, but I would not wish to mislead the House by saying that we could guarantee that all the jobs would be secured. It is entirely a matter for the negotiations,

but the IDB stands ready to assist in achieving the most positive outcome possible for that plant.

**Mr Hay:** I thank the Minister for taking time out today to answer a number of our questions. There is deep uncertainty in the Londonderry area concerning the Campsie site and the employment of the 300 workers in that factory. I have two questions for the Minister, the first relating to the £7.5 million grant aid that the company has already received. Where has that money come from? The other issue is the £139 million the company currently owes to creditors. How much of that money is owed to creditors in Northern Ireland?

I thank the Minister, who has been very exact on the issue raised in the House today. I must remind him, however, that the sooner the uncertainty over the company in Campsie is brought to an end, the better for the workforce. I express my thanks to the Minister and his Department for the work they have done in attempting to salvage the company in some way.

**Sir Reg Empey:** The hon Member for Foyle will be aware that the administrative receivers, Arthur Andersen, are in charge of the company. The question of its creditors and how much is owed in Northern Ireland are matters exclusively for the administrative receivers at this stage. As far as grant aid is concerned, quite obviously assistance was forthcoming from the Industrial Development Board in the form of selective financial assistance to provide for capital equipment and training when the subsidiary was established.

The Member will also be aware that, because of the high-tech nature of the processes and the significant quantity of automation installed at the time of the project's inception, a great deal of technical difficulties were encountered. The workforce was unused to these processes, and, indeed, litigation between the company and the suppliers of certain equipment is ongoing. The matter is currently before the courts, and it is not possible for me to elaborate on that, but that shows and demonstrates the depth of the difficulties surrounding this particular project. With regard to the total number of creditors, the Member will be aware that there is a subtext, in that a Department of Trade and Industry investigation is currently being conducted by independent inspectors into the affairs of Transtec plc, concentrating on the accounting treatment of a claim by the Ford Motor Company against Transtec.

I cannot prejudge the outcome of that investigation as it is sub judice, but Members will see at a glance that a significant number of complicated issues surround it. As to the need for a positive, satisfactory and early outcome, I fully appreciate the difficult situation in which the workforce finds itself. That having been said, there is a lot of work on the shop floor now. As I said in my original answer, the workforce is currently operating under the same terms of contract that it had when

Transtec was in charge of its affairs. So the position of the workforce has not materially changed since the administrative receivers were appointed.

**Mrs Nelis:** Can the Minister elaborate on that? This is not just about the future of the workforce. Because this company is in receivership, those working at the plant have been denied mortgages when they have given the address of their employer. They are also having other financial difficulties because of this.

**Sir Reg Empey:** I can sympathise with the position in which many workers find themselves. This is not unique, I regret to say. I know from local government experience that when people are on temporary contracts, mortgage lenders and other finance houses take a very sceptical and jaundiced view of them, because, not having permanent, guaranteed employment, their income stream cannot be guaranteed.

The position is only resolvable with confirmation that agreement has been reached with a potential purchaser. Regrettably, as long as this company remains in administrative receivership, I do not see any solution to the problem. The basic problem is that mortgage lenders and finance houses do not regard people who may currently be earning satisfactory wages as being in long-term employment. They will not adjust their attitudes until the jobs are confirmed when the company passes back into private hands.

**Mr Tierney:** I thank the Minister for his comments. Does he envisage a gap between Transtec and the new negotiations that he is involved in? Are the jobs that he has saved existing jobs, which will not be re-advertised? Will the owners employ the existing workforce if the negotiations are successful?

**Sir Reg Empey:** I do not quite understand what the Member means by a gap. This is the subject of a private negotiation. Since the company went into receivership, those employed on that date have had their contracts of employment adopted, on behalf of the company, by the administrative receiver. Those who were previously working at Transtec have had their contracts adopted by the administrative receivers. They remain employees of the company and continue to be employed under the same terms as before. The administrative receiver is liable for post-employment wages and salaries.

The most likely outcome, though I can not guarantee it, is that a significant number of employees would be retained by the new purchaser, depending on the contract that that company may have with the Ford Motor company. This is a competitive industry, based on supply and demand, and with more than one supplier in the EU. It is most likely that the contracts of the existing workforce would be adopted, but I cannot give any guarantees as it is a private matter.

3.15 pm

*Motion made*

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Deputy Speaker*]

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has decided to allocate two hours to the question of the arts in Northern Ireland and one hour to the matter of the PFI scheme in Antrim.

## THE ARTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

**Mr McMenamin:** The Government should facilitate and support the arts and culture but not be interventionist. It is imperative that artists, musicians, writers and others feel that the Government are there to assist and enable their work, but not to dictate on its content or ambition. That is a primary principle. A vital element of the success of art and culture has to do with the marketing and promotion of the work of writers and artists. It is vital that the Government do what they can to provide for the industry — related and infrastructural aspects of cultural endeavours.

What do we mean when we talk about arts, culture and leisure? What is the connection between them? An oft-quoted definition of culture is “what people do when they do not have to do anything.” Is the answer to fill time, to leave something behind, to influence the world, to define oneself in any of the many activities which fall within the categories of arts, culture and leisure? Clearly economics in life is important, but that is not the only, or even the most important, dimension.

The other elements, the things we do when we do not have to do anything, are what feed the spirit of our society and our people. Without them there would be no society and, therefore, no economy.

It is a central element of our policy that money devoted to these areas is not allotted on the basis of patronage or charity, but is a key investment in our future. That is the bedrock of the SDLP’s policy in this central area of human existence. The pay-off from this investment is not to be measured in “across the counter” economic terms but in the terms of the growing health of society and in its capacity to know itself and to relate to the external world. Since we are dealing with Northern Ireland, a central element of our approach must be the acceptance that we deal not with a single culture but with many different strands of experience, bound together for better or worse. A central objective must be the reconciliation and integration of these different strands, not with a view to blandness, but to maximise the tension of creativity as well as the creativity of tension. By using art to tell our story we must not admit the unmentionable. If we do so we have failed our people.

It is important to define precisely what we are talking about. There are two fundamentally opposing views of art and culture. One sees the artist sitting high on a hill above the people, bestowing works and representations upon the many, who are taught not to question. The other approach is founded on the belief that each human being, citizen, or individual has a capacity for creativity and that together we have ownership of this collective imagination. This is the democratic view, and it should



not surprise anyone that it is the view of the SDLP. Art and culture are the vehicles of reconciliation between our divided peoples. These fields give the greatest opportunity for challenging the prejudices, stereotypes and mutual incomprehension which lie at the heart of the fear which has gripped this society for generations. We need to create symbols and representations of what is common between us.

As far as the arts and disability are concerned, one in six people in Northern Ireland has a disability. There is a lack of good training to enable disabled artists to become facilitators. More role models are necessary with whom disabled people can identify, and facilitating workshops is one way of achieving this. At present, people have to travel outside the UK to find suitable training. Funding to support artists to undertake this training is limited, and disabled artists are not even given the same importance as other artists when they are applying for funding. At present, there is a limited number of disabled artists, approximately 20, practising in Northern Ireland, and with regard to arts programmes, they tend to be the same people. However, this will change if more workshops are offered to disabled groups and day centres, although the problem of participation still depends on the provision of accessible arts centres. A change of attitude towards disabled people is needed by everyone.

It is necessary to include disabled people at the planning stages of programmes. The best scenario would be to have a disabled person on each regional arts committee, acting as a voice for the disabled. That would bypass problems of access and participation at the planning stage, rather than their encountering frustration when the programme begins.

With respect to arts and education, we believe that the process of cultural rejuvenation must begin with education. The subject of segregated education has been a great bugbear in this society for many years, and although there has been some movement, there has not been enough.

But perhaps we have been putting the cart before the horse. Perhaps, what we need to do is take a leaf out of the Good Friday Agreement and approach this issue initially within the separate communities. We propose that the preliminary stage of the desegregation process should be a presentation, in the education system, of the culture of the "other". We believe that it is vital that the youth of each community initially be confronted with the culture of the "other", so that curiosity, interest and, ultimately, understanding can be created among our young people.

We propose a policy of adopting artists in residence in each of the three levels of education with a strong emphasis on choosing artists from a different tradition, to challenge and stretch the perceptions of our young

people. This might be approached on an experimental basis to begin with but with increasing ambition as it develops. Younger children might be exposed to the experiment for, say, two weeks per annum in primary school, one month at secondary level and, perhaps, up to six months at third level.

On the matter of financial support for the arts, we in the SDLP favour the widest possible support for the arts, with particular emphasis on community and minority arts endeavours, as well as supporting the existing commitments to theatres, galleries and other centres of cultural life. We also favour the introduction of an expanded range of tax incentives. Although we do not raise our own taxes now, it is to be hoped that we will do some time in the near future so that there will be funding, allocated from private sources, for the assistance and promotion of the arts. Such a measure would greatly assist the important work being done by the action business body. It is important that the imperative to involve the business community in the artistic life of our society be approached from the perspective of demonstrating to the entrepreneurial community the enormous benefits which can accrue to business from a society whose social health is underwritten by a healthy cultural life.

One of the besetting fears of the artistic community is the financial insecurity associated with the creative life. To give an example, one of the great success stories of our neighbours across the border has been the introduction of tax exemption schemes for creative artists introduced by a former Finance Minister. This visionary proposal has not only had the benefit of facilitating the level of cultural expression in Southern society, but has also attracted creative artists from all over the world to Ireland, where their presence contributes enormously to the culture and economic life of that society. We propose the adoption of a similar policy. We propose the introduction of an art and architectural tax or levy, currently in place in various European countries and the United States, to enable local authorities to have funding autonomy for cultural projects in their own areas. This would work on the basis of a levy of, say, 1% on all public developments, which would be used to fund the provision of local art works in appropriate local contexts, including such developments.

Another aspect of the cultural life of the Irish Republic which we might profitably examine is the story of the National Theatre Company, based at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. This theatre, although admittedly patchy, has nevertheless provided a showcase, not merely for established and emerging writers, but for views of society which might otherwise have no means of expression. It has provided a guiding light for Southern society's cultural growth, which is fed into other disciplines and media. This is something that we

should seek to emulate. We should encourage the Lyric Theatre to develop its central role in sustaining and developing local artists and writers.

We might also take a leaf out of the Republic of Ireland's book with regard to supporting the indigenous film industry. The Southern policy of strong state support and tax incentives has resulted in a spin off for the Irish economy. Good films require good stories and top-class writing. We need to provide seed capital to enable producers to take the kind of risks which are essential if this society is to be provided with reflections of itself which match the quality of those produced in the rest of Europe and in America.

This should improve dramatically with the current £65 million budget available to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and should be seen as a one-off boost for the infrastructural side of the industry.

We must also build on the achievements of the Northern Ireland Film Commission and extend its ability to fund and oversee the development of a strong indigenous industry. Perhaps it is necessary to develop a more corporate identity and *modus operandi* for this body to enable it to compete in the present cut-throat world of international movie making. This will not happen unless strenuous efforts are made to upgrade the technical infrastructure and provide the highest quality personnel. For example, the establishment of a high-tech ultra modern digital mastering facility and the training of talented people to run such a facility would add enormously to the attractiveness of Northern Ireland as a centre of excellence in this field.

In the last three years productions spent £6 million in Northern Ireland. This figure will rise as interest grows in the natural locations and skilled crew that Northern Ireland has to offer a creative film maker.

The SDLP believes that much improvement could be made by emulating the cultural strategies of our neighbours in the Republic. This can be a two-way-street, and we in Northern Ireland, as has been demonstrated by so many of our writers and artists, have much to offer the Republic given the overall image of Irish culture in the eyes of the world. One of the most successful examples of cross-border co-operation in the field of the arts is the jointly funded Tyrone Guthrie Centre at Annaghmakerrig in Co Monaghan. There, artists from both sides of the border work alongside one another. We should use that example as a model for future developments in this area of arts and culture. The guiding symbol of these endeavours should be the metaphorical notion of the illusive duck between the *bodhrán* and the *Lambeg* drum.

Television and radio are central elements of the culture of a modern society. Northern Ireland has been well served in some respects by our regional services,

but there have been significant shortcomings in showcasing local writing on both radio and television. The main problem has been the centralisation of decision making in London, which has militated against the provision of satisfactory representations of this society on our airwaves and television screens.

Northern Ireland, treated as a region of the United Kingdom, is frequently approached from London in an objective manner which limits the self-expression of the true voice of this society. Writers, directors and performers complain that they are not listened to, that they are told what they can and cannot say about their society. We need a genuine regional policy which would give autonomy to artists and producers to give this society a more truthful and challenging idea of who we are and where we are going. We call on the BBC and the other providers of these services to look again at their policy on drama and other forms of culture with a view to encouraging self-confidence and creativity rather than handing down prescriptions and diktats.

While there has been an enormous growth in community-based theatre in Northern Ireland, there remains a suspicion that groups seeking to make particular statements about themselves and their lives have found it more difficult than others to obtain Government funding and support. Although a certain level of quality control is needed, we must develop a clear hands-off policy between the support and the content of cultural statements.

3.30 pm

Language is a central element of culture. Clearly, English is the primary mode of expression in this society, but there are other tongues which not only have strong roots in the traditions of the different communities, but are core elements in the identity of those communities right up to the present moment. Unfortunately, languages such as Irish and Ulster-Scots are taught as foreign languages in Northern Ireland. Most people in the North do not encounter Irish in the education system until post-primary level, where it is taught in the same way as French or German. This practice ensures that languages which should be viewed as repositories of cultural memory are instead perceived in terms of their economic usefulness.

It is imperative that a cultural heritage programme be established to co-ordinate and focus efforts to bring young people in Northern Ireland into contact with the vital elements of their culture, including indigenous languages and music. In the Republic, Gael Linn has called for the appointment of more Irish language teachers in Northern Ireland and special language counsellors to assist young people seeking to learn Irish, and for the provision of facilities and other support to make Irish an attractive choice for students. The SDLP supports these proposals with regard to all the

indigenous languages, and, specifically in the case of Irish, propose stronger cross-border contacts between relevant bodies and organisations. We should also have a policy of requiring from our broadcasters a greater public service commitment to the support of minority languages and cultures within our society, for example by providing subtitles to drama and current affairs programmes, and also by providing such programming in all the indigenous languages.

In the area of art and culture, the support of the contemporary must be combined with the maintenance of what has been handed down. A society can only grow culturally if it first has a clear notion of where it is coming from. A central element of the Government's function in this area, therefore, is the preservation and celebration of the cultural artefacts and experiences of the past. In this respect, our society has been fortunate, but there is no room for complacency. We must invest in a sustained attempt to restore archival film footage, manuscripts and other artefacts of our past, and provide for this to be done on a continuing basis.

Having accepted the necessity of separating the administration of Government policy on the arts from the actual work of artists and writers, it is also important to provide a structure in which each layer of the cultural process can operate to the maximum possible extent. To this end, we recommend the creation of a policy implementation buffer between the area of Government policy and that of creativity. The SDLP recommends the establishment of a cultural task force to examine ways in which the cultural and artistic life of Northern Ireland might be galvanised at this critical juncture in our history. This task force should be independent of all existing bodies and be empowered both to make recommendations centred on expanding this society's creative potential and to identify any factors that may be inhibiting the development of the cultural life of our people.

This body might also be given exceptional powers to develop and implement strategic thinking and to target available resources so as to develop the industrial potential of the cultural domain. The task force should comprise a combination of business and commercial experience, working artists and those who have been involved in arts administration on both sides of the border. Its remit should extend to the undertaking of a critical review of how the arts are administered in Northern Ireland. The task force would examine the effectiveness of existing bodies with responsibility for administering and fostering the arts, with a specific brief to create improved conditions for promoting the maximum level of access to the arts.

The present thought paradigm with regard to arts and culture might have one believe that its current level of Government support — £64 million per annum —

represents a substantial commitment. We beg to differ. If, as outlined at the outset of this document, the artistic and cultural domain is perceived as central to the life, including the economic life, of this society, then this level of funding reveals itself as relatively paltry. It will be clear, therefore, that what is required is not an incremental improvement on the existing commitment to this vital ingredient to a full life for our society, but a radical review of our whole thinking and approach.

**Dr Adamson:** I would like to concentrate on language in the arts. My background is a Gaelic background in that my great-grandmother Lambie spoke nothing but Gaelic on the isle of Islay. She taught us well. My Gaelic has since gone away quite a bit, but the memories of her have lingered on. For my great-grandmother the centre of the Gaelic world was Islay, naturally, although the centre of my Gaelic world was Bangor, where I was born, because I was interested in the development of Ulster Gaelic, rather than other types of Gaelic, particularly "Official" Irish. And East Ulster Gaelic was, of course, something which I learned a lot about as a boy.

I also learned a lot about Ulster-Scots, which was the language of the neighbourhood around my native village of Conlig, and I have followed Ulster-Scots all my life. I tried to maintain an interest in the local community in Ulster-Scots when I was a young man, but various factors militated against that. Ulster-Scots, like its sister language of Scots in Scotland, is of course a West-Germanic language. It has its own vocabulary, grammar, literary tradition and dialectal regions. I first encountered it in written form in 'Galloway Gossip,' an old book my father brought over from Galloway which has various dialects of Scots in it. But Ulster-Scots has an eroded integrity and a marginalised status. This is, of course, a product of official neglect. However, that is not a rationale for ignoring it, as so many do. Ulster-Scots, like Irish Gaelic — I use that in the broad sense — has contributed to the linguistic diversity of Northern Ireland and to our English language literary tradition. However, Ulster-Scots, like Irish Gaelic, also deserves a less reactive and a more proactive approach to the support of its own language and literature.

Special mention, of course, must always be made of the place of Robert Burns in the Ulster-Scots literary tradition. Like the works of his predecessors, the poetry and songs of Burns and Lowland Scots were well known among all the Ulster-Scots communities during the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. These works form a valid part of the Ulster-Scots literary tradition, just as Ulster-Scots writings were created in the same broader Ulster-Scottish cultural context.

The first edition of Burns's works was published in Kilmarnock in 1786, but the second edition was



published in Belfast in 1787. This interaction remains part of the Ulster-Scots tradition. The Belfast Burns club is one of the oldest in the world and several other clubs exist in Northern Ireland. It would be a gross misunderstanding of the history of Burns clubs in Northern Ireland to dismiss their significance as being only relevant to expatriate Scots living in Ulster. I am aware that individual contemporary Ulster-Scots writers have regularly had works rejected by local publishers on the grounds that there was no market for this type of material. So I endorse the Arts Council's recommendation to focus future support on the writers rather than on the publishers.

I also welcome the Arts Council's positive attitude towards community drama. Amateur drama in rural Antrim and Down, including productions by Young Farmers Clubs, provide some of the last surviving opportunities for some Ulster-Scots to be heard in public situations. Many local plays continue to be written in the farmhouse kitchen genre, and this is one of the liveliest twentieth century Ulster-Scots literary forms. It is not unusual for amateur dramatic societies from Ulster-Scots speaking areas to ad lib standard English scripts directly into Ulster-Scots. Classical drama exists in Scots translation as well and opportunities could be exploited by the Arts Council to bring Scots language drama productions from Scotland to our theatres.

In the early 1800s many observers reported that the airs and ballads of the Ulster-Scots communities in Antrim and Down were merely those that were strictly Scottish. The tunes identified by scores of Ulster-Scots folk poets are suitable settings for their songs and provide confirmation of the overwhelmingly Scottish character of their musical repertoire from 1780 onwards. We have a flourishing band movement in contemporary Ulster-Scots areas. Much of it is grounded in the Ulster-English tradition of mid and south Ulster — exceptions to this rule are the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association and the Accordion Band Movement. These musical traditions and their instruments remain essentially Ulster-Scots in their identities.

In recent years the all-Ireland Scottish Pipe Band Championships, held in Northern Ireland, have attracted tens of thousands to each event. However, little acknowledgement is given to the exceptional international achievements of Ulster pipers and accordionists. Despite our small numbers, the world championships in all grades, including solo prizes, are regularly and currently held by people from Northern Ireland. I support the proposal by the Pipe Band Movement that support be given to its piping and drumming school.

The Scottish pipes, along with Lambeg drums, remain one of the few genuine traditional music art forms in Northern Ireland in that they rarely, if ever,

follow written music, and they are learnt orally. Solo pipers and fiddlers were the traditional accompaniment for country square dances and reels over a century ago. Ulster-Scots fiddling and accordion playing is still associated with country dancing today. Ulster-Scots traditional fiddle music exists, but it is rarely played beyond small local groups to small or non-existent audiences. It has no recognition beyond the smaller number who play in it.

The long-established and flourishing branches of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society in Northern Ireland receive no funding from the Arts Council. However, they receive some limited support from the Sports Council. The inescapable conclusion of such a policy appears to be that any non-Irish tradition of dance is only a keep-fit exercise. Informal reels and country quadrilles also survive as traditional dances performed in small groups as a genuine legacy of the Ulster-Scots folk dance tradition. These survivals are not part of Irish set dancing.

The catalogue of denial and marginalisation of Ulster-Scots culture in Northern Ireland is too lengthy to be properly addressed at this time. However, it needs to be addressed by the Arts Council in the context of regular audits of evaluation and assessment procedures to ensure that no group in Northern Ireland is discriminated against. As stated, the issues are complex, and while the description of traditional music as either Irish or Orange is simplistic and unhelpful, the broader issue of the criteria for funding needs to be addressed urgently. Traditional arts are subject to a variety of influences including Gaelic, Orange, Irish, English and Scottish.

3.45 pm

These core traditions of our country deserve support in their own right to ensure that the traditional arts are not collectively seen as the preserve of any one section of the community.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is mian liom toiseacht agus saibhreas na hÉireann sna healaíona agus sa chultúr a cheiliúradh. Aithnítear saibhreas tallainne na tíre seo ar fud na cruinne. Tá clú agus cáil ar fud chlár an domhain ar ár gcuid aisteoirí, filí, ceoltóirí, ár gcuid damhsóirí agus ealaíontóirí. Thuill siad ariamh moladh idirnáisiúnta thar na bearta — agus a chúis sin acu.

Is é misean mo pháirtí ná déanamh cinnte go mbíonn deis ag achán saoránach a bheith páirteach sa tsaibhreas seo agus córas a chruthú ina mbíonn na healaíona agus an cultúr ar fáil i bhfírinne do gach Éireannach, go háirithe dóibh siúd a himeallaíodh san am atá thart mar gheall ar mhí-chumas, ar dhearcadh polaitiúil, ar inscne, ar aicme nó ar áit chónaithe. Dúshlán fúinn uilig é seo, ar ndóigh.



Cúis ghéar achraínn ariamh anall é dáileadh acmhúinní ar lucht cruthaithe agus lucht úsáide na n-ealaíon agus an chultúr — cúis achraínn sainmhíniú féin na n-ealaíon.

I want to begin LeasCheann Comhairle by celebrating the fact that the island of Ireland is rich in arts and culture. Ireland's wealth and success has won tremendous international acclaim and is recognised universally. Anyone could be subjective about listing people who have achieved tremendous things in the arts and culture, but look at whom Ireland has produced: actors such as Liam Neeson and Stephen Rea; poets including Cathal O'Sharkey and Seamus Heaney; musicians such as Sinead O'Connor, the Corrs and Clannad; and dancers like Riverdance and others.

**Ms Morrice:** Van Morrison.

**Mr McElduff:** Van Morrison, of course, and our painters Jack B Yates and John Lavery. Digressing momentarily, it was a matter of some regret to myself and others that there was an attempt recently to remove history of art as an 'A' level subject from the curriculum. I am glad that it was reinstated in the course of the curriculum review. The people I have named have excelled themselves. They have received international recognition and have projected a very positive image of this country where art knows no boundaries.

It is the mission of my party to ensure that every citizen of this country can share in its artistic and cultural wealth. We want to create a system where arts and culture are truly accessible to all Irish people, North and South, and particularly to those who have been marginalised in the past because of disability, gender, political belief or geographical location. That creates quite a challenge for us all.

Any discussion about the arts must touch upon the allocation of finite resources both to the creators and to the consumers of art. This has always been hotly debated, as indeed has the very definition of art itself. I know that the European definition of art incorporates culture. We have much food for thought on this matter.

Is cuma cé bhéas i mbun riarachán agus maoiniú na n-ealaíon, an Arts Council sna sé chondae nó an Chomhairle Ealaíon sna sé chondae is fichead, caithfidh aitheantas a thabhairt don ealaín atá á cruthú ag gnáthdhaoine. Baineann an ealaín seo le daoine; tá suim acu inti, nó taispeánann sí nádúr ár sochaí dúinn.

Caithfidh a aithint gur cruthaíodh an iomad cinéal ealaíne le triocha bliain anuas — an múrmhaisiú, agus cruthú foirmeacha radaiceacha den cheol dúchasach, mar shampla. Fríd na healaíona seo thig le daoine amharc ar a n-eispeireas féin fríd a súile féin. Thig leo a gcuid scéalta féin a insint.

Creidim go gcaithfidh ceangal níos dlúithe a bheith ann idir lucht maoinithe na n-ealaíon agus lucht a soláthair ag gach leibhéal. Caithfidh ceangal a bheith ann fosta le hoideachasóirí le go dtig leis an aos óg páirt iomlán a ghlacadh sna healaíona agus sa chultúr. Agus go mbeidh grá á chothú don chultúr i measc an aosa óig.

Tá an féin-chur in iúl agus an chruthaitheacht tábhachtach, don aos óg ach go háirithe.

Whoever is responsible for administering or funding the arts, whether it be the Arts Council in the Six Counties or an Chomhairle Ealaíona in the Twenty-six Counties, they need to really appreciate art being created by ordinary people and which is relevant to ordinary people. Art should interest people and reflect the nature of the society in which they live. It will take a mixture of community arts and sometimes what are known as local appreciation of fine arts, or higher arts. The definitions are always most interesting.

Proper recognition needs to be given to mural art and to community drama, which might be described as amateur, but only in terms of remuneration, not quality. Those types of media enable people to reflect their own experiences and tell their stories from their own perspectives. There needs to be greater liaison at all levels between the providers of arts and culture and arts funders. There needs to be closer contact between the educationalists and the arts practitioners so that a grá for arts and culture can be properly developed and fostered in our young people, because self expression and creativity is so crucial for them. Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí, mar a deirtear.

I will concentrate my remaining remarks on other priority areas that require some focus. The Irish language is one area. It was totally recognised in the Good Friday Agreement, and all that we ask for is that that is given actuality in terms of public recognition by statutory agencies and such bodies.

Another area requiring focus is in the promotion of a wide range of qualitative art forms, both modern and traditional — in this matter the revitalisation of traditional arts and crafts is very important. We need to increasingly recognise emerging and growing all-inclusive community arts festivals or féilte and the value of single identity work, wherever that may come from, without the need for social engineering to suit funding criteria, which is not totally natural.

Very importantly, there needs to be a single all-Ireland administration for the arts to avoid unnecessary duplication of work. There are other areas of public life where this would also apply — agriculture, tourism, industrial development. We need to learn lessons from the rest of Ireland.

Mr McMenamin earlier referred to those areas of co-operation which presently exist, and I would like to

think that Mr McGimpsey would be like Michael D Higgins and that we would see a ministerial-led Department — I think that he has done good work to date. Michael D Higgins said in relation to the arts that the dissenting voice must be heard. Not everybody has to be a conformist when it comes to the arts.

Another area for focus is in putting people before buildings sometimes, but not all of the time. The National Lottery has been kind to theatres in places such as Armagh and Cookstown and these are tremendous assets. However, it is important that we consider people as well as buildings, and that we provide suitable training courses for budding young actors and actresses. People presently have to go to London for a suitable course. If they are aged 17 and have a talent for acting that is where they invariably will have to go.

We need to focus on the innovative use of existing buildings and facilitating touring theatre groups. I am calling for the re-orientation of public money towards these areas without huge displacement, and a debate needs to take place about that.

We need to look at bringing art to the people and seeking new audiences. There are criteria laid down for funding. Let us look at who meets those criteria best of all.

Finally, television, radio and other forms of multi-media are so crucial these days. That was the subject of a very interesting recent article by Tom McGurk in 'The Sunday Business Post'. BBC television, in particular, needs to take note that the Irish language exists and is thriving, and that many of us look to Dublin, and not London, as our capital city. That is a fact of life in terms of this society.

In conclusion, Ós rud é nach bhfuil mórán ama agam sa díospóireacht seo, díreoidh mé mo fhoclaí deireannacha ar rudaí tábhachtacha eile. Cur chun cinn réimse mór de ealaíona cineálacha, idir nua agus thraidisiúnta; ealaíona pobail; forbairt féilte pobail; athbheochan ealaíon agus ceirdeanna traidisiúnta. Caithfidh aitheantas ceart a thabhairt do luach obair an aonaráin agus níos lú béime a leagan ar an innealltóireacht shóisialta ar mhaithe leis an mhaoiniú —chan ar mhaithe leis an ealaín. Caithfidh tionscadail ealaíne fríd mheán na Gaeilge a cur chun cinn.

Caithfidh riarachán na n-ealaíon bheith ar bhonn uile-Éireann, — agus tá sin fiorthábhachtach — é freagrach do mhuintir na hÉireann a dhéanfas deimhin go bhfuil dáileadh cothrom, éifeachtach airgid ann. Cosfaidh seo an dubailt neamhriachtanach. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**The Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee (Mr O'Neill):** I too support the sentiments expressed in this debate. While absent from the Chamber I listened to the debate, and I welcome the

number of ideas that I heard and which should be able to be adopted and put to use.

We are at a very important stage as far as arts and culture are concerned. I agree with Members who said they recognised those who contributed to the good past that we have had. We have lived through a period of great social upheaval, which, in common with other great social upheavals in history, has led to self-examination and, as a result, increased artistic endeavour and output.

As a student I remember being told, in impressive terms, that 24,000 books had been written about the reasons for the outbreak of the First World War. The examinations of the causes of the troubles in Northern Ireland must be getting close to that, but there is something in the literature that has been produced that recognises artistic output as a result of self-examination.

*(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)*

We are at the stage where we now have the potential to move forward. Of all the things that we have done, the creation of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has been one of the most positive and exciting things. The members of the Committee and I were enthralled — and I use that word carefully — when we met the permanent secretary, Aileen McGinley, and her representatives. The excitement, the clear enthusiasm, the recognition of the challenges and the openness to suggestion that were coming from the team filled all of the members of the Committee with hope for the future.

Arts, museums and all of the other areas that go to make up the broad brief of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure were, in the past, the lesser-funded elements of larger Departments, and they did not receive the attention or encouragement they deserved. They came low in the pecking order. Now they are in a Department of their own, with a permanent secretary of their own and a Minister of their own who — if I may agree with others — has, so far, impressed the Committee.

I make no bones about saying that publicly. The excitement and the enthusiasm displayed by the Department will make an impact.

4.00 pm

As I said, we are at the edge, and I think of it as the edge of a renaissance in culture, arts and leisure in Northern Ireland. We can spearhead that renaissance through the Assembly, the Committee and the Department working together to create that open and transparent approach to the whole of arts and culture that I think we would all welcome.

When people talk about the arts they immediately begin to think of cutting up a cake and redistributing it in certain ways. Unfortunately, as we have discovered,

the cake is very small. The reason for that is what has been happening over this last five to 10 years. There has been no increase in funding in the Department, not even to take account of inflation. That has been a debt on all areas in the Department, and it will take a considerable readjustment to bring it back even to a fair basis on which we could operate.

Some of the items in Mr McMenamin's document are worth examining. I am not necessarily saying that we should adopt all of them, but they are the types of things we should be looking at in terms of funding. We should be looking at more private funding for the arts. There are untapped possibilities in that area. We should be looking at the possibility of convincing central Government — as it happens, we have not got control over taxation — to have some kind of exemption or reduction for arts activity and artists in Northern Ireland. It would not be unlike the regime that was introduced so successfully in the Republic some years ago.

Another very interesting idea, which comes from Europe, is that there should be some kind of tax — dare I use that word — or some kind of contribution from developers towards a local council arts budget. The figure currently used is 1% of development costs — quite a lot when you think about it. It has proved to be a successful way of gathering money for the arts in some European countries. If we had applied that in the Belfast City Council area — when you think of all of the development that has taken place there over the last few years — we would have a thriving budget for investment in the arts.

These types of ideas are worth examining. We may not agree to adopt them or go with them, but certainly they represent the type of thing we should be doing.

Finally, when our civilisation is judged, and if at that stage we have spent money only on functional things and the things that we need to live on, if we have spent nothing on the creative, nothing for the soul, nothing for the aesthetic, and nothing for arts and culture, then we will be judged very poorly indeed.

**Mr Shannon:** I thank the Member for West Tyrone for raising this issue. It gives us an opportunity to express ourselves in Ulster-Scots and to talk a wee bit about the culture of it.

The wurd “irts” taks in a mukkil whein fowkgate daeins o ilka sort, frae airt til music, frae dance til daein drama an skreivin buiks. The heicht at fowgates is hauden in maun aye be taen ower ocht tent o, an a biggit-up kennin o a bodie's fowkgates cannae dae ocht but gie a lift ti weans an auld fowk baith. Houaniver, ower ocht o aw sic daeins is that yin fowkgate cleik in Norlin Airlann soudnae be gien aw the heftin whaniver the tither fowkgate bis unner-docht. Ivan Herbison

ledges in his skreivin ‘The Rest is Silence’, whilk he gien oot til the colloque ‘Varieties of Scottishness: Exploring the Ulster-Scottish Connection’ at a heich heid yin o the Presbyterian Kirk, no lang syne, opined at a whein Presbyterians theday, qo he, “feel like an invisible people”.

I should like to talk specifically on the Ulster-Scots aspect of the arts in Northern Ireland. The term “arts” takes in a wide range of different cultural events and activities, from art to music, from dance to plays and books. The importance of culture must continually be highlighted, and an increased awareness of one's culture can serve to benefit young and old alike. However, it is important that one cultural identity in Northern Ireland is not emphasised while another community's culture is ostracised or neglected. Ivan Herbison states in his document ‘The Rest Is Silence’, which he presented at the Varieties of Scottishness: Exploring the Ulster-Scottish Connection conference, that a prominent member of the Presbyterian Church recently remarked that he thought his community

“feel like an invisible people.”

He said

“It is as if they do not exist.”

Michael Longley identified in his ‘Varieties of Irishness’ at the first Cultural Traditions Group conference a prevalent tendency

“to undervalue, even to ignore the Scottish horizon”.

Herbison believed that this was because there was a tendency to see only two traditions in Northern Ireland instead of examining the rich variety of cultural traditions among the Ulster Protestants.

It is now important that we mainstream the wide diversity of culture and cultural identity instead of seeing this as a debate of two sides. For this reason, in the short time I have left to speak, I wish to concentrate on the Ulster-Scots language, to give a brief history and to look at developments in this area in recent years.

Ian Adamson has already said something of Ulster-Scots, clearly outlining how it has developed and its importance to many of us in this Province. All those who have spoken on the subject thus far have said that language is important. Language is often unique to a particular group or place, and it often carries with it a rich cultural history. Language has always been seen as a mark of identity, and the language debate has particular significance in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland there are a number of distinct traditions and nationalities — the Irish, the Ulster Scots and the Ulster English. In addition, we have a number of diverse cultural identities such as the Chinese and Indian communities. One of the most significant literary works on the cultural significance of language is a play



by the well-known playwright, Brian Friel, entitled 'Translations'. It deals with the transitional period in Ireland when place names were changed from Irish to English. However, its deeper theme is the importance of language and identity. Brian Friel admits what many in this House who speak Irish fail to, namely that language can be an emotive political issue and not a purely cultural matter. The issue of language has always been emotive in Ireland, both North and South, because of the political connotations which the debate carries.

However, I feel that Ulster-Scots is not a political point-scoring exercise, but rather an expression of people's need and desire to find out who they are and where they come from, and many Members already know that. The Ulster-Scots cultural identity has been ignored for many years and scoffed at by many who openly dismiss their own linguistic culture as a dialect. Those who say this only show their cultural ignorance by expressing such an opinion. The linguistic division between Ulster and the rest of the island predates even the plantation. However, the present pattern of linguistic division is a product of the settlement of Ulster during the seventeenth century. Over this period these linguistic influences, most notably the Teutonic and Old Norse strands and the influx of Lowland Scots into Ulster, led to the evolution of Ulster-Scots speech unique to the north-east of Ireland. I should perhaps mention that it went across Northern Ireland to Donegal and eventually to the new lands of America and Canada as well.

Ivan Herbison states that the language possessed many of the distinguishing characteristics of a separate national language rather than those of a mere regional dialect, not only in pronunciation, but also in orthography, vocabulary and syntax.

Ulster-Scots is not only important for its complex historical development, but it is also important culturally because it has its own literary tradition. Between 1750 and 1850 some 60 to 70 volumes of poetry were printed which belonged to the Ulster-Scots literary tradition of the rhyming weavers, the poets who came from a rural working class background and who were the descendants of Scottish settlers.

I hope, in some small way, that the great cultural wealth in Ulster-Scots has been explained today, and connected directly to the Ulster-Scots language. Some people in this Chamber self-righteously declare themselves to be full supporters of cross-community work and events. However, it is clear to me and to many others that those people believe that the Irish identity and culture should be accepted by all as cultural rather than political, and the cultural identity of Ulster Protestants should be suppressed.

Nationalists want Irish traditional music bands and Irish dancing to be accepted by all as non-political

symbols of culture, while they simultaneously try to suppress every element of Ulster Protestant culture, including the very organisation which was set up to defend Ulster Protestant culture — the Orange Order. There is no difference in displays of culture. An Irish dancer is as much a symbol of one tradition as a flute band or an Orange procession is a symbol of another. Yet Nationalists will not even tolerate the thought of Orangemen walking or of faintly hearing the sound of a band. Indeed, some people go out of their way, some travel miles upon miles, just to be offended.

It is time for Nationalists to take a look at their own hypocritical policies on culture and become mature enough to accept the culture of all sections of this community because we are not going away either. It is time for Nationalists to accept that there are many elements of Ulster Protestant culture which are rich and beautiful. We should be, and indeed we are, proud of our cultural heritage.

For many years, propaganda machines have been trying to show that Ulster Protestant culture is bigoted and that it is a pale imitation of Irish culture. It is now time for the true picture to be shown: that of the diversity of identities and cultures. Some work has already been done to promote the Ulster-Scots language and traditions. It is valuable for all traditions to learn about this unique element of Northern Ireland's culture. The only way for Northern Ireland to move forward is for everyone to be tolerant of each other and each other's differing cultures and identities. It is possible to be proud of your own identity, yet respect the richness of someone else's, and I believe it is time that those propagating the Irish language's viewpoint open wide their somewhat narrow minds and see some good in the culture of other traditions in Northern Ireland.

However, Nationalists will have to accept that language can be emotive and offending, especially when used as part of a political points-scoring exercise. That has been demonstrated in this House by some of those who insist on using the Irish language when they plainly cannot speak it, using it merely to cause offence. Language does not cause offence when used in a cultural context by those genuinely interested in the language, but it does when it is used as part of a political points-scoring exercise.

In conclusion, I would simply state that equality must be given to all cultural traditions, instead of the scoffing and intolerance shown by some across this Chamber to all elements of Ulster Protestant and Ulster-Scots culture.

**Mr McCarthy:** As a Member of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee I fully support every effort to engage as many people as possible in creative leisure time. The arts are for everyone, regardless of one's political opinion or affiliation. I hope we go forward



together in promoting arts of all descriptions to people of all descriptions.

We are not short of suggestions in planning for the optimum use of public funding in the sphere of culture, arts and leisure in Northern Ireland. There is, for example, the report on the recent FutureSearch conference, which was organised by the permanent secretary to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. That document should provide a number of useful ideas in creating a strategic framework for action in arts and culture in Northern Ireland over the next 20 years. We have also seen published in recent times a strategy review for the Arts Council in Northern Ireland entitled 'Opening up the Arts'.

4.15 pm

The aim is to have a new Arts Council strategy in place by April 2001. This review makes reference to many issues of concern to Members, such as the community arts budget. The review says

"the rapid growth of community arts in recent years has not been accompanied by adequate evaluation."

No doubt the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, who has graced us with his presence today, and his officials are taking note of this and the many other valid points in the Arts Council's review.

Community arts are playing an even greater role in reconciliation, and that is to be welcomed and encouraged. There is a group in my area called Bright Sparks, with whom I am very proud to have associations. It comes from Portaferry and caters for youngsters from the age of three. That group puts on wonderful shows that could be the pride of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, probably through lack of funding, it is confined to the Strangford constituency. There are many such community groups.

It would be remiss of me not to plug another very important organisation called Cinemagic. Members may well know of the activities of this group and what it does for the young film-makers of Northern Ireland. I have to pay tribute to one of its directors — my niece, Miss Shona McCarthy. I am proud to tell the Chamber about Cinemagic's activities.

Many interesting ideas are being generated about funding for the arts. The point that I would like to make is to do with organisational structures. Public funding of the arts is not only a matter for the Arts Council; many other bodies including the National Lottery, district councils, European institutions and other Government Departments — notably Education — are involved as well. Already those hoping to benefit from the system find it amazingly complex. My plea to the Minister — and I am sure that my colleagues on the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee will support me on this — is that special efforts be made to keep the design of any

future restructuring as simple as possible and the cost of bureaucracy as low as possible. We do not want to find that efforts to increase funding are rewarded only by increased administrative costs, with no significant benefit to Northern Ireland citizens.

In conclusion, the arts in Northern Ireland play a very important role in bringing people together. It is vital that we support every effort to bring the arts to an even greater number of people and that can only be done by properly funding every aspect of the arts, culture and leisure programme. I hope that the Minister takes on board all that has been said about this today.

**Mr Weir:** I had not originally intended to speak in this debate, so I will keep my remarks brief. As a former culture, arts and leisure spokesman for the Ulster Unionist Party, albeit for a period of four days — perhaps the shortest-lived party spokesman ever — I feel compelled to say something on the subject.

There are few subjects which should unite the House more than the arts. It is a subject which touches the hearts of everybody, whether Members of this House or the general public. They may have a love of the cinema, literature or fine paintings in an art gallery; they may have a love of traditional or country and western music, or they may want to buy the latest Blur Lightning Seeds CD. This is an important subject, and we have to look at what the guiding principles should be when dealing with it.

The first guiding principle should be that we approach this subject with a degree of realism. In the past, because culture, arts and leisure have tended to be Cinderella aspects of Government which have been hived off to various Departments, they have often been susceptible to Government cutbacks. We have to realise that the pressure for an increase in resources for the arts is going to be met with a great deal of resistance, given the scarcity of resources in the future, and we are always going to be faced with this situation. If, for example, we get additional money, will that money be spent on a particular arts project, or is it going to be spent on health or education?

There will always be worthy causes which, on many occasions, are going to have a greater call on our resources than the arts, so it is important that we realise that whatever money is spent on the arts — or, indeed, if we are able to get any increase in spending on the arts — it will not be a vast amount or a vast increase. While I agree with Mr McMenamin that we ought to ensure that the individual artist has freedom of expression and that interference does not occur, as a body we have to ensure that the money we spend on the arts is carefully monitored to ensure that we gain the maximum value for money from public investment in the arts.

The second issue that has been highlighted by Mr McMenamin is that when looking at spending in the arts, we have got to do so in an imaginative context. He

mentioned the great efforts that have been made in the Republic of Ireland and other places in the world. New York is one of the areas which has tended to benefit from this. A great deal of emphasis has been placed there on trying to attract film-makers and backing its local film industry. We have seen in the Republic of Ireland, for example, how that has paid dividends, both in an artistic sense, in terms of expanding the film industry and expanding the artistic content in the Republic of Ireland, and also from an economic point of view. For example, in recent years a film which is more associated with Scotland, 'Braveheart', was shot on location in the Republic of Ireland.

With the advent of the ceasefires there has been an increased interest in Northern Ireland from a cinematic point of view, and perhaps film-makers feel that it is more accessible. We need to look imaginatively at how we can promote the arts in such a way as to benefit the people of Northern Ireland, both in terms of enriching their artistic experience and also the practical benefit that could bring to the economy.

Thirdly, as a number of Members have mentioned, we have to promote cultural diversity. The point has been made — and it is a very true one — that culture, particularly in the Ulster-British sense and also, to some extent, the Ulster-Scots sense, has tended to be marginalised and ignored in the past. I would very much hold to that view. This has not simply been because of a lack of recognition from official sources. At times in the past the Unionist community has perhaps not been aware of its own culture; it has perhaps not gone out to embrace its culture and history.

It is important that that diversity is celebrated. One thing slightly disappointed me about this debate, and I am glad to see at least that Jim Shannon was the first person to mention it. When we have been looking at arts and culture in Northern Ireland, there has obviously been much concentration on Irish, the Irish culture, the Ulster/British culture and, indeed, on Ulster-Scots. Jim Shannon has been the only Member so far to mention that we are living in a multicultural society and to highlight that there are more than just the British and the Irish communities in Northern Ireland. There is a wide range of communities — for example, Chinese, Indian and Jewish — and it is important that, as part of that feeling of cultural diversity, we ensure that those communities are well represented as well. The artistic diversity which they can bring to Northern Ireland should be celebrated. That would be enriching for the whole of society and help to break down some of the barriers within it.

Finally, we should ensure that we have not only cultural diversity, but cultural tolerance. And in celebrating the various cultures here, we should do so in a fashion that does not become — and I have seen this

happening on a number of occasions — cultural imperialism. From my own background, for example, having spent a lot of time at Queen's, I know the very negative effect that the Irish language signs there had on the Unionist community. That was a feeling of cultural imperialism. Whatever the intentions behind the signs — and I am sure that many of the people who supported them did so for the best of reasons — it created a feeling of oppression and of cultural imperialism. When any section of the community feels a sense of cultural imperialism, that leads, unfortunately, not to cultural tolerance, but to cultural and artistic intolerance.

We must encourage people to celebrate the diversity of our culture but to do so in a way in which they do not feel that a particular culture is being forced down their throats, or feel that they are being forced to learn a language, for example, Irish, against their wishes. We must encourage tolerance and diversity but ensure that it does not stray into the realms of imperialism.

**Mrs E Bell:** I am very interested in what the Member is saying. Does he agree that the cultural traditions group of the Community Relations Council does the work that he is talking about, and that if we all embraced that, it would help to enhance and expand cultural diversity in all our traditions?

**Mr Weir:** I am talking in terms of the broader context, rather than getting into the specifics of particular groups. We must consistently seek better ways for the various groups to get that message across. We must have cultural and artistic diversity. This has great potential to educate, to inspire and to uplift the human spirit. I am glad that we have had this debate.

Mr McMenamin has helped to open our minds to a wide range of possibilities. Whatever concerns I have had about the setting up of a separate Department and the administrative costs involved, it has the advantage of allowing the Assembly to focus on a wide range of issues in culture, arts and leisure, and ensuring that the people of Northern Ireland are properly served in this area. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**Mr A Doherty:** I compliment my Colleague Eugene McMenamin for highlighting the importance of culture, arts and leisure as an essential element in our work to bring peace and a decent quality of life to our citizens.

I had a cultural experience a few weeks ago. I watched a Billy Connolly special on late night television, very irreverent, very funny and very perceptive. I can imagine Billy Connolly talking about arts and culture. "Crawford, me and Nigel are going up to the Waterfront to see a concerto. Will you join us in the wine bar for a glass of Mouton Cadet?"

4.30 pm

To some, culture is high culture: concerts and theatre, art galleries, poetry and, of course, eating out. Everything else is not culture; it is common: television, bingo, football, discos, lotteries and carries-out — or carry-outs. *[Laughter]* I am being too grammatical for myself.

If that is your idea of culture, arts and leisure, you might be right in thinking that it is not nearly as important as other areas of Government, such as health, housing, education, environment and employment. But you would be wrong. As that cultural guru Jimmy Cricket says, “There’s more.” We are getting very sophisticated. Now we also have Cultural Heritage. It has capital letters because it is very important, particularly as a way of killing time, and other things, during the long, hot Ulster summer.

There is Cultural Heritage A, full of flags and emblems, arches and murals and banners, collarettes and hard hats, walking up and down, Ulster-Scots, balaclavas and black helmets. There is Cultural Heritage B, full of flags and emblems, murals and protests, diddly-dee music and dancing from the knees down, *tír gan teanga*, *tír gan anam* berets and black glasses.

I make the point very firmly that I have no wish to belittle the culture of any group. What I am trying, awkwardly, to do is to describe each group’s culture from the perspective of the other. What I find totally abhorrent is Cultural Heritage C, which unites and divides at the same time. It is a culture of bigotry and sectarianism, violence and punishment, up to and including the ultimate sanction of death. This sanction can be directed against one’s own side for not conforming, or against the other side just for being different and therefore a threat.

**Mr Fee:** Actually, the Member and I conspired to allow me to contribute to a debate which I was not listed to take part in. His point is very important. He spoke about balaclavas, sashes and the like. I have a unique experience of arts and culture in Northern Ireland. At school, I had a wonderful teacher called Sean Hollywood who introduced me to the dramatic arts and the amateur drama circuit. He inspired an understanding of what amateur drama can do: the potency of drama as a means of communication, a manner of understanding the point of view of others, and a way of building empathy between people with differing cultural backgrounds and experiences, of building sympathy, and through that, unity between people from different backgrounds.

I am glad that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure is here, for I have a simple plea, and I take this opportunity to make it to him. The amateur drama circuit in Northern Ireland has been the single

continuous arena in which people from a broad range of backgrounds and beliefs have met, exchanged views, communicated and come to some understandings. I welcome the current generation of Newpoint Players, who are here in the Gallery today. Within that group, and within all the groups on the Ulster drama circuit, there is a diverse range of religious, political and other views, yet they have found a forum in which they can exchange them and come to terms with them. It is the single element of arts and leisure in Northern Ireland that is wholly underfunded, with no structural supports whatsoever, and it is maintained by a massive voluntary effort.

I ask the Minister to take a personal interest in the amateur drama circuit and see what provision he can make, or what resources he can release, to help support the work of people in every section of the community in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Hussey:** I would like to make a very brief point, and I see my councillor colleague from another life, Mr McMenamin, looking at me and wondering what I am going to say. Mr A Doherty talked about high culture and low culture. Is it not amazing that what some people would call low culture — whether it be John Hogan or Billy Connolly or whatever — seems to be financially viable, whereas what is called high culture often needs the public purse to assist it?

**Mr A Doherty:** My answer to that is yes. I thank the first person for intervening — he managed to get more time than I am going to need. But it was in a good cause, and I am grateful for that.

The people of most countries take a genuine pride in their culture and heritage, no matter how diverse it is. It draws them together and brings joy and colour to their lives. That is not the case with us, and that is tragic. Now tell me that culture, arts and leisure is not important. Now tell me it is not time we caught ourselves on and stopped tub-thumping or hurling clichés or veiled insults at one another and demanding equality so long as we, in Orwellian terms, are more equal than others.

Do not tell me that all cultures and traditions are good and must be protected, no matter what the cost in human suffering, misery and terror. Cannibalism, slavery and ritual mutilation of young girls and boys, torturing, burning of witches and heretics are all examples of traditions and cultural heritage which, thankfully, have now gone in most places — sadly, not all. We could all make a long list of elements of our culture and traditions that should be changed or done away with. There is much that is good that could unite us and bring us joy, but there should be no place for anything divisive, dangerous or downright evil. The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, his Department



and the Assembly Committee have much to do, and I wish them well.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am grateful to Mr McMenamin for raising this subject. I believe the arts can be and should be a unifying medium. It can break down class, religious and cultural barriers, and that is what I hope we in the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee will be directing our attention to over the years. The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into fishing. As I listen to members of the angling fraternity telling the inquiry about various aspects of fishing that I knew little or nothing about, I now appreciate that angling is, indeed, an art, and it should be encouraged.

The island of Ireland is rich in all aspects of arts and culture, and it is a fundamental part of our historical heritage as Celts. We can point to our ancient Celtic heritage, which is aptly illustrated and internationally famous, and it has been an inspiration to all. Countless artists, painters, writers, musicians and architects take inspiration from that ancient civilisation known as the Celts. We can dispute whether we are Celts or not, but I do not think any of us can claim we are purely this or purely that.

However, we can point to the heritage that has been left to us. We can point to the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow. We can look at our Celtic stonework crosses throughout the graveyards. We can read the literature of our bards and poets. I am indebted to a writer, Thomas Cahill — I think he is American — who claims in a book that we Celts or Irish saved civilisation from the worst, or darkest, excesses of the Middle Ages, and that we did this through the medium of art.

Therefore I believe that art is humanity's creative expression and interpretation in a world made by God. Art in its most basic form is created by, and should be for, the common people, be it through the medium of song, storytelling, drama, language, the visual arts, sculpture, or painting and drawing. Indeed, in contemporary society, art is used on the walls of our various cities and towns to express what the people needed to say and, perhaps, were prohibited from saying.

Art should never be interpreted in its narrowest forms as a means of class division, or of division of any description. Equality should be the cornerstone in the thinking of all those charged with the responsibility of promoting arts as the means of addressing division and promoting diversity. Art, as we know it here, should reflect the ethos of the Good Friday Agreement. The Ulster-Scots tradition and the interplay and relationship between these two islands as reflected in that very rich culture of Scots Gaelic — song, Scots dancing, design of clothing — should all be respected and promoted.

We need to democratise arts. On all sides of the artistic process there needs to be access for the creators and also for the consumers at a community level. It should not be the prerogative of the affluent. We must recognise that art is a partnership that provides a forum for the expression of people's most fundamental needs. It can be utilised to address issues that define the social, political and cultural needs of the community. I am reminded of an Italian film director, Armand Gatti, who came here some 20 years ago to make a film which he thought would tell everyone in France and Italy what we were doing, what sort of a divided people we were. He called it 'The Writing on the Wall', and he showed the film in France, in Toulouse, with French subtitles. Then he showed the film in London, and people could not understand what we were saying, because we were speaking, I believe, a language that has been interwoven with various dialects, from Scots to the Irish language. And so, in London, Armand Gatti had to add English subtitles to a film in which young people from Derry and Belfast were speaking.

I am also reminded of my mother, who travelled quite extensively back and forth between Donegal and Scotland. She was a great fan of Robbie Burns. I always remember that she quoted or read extensively to us children from his poetry. The one that sticks in my mind is

"Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, timrous beastie".

I think that everyone knows that one. To me, all those things make up an interpretation of art. I am thinking of interpretation of the Féile an Phobail in West Belfast, which has been an artistic festival of tremendous international dimensions.

It has attracted thousands of visitors from all over the world in the past two years, proving that art can play a fundamental role in bringing people here to enjoy our rich and diverse culture, in promoting our economy and in being a tourist magnet.

4.45 pm

As a society we need to do a number of things to promote and widen the interpretation of what art is. I think that to a degree — some Members have already mentioned this — art has been defined for us. Now we need to start to define it for ourselves. Art should never be about rich millionaires who come over here and buy our paintings, literature, even our buildings and export them somewhere in the world because they have the means to do so.

We need to start encouraging art by encouraging it in our children. We need to look at the wholeness of our children. Children are naturally creative. They are naturally conduits for the expression of art. We must begin at that fundamental level.

The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee needs to promote and widen the interpretation of art, and we can



do this by allowing art to influence us in all forms: art in schools; art in community schemes; art for the disabled; art for the ethnic and minority communities — we can learn a lot from the richness and the diversity of them all. We should look at art in our design and textile industry. I used to make Irish dance costumes when I was a member of a women's co-operative. We embroidered very elaborate designs, most of them copied from the book of Kells. We learned that the knots, crosses, twists and designs that we used had an artistic meaning, often symbolising something close to nature — for example, the knot symbolised harvest time.

There has to be a radical overhaul of the various agencies charged with responsibility for promoting the arts. Art must be made more accessible to those communities who have struggled for years with little or no financial support, or even recognition. We need, once again, to promote and encourage all of our cultural festivals, our feiseanna and our films. Look at the success of a film made in Derry on a very, very low budget, 'Dance Lexy Dance'. It is an amazing film which made it all the way to Los Angeles and the Academy awards.

This has been a valuable debate, and I hope that the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee will address all the issues raised today. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Boyd:** I want specifically to highlight the excellent work of the Northern Ireland Film Commission and provide some details of its role and function. The purpose of the Northern Ireland Film Commission is to develop the film industry and film culture in Northern Ireland. It was established in 1997 and provides assistance and information for film and television producers from across the world who are considering filming in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has unique opportunities for the creative producer. Its position as a region of the United Kingdom offers producers access to UK sources of production finance, whether for feature films or for television drama. The role of the commission is to provide strategic leadership for the film sector by ensuring the best use of those public funds which are available for film development and production in Northern Ireland.

In addition, it is contracted by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to provide advice on the distribution of National Lottery funds to film projects — currently around £700,000 per year. Benefits of the Northern Ireland Film Council's work include medium-and long-term job creation, inward investment and tourism. It promotes Northern Ireland as a tourist destination, stimulates private-sector investment and builds confidence in Northern Ireland through new images across screens throughout the world.

The Northern Ireland Film Commission promotes an awareness of Northern Ireland locations, crews and facilities to producers nationally and internationally, and promotes films produced in Northern Ireland. It also supports the development and production of films in Northern Ireland and encourages private-sector investment in the industry. It offers development loans to producers intending to make feature films or television dramas in the region, and the fund offers producers loans towards the costs of developing a project.

The Northern Ireland Film Commission provides a comprehensive information service in print and digitally on all aspects of film in Northern Ireland and Europe.

It is recognised as the industry training body for Northern Ireland, and, as such, it ensures that the training needs of the industry in Northern Ireland are met and that producers engage local trainees when appropriate. Specialist short courses, training grants for freelance technicians, industry-recognised qualifications and support for trainees on productions are all part of the commission's commitment to building on the existing creative and technical skills and talent base of the industry in Northern Ireland.

The commission's training programme is supported by Skill Set, the UK national training organisation for broadcast, film and video, the Training and Employment Agency, and Ulster Television. In 1997, together with Ulster Television, in recognition of the success of its joint training programme, the commission received a regional training award and a national training award.

The commission also works in conjunction with BBC Northern Ireland, British Screen, Ulster Television, Channel 4, Belfast City Council, Londonderry City Council and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland on a range of schemes intended to develop the creative, technical and business skills essential to the growth of the industry in Northern Ireland. The film commission manages the premiere scheme, funded in partnership with Ulster Television, Belfast City Council and British Screen. Premiere offers an opportunity for Northern Ireland's new film-making talent to make five short fiction films each year.

Northern Ireland has developed a reputation for innovative and imaginative approaches to cinema exhibition and media education. The commission promotes the development of cultural cinema and encourages the study of the moving image and convergent technologies here.

Northern Ireland is the home of the Cinemagic International Film Festival for Young People. This is a high-quality mix of entertainment and education for young people between the ages of six and 18.

Belfast is the home of one of the UK's longest established art-house cinemas: the Queen's Film Theatre. Northern Ireland continues to produce many fine actors and actresses, and long may that continue. I commend the work of the Northern Ireland Film Commission.

Finally, may I say a few words about amateur dramatics. This has been thriving in Northern Ireland, and, in fact, my own family has been involved in amateur dramatics. I thought it was particularly sad when the Arts Theatre closed its doors last year. We must ensure, as an Assembly, that no other theatres close due to a lack of funding.

**Mr Davis:** I will be very brief. I am very pleased at the way that this debate has taken place and at the number of speakers that have taken part. I am delighted to see the Minister here. I believe that as a result of the establishment of this new Department under a local Minister, the arts, leisure and sport will be very dominant in the years that lie ahead.

It is a well-known fact that Belfast suffered for nearly two centuries from having the image, if not the explicit reputation, of being the centre of obscurity in western Europe, and not without just cause, in relation to the arts. However, that has all changed. We are currently well served, perhaps better served, for poets, writers, painters, playwrights and musicians than any other area of a similar size in the world of art. Belfast City Council deserves credit for bringing arts to the fore, albeit in response to pressure from various areas and groups.

Those interested in art in other areas of the Province have now organised considerable lobbies to pressurise elected representatives for more funds for promotion of the arts. We all know that there are plenty of projects throughout the Province crying out for more funding and financial support.

We could take a lead from the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, which have been doing very well in recent years. These cities spend not only to promote the arts by raising the general level of appreciation but, more importantly, by creating new jobs and new industry in what is now established as the growth area of the national economy.

In conclusion, I do not believe that we can afford to miss the opportunity that now exists, and with the new Minister installed in the new Department, we can get on with promoting the arts.

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey):** This has been a wide-ranging debate and one that has stimulated a number of people to speak. I am very grateful for the input from all parties around the Chamber.

The debate could perhaps have begun with what we mean by "culture" and what we mean by "arts" —

"leisure" is well defined as "sporting activities" — since culture and arts are sometimes confused. The widest definition of culture is the values and rules that underpin society.

The motion is about arts in Northern Ireland, and I believe that that relates primarily to the performing arts, creative arts and community arts. Those are broken down into other facets: painting, sculpture, film, architecture, literature, dance, drama, music, poetry, literature, and so on. I will not go through the complete list.

The timing of this debate could not be more appropriate. Ours is a new Department and we have begun to create a strategy for the Department and, within the arts section of the Department, a strategy for arts that we call "Future Search", as previously mentioned. The main deliverer of financial support for arts in Northern Ireland is the Arts Council. A review of the Arts Council, which is now in the public domain, has just been published by Prof Everitt. It is called the 'Opening up the arts — a strategy review for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland'. It is important that we look at those two pieces of work, which have yet to come to fruition because the final strategy has still to be produced. However, I expect that to happen sooner rather than later.

We recognise the importance of the arts, and we recognise the unfulfilled potential and the need to develop them. Mr Arthur Doherty referred to arts in terms to do with the quality of life, and I believe very strongly in that. This is an area that will enhance, reinforce and sustain the quality of life for our people by helping to build a better future for Northern Ireland through arts and creativity. It will also act as a catalyst for personal, social and economic development.

Someone spoke about value for money, and the arts give value for money. In terms of where art stands, the Myerscough Report — which came out in 1996 using data from 1993-94 — demonstrated that six years ago the arts sector had a turnover of £150 million and supported up to 9,000 jobs. When one considers that that was six years ago, and thinks of all that has happened since then, one can see the economic potential that arts and culture have.

The arts can also be a catalyst for personal and social development that gives confidence to young people through participation, and they can express an image both within and outside Northern Ireland that can change perceptions about the Province. They are important among a whole range of Government activities and can help to attract inward investment and tourism.

It is the key element of the Northern Ireland economy and that is why it is so exciting. A number of points

have been raised, and many of those have been earmarked for future research.

5.00 pm

Mr McElduff raised the issue of arts in education, and that is one top-of-the-list key aim, in terms of future research. Mr McElduff played an important role by participating in the 'Creativity in Education' workshop. That workshop looked at how we could give our children the opportunity to realise and develop their creative potential — embedding creativity in the educational process. Prof Ken Robinson, the United Kingdom's leading authority on promoting creativity in education, will be helping us to develop action in this area.

Mr McCarthy referred to the creative industries. Again, we have enormous potential and talent in this area. Coincidentally, it may interest Mr McCarthy to know that, during the first period of devolution, the very first activity I undertook as Minister was to go to a Cinemagic function, and I was very impressed by the director, Miss Shona McCarthy. I did not realise that she was his niece, and I do not believe she volunteered the information. Even now that I know this, I can assure him it will not be a disadvantage to her. We have an innate talent among our young people in our creative industry, and that is something which we are looking to tap into. There are new technologies coming on board.

Mr McMenamin spoke about a cultural task force. We would not rule that out, and it is certainly in the melting pot. It is important to reflect that we have already a creative industries task group looking at film, Cinemagic and how we get involved in the new converging technologies, such as software and the Internet.

We also have the creative industries task force, which is a United Kingdom wide vehicle, and we are interacting with colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales. Again, that is another mechanism for delivering ideas, strategies and policies. The idea of a cultural task force can go into the melting pot. I am not sure how to respond in so far as producing yet another grouping to go with that.

Support for individual artists was mentioned, and again this is an important area. Over 1,000 people are employed in arts and crafts in the Province. That is part of the job creation and economic benefits we are deriving from an innate creativity and imagination in our population.

The issue of universal accessibility was raised by Mr McMenamin. He may be aware that we launched the Adapt programme recently. That aims to improve accessibility to the arts for those who suffer disability, by effectively auditing all arts and culture venues — whether they be museums, theatres, art galleries or

heritage centres. There are approximately 300 venues for which the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is responsible. That is another area which we are trying to move forward on. Once we complete the audit we are determined to take the next step which will be the implementation stage.

I have referred to the review of the role of the Arts Council, and that will be the main mechanism for delivery. A number of areas have come forward under that review. The Chairman of the Arts Council referred to the review as 'bracing', and it was certainly not a review that simply looked at what has gone before and endorsed it. It made a number of suggestions on various areas, including transparency, the involvement of district councils, resources, extending participation, and, in particular, the review of the community arts sector, as already mentioned. That is important when we talk about community arts and amateur drama, and the Everitt Report points out that some 20,000 people in Northern Ireland are involved in such activities. We looked at ways in which the Arts Council of Northern Ireland can support that area.

Resources of course are extremely limited. The Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, Mr O'Neill, referred to £65 million, but this is a global figure and includes funding for libraries, which take up roughly a third of the budget, and sport, for which we allow roughly £2.5 million in Northern Ireland. Were it not for the National Lottery top-ups, we could not survive. We also have other areas such as Ordnance Survey, the Public Record Office and museums, all of which are funded through my Department. It boils down to the fact that funding for the arts in Northern Ireland stands at a grand total of £7 million. We add on to that National Lottery top-ups, which is why we can make progress.

If we were comparable with Scotland, we should look for an increase of around 40%. If we had the Great Britain average, we would receive a 16% increase. What we get through National Lottery funding is based on our percentage of the population, irrespective of need. It is recognised that when it comes to meeting our needs in Northern Ireland we are between 15% and 20% behind the rest of the UK, not least because we have suffered from 30 years of violence, and not least because we have one of the youngest populations, if not the youngest, in Europe. Our needs are greater, and our funding for the arts has been abysmal.

Mr Weir referred to the fact that all sections in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure are "Cinderella" sections. Libraries come under our remit because they used to be part of the Department of Education. Every time there was a financial constraint on education, the Department cut not the schools, or the youth service — or at least not to the same extent — but the libraries.



The same thing affected sports, and Members can see that £2.5 million for all sports in Northern Ireland is indicative of the sort of challenge we face. The sum of £7 million is abysmal funding. One of the ways forward is to see what is happening in other countries. We need only look south of the border to see what is happening in the Irish Republic and the money that is spent there on arts and culture. People there recognise the connection between economic development and cultural tourism. They recognise that they can provide potential employers with a workforce that is creative and imaginative by getting into the cultural and artistic side of society and, in particular, by bringing on young people.

It may be that our generation has lived too long to advance that theory now, but our young people have innate talent, and we have an opportunity to give them training and support to reinforce those natural talents so they can repay our society handsomely. We need only look around the world — take, for instance, the way in which creative industries have come on in places like Glasgow — to see the huge potential for economic development and job and wealth creation. If we look simply for value for money, we could not spend our money in any better way than this. It also channels the talents, energy, creativity and imagination of our young people down pathways such as the arts, cultural activity and sport, taking them away from other, more negative pursuits.

I have tried to cover as many of the points as I can. I know that I have not covered them all. I am grateful that so many points have been raised, and I shall do my best to address those on Monday when I will be here to take Ministers' questions, and when I am next with the Committee. Culture, Arts and Leisure is a very exciting Department. I believe that I have the best job in the Executive, and I think other members of the Executive recognise that. The variety is here, the potential is here, and there is the ability to improve — to use Mr Doherty's phrase, which I am very attached to — the quality of life of our people.

## PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE SCHEME (ANTRIM)

**Mr Ford:** I have a very long saga to recount of the history of Antrim town centre. I hope it will be of interest not just to those of us who represent South Antrim. It certainly has implications right across Northern Ireland. I had hoped that my council colleagues, Cllr McClelland and Cllr Clyde, would have been in a position to contribute to this debate today, but perhaps you will keep me right from the Chair if necessary, Mr Deputy Speaker. The saga of this particular PFI Scheme involves two statutory agencies — the Transport Holding Company and the North Eastern Education and Library Board. It also involves what are now three different Departments of Government — Culture, Arts and Leisure, Regional Development and Finance and Personnel — and I am desperately hoping that at least one of them will manage to provide a Minister to respond to this debate in the near future. It is a rather complex issue which requires their attention.

As far back as 1984, when the Antrim area plan was developed, a site in the centre of the town was already identified for the development of a library and a bus station. It sits at the junction of Church Street and Railway Street in the very centre of the town. Part of it is now owned by the Transport Holding Company and part by the North Eastern Education and Library Board. It is an area of about an acre and occupies a prime town centre site. It is situated in the middle of the main street, with the high wall of the parish church on the other side. The fact that it lies empty restricts possible developments on either side, and it splits the town centre in two. It is having a hugely detrimental effect on the development of the town centre. That was the plan in 1984, but it was not until the autumn of 1990 that Ulsterbus announced plans to develop the site. Planning permission was granted in 1992 and an investment appraisal undertaken, but the black hole sat there.

**Mr Boyd:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not want to stop the debate, but do we have a quorum?

*Members counted, and a quorum being present —*

**Mr Ford:** I am sure that no Member for South Antrim would wish to stop this debate.

In 1993 a series of negotiations took place about land swaps and about various plans for the site. Ulsterbus was supposed to be taking the lead in a joint scheme with the North Eastern Education and Library Board. I remember shortly after my election to Antrim Council in 1993 that it was already a topic for discussion in the technical services committee. There was a concern about the state of the site and the detrimental effect it



was having on the town centre. There were further talks in 1994, and I believe that planning permission was granted for a scheme at that stage. In 1995 there was another investment appraisal, and there was to be another delay.

It was clear at that stage that the major problem was the Conservative Government's economic policy. They refused to fund the necessary public infrastructure. I remember, as I am sure you do, Mr Deputy Speaker, a meeting with Mr Moss, who was then briefly the Minister for the Environment. He came to Antrim Council in late 1995 and was questioned about what was happening on the Ulsterbus site, as we now refer to it. He said he would review the matter again. In 1996 a report arrived from the Minister. Now this was at the height of the Tory Party's privatisation efforts and its enthusiasm for PFI so, according to Mr Moss, the way was now open to proceed under PFI. It could not proceed any other way.

5.15 pm

In the Chamber today we have heard some support for the concept of PFI and PPP. Four and a half years on, I have considerable doubts about their value since there has been no real progress, at least as far as the public is concerned. Of course, there has been much happening in the background.

The PFI procedure was supposed to have been implemented in early 1996 but it was after the change in Government, and long after the departure of Mr Moss, that a briefing meeting was held in January 1998. In March 1998 three parties were invited to negotiate. Bids were submitted in July 1998, although only from two parties, and they made their best and final offers in December 1998 — only three years after the Minister announced that we would be proceeding through PFI as the best and speediest way of implementing this scheme for the good of the people of Antrim.

By the spring of 1999 it was clear that all was not well. There were stories that the PFI would be terminated on grounds of cost. In May 1999 I was approached by an agent for one consortium and informed that it believed that PFI was not being properly implemented in this respect. I was told, and I have no reason to doubt it, that there was a unilateral demand for reduction in the price of the scheme. That was in contravention of the scheme drawn up by the Government as to how PFI should be implemented. I was shown a copy of the guidelines. The penultimate saga is described as "final negotiation over the proposals". It has also been described, perhaps more accurately, as "a bit of a haggle over the details of the scheme". Yet it appeared, and my understanding is, that this was driven by the Department of Finance and Personnel. I would be interested to hear the Minister's response. The haggling over the details was ignored,

and there was simply to be a unilateral decision to require a price reduction, or nothing would happen.

I contacted Paul Murphy and Lord Dubs, the Ministers then responsible for the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Environment. I also obtained the support of Antrim Council in June 1999. That particular bidder met the council in the summer of 1999 and showed models and plans for what the scheme might have entailed. By September Lord Dubs advised the council that a meeting was being arranged with both bidders. However, it took another letter, and it was in October 1999, following a further intervention by Lord Dubs, before the two bidders were invited to submit their revised bids. Further bids were then submitted in November 1999 — we are now nearing 4 years from the time that the PFI scheme was introduced as a speedy way of resolving the problem. By February this year, the company that had first contacted me told me that it was now being recommended as the preferred bidder.

However, there was a further wrangle about incurring costs in advance of final approval. It appeared that the company was being asked to undertake further work before it was given the full approval, and it would be at certain financial risk in so doing. Given the wrangles that had gone on over many years and the difficulties it had, I find it difficult to suggest that the company should have been anything other than cautious in its approach in dealing with that aspect. I understand that in February this year, and for four months since, the company has been told that news is expected soon, every time it has asked. Soon means many things. Those of us who have been through the entire negotiations that led up to Good Friday in 1998 should, perhaps, be cautious of criticising others. Soon for something that was supposed to have been finalised at least a year ago is not very soon.

I hope I have managed to give a reasonably accurate picture of this particular project and all the traumas it has been through, although I have shorn off an awful lot of detail. I felt it was necessary to do it for two main reasons. First, I wanted to highlight the problems that have been caused to Antrim and its people by the delay in this scheme. A crucial town centre scheme has moved nowhere for five years, despite constant allegations that this is the speediest way of dealing with it. Secondly, it raises many and detailed questions about the PFI process. I am glad that the Minister of Finance is now here to respond to my concerns, and no doubt the Minister for Regional Development will be in a position to wink across the Chamber at him as well.

I have some philosophical concerns with PFI. I have made this clear to those with whom I have been talking, who are engaged in the PFI process. There are major problems in some schemes across the water. In hospitals

and schools, for example, the management of a facility appears at times to come extraordinarily close to issues of clinical judgement or professional competence of teaching staff.

There are major problems in the implementation of PFI schemes in that respect. There is also the issue that at times, despite the cost of Government borrowing's being lower than that in the private sector, PFI schemes have added to the cost rather than decreased it. This should have been the ideal scheme for PFI. It was a simple scheme to manage and build a library, a small bus facility, some shops and some residential accommodation; there were no major complications of professional competence, no major difficulties in terms of who was responsible for which aspects of the work. It was easy to divide between the various agencies and the private-sector bidder.

In this case the private sector produced better plans than those that were originally produced by the Transport Holding Company and the North Eastern Education and Library Board. There is no doubt that for a commercial town-centre site, the commercial impetus of a private-sector bidder has added additional shopping facilities and accommodation and has produced a better plan. However, a better plan is no use to the people of Antrim if something does not appear on the ground. Even with these better plans, this saga has been going on for over four years, with no sign of any movement. The Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions in England, or Great Britain, or wherever its precise remit covers, has produced a report suggesting that PFI is not the appropriate way to proceed for schemes of less than £10 million.

It seems to be parallel with what some of us would call compulsory tendering in councils. Because PFI is not the right way to proceed, there is this huge issue of small bodies or small schemes being subject to massive additional costs and over-administration. That appears to be borne out in every case by this scheme. PFI is being forced upon us by the initial policy decisions of the Conservative party, which have been implemented without change by the new Labour Government, and that has been detrimental to us all.

As a town, Antrim currently has major development opportunities. It recently submitted an application for out-of-town retailing which has been rejected but which gives the town centre a major opportunity to develop. There are possibilities of new housing, which you and I, Mr Deputy Speaker, remember from our rows with the planners on the issue of the redundant Massereene Hospital site's being used for commercial development sitting, as it does, in a town-centre location. All these things are going ahead, and yet the scheme, which is supposed to have been in the public sector for almost 16 years as a plan to move on, is now lost in the ether,

and nothing is happening. We talked about public transport earlier, and here is a scheme that aims to provide the facilities to bring quality public transport into the town centre for the benefit of those who are taking their custom to the shops there, yet nothing has been done about it. This gap is likely to continue, with no sign of movement. Most other things are going ahead, while we sit with an empty site, blocking the development from one end of the main street to the other and also blocking the view of any possible development up Railway Street towards the hospital site.

In conclusion, I hope that at the end of this debate the Minister will be able to tell us two things; first, can he explain to the people of Antrim what is happening to the Ulsterbus site, and how we will get the public transport and library facility? Unfortunately the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has left, so he cannot hear my praise for the Library Service about which, I am sure, he would have been pleased. Secondly, I would like the Minister to tell us how his Department is going to deal with such a dilemma in the future. This saga illustrates the past failures of PFI under the Department of Finance and Personnel to produce any real benefits for the people of Antrim and the people of Northern Ireland, even in a scheme as simple as this.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** I can understand the genuine frustration that the people of Antrim are currently suffering as a result of the inactivity of those who have the responsibility of ensuring that this building is erected in Antrim. The scheme is an imaginative one, the plans are excellent, and the people of Antrim would be well served if it were fully built and operational. The problem lies in getting it from the initial planning stage to full planning stage and then actually building it. I understand the Members for the area raising the issue in the Chamber, and I would like to apologise for my Colleague Mr Clyde who is at the funeral of a close friend and is unable to join us in the debate. For a long time elected representatives in Antrim, including my colleagues, Cllrs Clyde, Dunlop and McClay and others, have fought valiantly to make representations about this delayed scheme. It has a long history, but we cannot go back, and, we cannot change that. I trust that we can give an impetus to the scheme to ensure that it moves on.

Six years ago the North Eastern Education and Library Board entered into deep and genuine discussions about pooling its land with the land which was under the control of the Transport Holding Company. They decided together on an imaginative scheme which would permit the Transport Holding Company to take full responsibility for building the property. It was agreed that the Education and Library Board would repay a sum of between £50,000 and £60,000 each year for five years until its part of the

scheme was paid off. That was not only an imaginative scheme; it was the proper initiative to take and the best way forward. The two schemes were coming together with the pooling of land and resources, and in five years the board should have owned the library. They felt that it was the best way in which to handle public funds, and I certainly agreed with their approach.

However, the relevant Departments said that the scheme could not proceed if the board accepted rent under the PFI directive, a directive that Government policy dictated. Even though the board had spent a considerable amount of finance on legal and consultative fees, and the PFI procedure would delay the project for a considerable time, they were told by the Department that it had to be done in this way. The board and the Holding Company went through all the procedures, involving an outline business plan, legal advisers, consultants and advertising, and then they were told to enter into negotiations with bidders, making a full business case.

The offers finally came in but were unacceptable on two counts. First, the project was now unaffordable and, secondly, the bid fell outside the public-sector comparators. The board and the Transport Holding Company asked if it was possible to go through the normal procurement route, but they were told that they must re-open negotiations with the private developers. So, once again, it went back into the melting pot of negotiations.

An amended copy of the final business case was eventually presented, and a bid was both acceptable and affordable to those who were involved in the negotiations. The board and the Transport Holding Company await the final approval before matters can proceed.

However, that that is not the end of the story. It will take time to reach the final planning stage and then it will take another year for the actual building. The people of Antrim could be two years away from getting their bus station and library and the shops that are to be included in the development. The development itself is excellent, and we should do everything in our power to encourage it. It will certainly bring quality, public transport, and quality shops into the centre of Antrim. It will help to regenerate the town and ensure it is kept very much alive and busy by bringing people right into its very heart.

That is one of the attractive things. It is bringing the people, using the public transport we talked about this morning, into the very heart of the town. That is what we want to see, to encourage the development and expansion of Antrim, with its heart being very much alive and a vibrant economic entity.

5.30 pm

The question remains: why the delay? I am led to believe that the Ministers concerned have the final papers on their desks now. I ask them to look very quickly at those papers. The Minister for Regional Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel are sitting here now. I trust that they will both ensure that the papers on their desks are approved. There is anxiety among those involved that something actually be done. It should be done.

This scheme probably falls outside the criteria for PFI. I am told that the scheme is too small, at just over £1 million, for PFI investors to find it attractive. There were no groups of people jumping up and down to take on this particular scheme. Even in the education sector, schools are being lumped together to try and constitute schemes that are appropriate for PFI. The route that has been taken has created an unnecessary delay. I ask the Ministers and Departments concerned to ensure that there is no further delay. They should get it off their desks, allow this money to be spent in the centre of Antrim and ensure that the people of Antrim are well served with an up-to-date library and an up-to-date, quality public transport system. I support Mr Ford, and I trust success will be forthcoming through continued representations.

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** I thank both Members for their contributions. I apologise to Mr Ford for my not being in the Chamber for his opening remarks. They were available to me through the technology that we have on the premises, so all I missed was whatever was said while I was coming down the stairs.

**Mr Ford:** That was the important bit.

**Mr Durkan:** Lucky I missed it then. I will write to the Member when I read it in Hansard. A variety of points were made and many questions were raised about the whole issue of PFI and PPP, and there were also particular points relating to this specific project. I will deal with the general points first.

Public/private partnerships allow the expertise and methods of the private sector to be deployed in the public sector. That has the potential to bring greater efficiency, along with a focus on achieving long term value for money over the duration of a project, which can be 20 years or more. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) is a form of public/private partnership where the private sector is involved as a provider of capital assets as well as services. PFI projects frequently involve construction or renovation of buildings, as is the case with the proposed bus station, library and retail units in Antrim.

One of my most important roles as Minister of Finance and Personnel is to ensure that we obtain the



maximum benefit and value for money from the resources available. This calls for a rigorous, realistic approach to questions of how public services can best be delivered. The need for this is re-inforced by the concerns that are continually being raised by Members over the level of resources available for particular services. When taken together, these concerns cover just about every service. This point was brought home, certainly to me, during the recent debate on the 2000/2001 Main Estimates and was emphasised again today during the debate on public transport.

Against this background we need to explore, and be ready to exploit fully, any method of delivering services that offers potential for improvement over the more traditional ways of procuring new assets in the public sector. I hardly need to remind Members that these traditional methods are not always fault-free, with cost overruns and delays in construction occurring perhaps too often. With a PFI project it is likely that such risks will be wholly or substantially transferred to the private sector, which should be better able to manage them.

There are great challenges confronting us with the improvements that we wish to see in education, health, transport, housing and many other public services. We have also inherited a backlog of maintenance work. In facing these challenges we cannot afford to ignore what the private sector has to offer by way of potentially better solutions and fresh thinking. To do so would be to do a disservice to the people. Indeed, we would find ourselves as a minority of one because other countries and territories throughout Europe and the world have increasingly looked to the private sector for help with similar problems. I am sure that this is not a distinction that we would want to bring on ourselves.

Northern Ireland has so far had a reasonably good record of successful PFI projects, two of which have this month won an award or been highly commended nationally. So far, deals worth some £53 million in estimated capital value have been signed across a wide range of services including information technology, water and sewerage, education and health. A further £560 million worth of deals are at various stages of completion on public transport, education and health, and there may be potential for much more such funding.

Both Dr McCrea and Mr Ford suggested that schemes under £10 million were not suitable for PFI. The test for PFI schemes is value for money. The size of the scheme is one factor, but it is not the only consideration. Many smaller successful schemes have been implemented here in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. The value of the scheme that was referred to, contrary to some of the figures that were suggested, is really around £3 million. However, public/private partnerships and PFI are not panaceas. There are limitations as well as opportunities. We need to identify

the potential opportunities in order to decide which solution will work best in particular circumstances. The key test, as I have said, is value for money. My Department works very closely with other Departments in helping to analyse business proposals.

The deals under public/private partnerships and PFI are generally more complex than traditional methods of procurement, and therefore they do take more time. This is only to be expected given the length of time for which these deals have to run, and the number of services which may be involved. Both public and private sectors have been on a learning curve. I hope that this is now behind us and that these lessons will help us. We should now be in a better position to identify suitable new projects and to speed up the processes in the future. Departments have developed their own expertise, and they also have available to them a competitive field of experienced private-sector consultants to help take projects forward.

For more innovative and complex projects, Departments will also be able to call upon the services of the newly established Partnerships UK. This organisation has taken over from the Treasury taskforce and has the sole mission of helping the public sector with PPP and PFI deals. In addition, I will be looking to see if there are any ways in which my Department can be of further help in supporting PPP and PFI projects.

In relation to questions raised specifically about the Antrim project, I can well understand the frustration felt by Mr Ford and expressed by the Mr McCrea at the length of time that it has taken to reach a conclusion on the Antrim bus station and library project. As I said at the outset, the prime focus of my Department throughout the process has been, and will remain, on obtaining value for money. That is the Department's job.

Contrary to some of the impressions given, the Department of Finance and Personnel has not been the source of the ongoing lengthy delay throughout the life of this project. The Department of Finance has had to respond to the papers that it received and relay its consideration back to the relevant Department. The relevant Department has, in turn, had its work to do in relation to the PFI procedures. It would have had to do further work anyway for economic appraisal purposes had it been going down the traditional procurement route. People should be careful not to misrepresent the Department of Finance and Personnel's contribution to this exercise. I am prepared to sit down with the Member and take him through my Department's calendar of involvement. It will be clear that the Department of Finance and Personnel did not hold up progress on the project. It has achieved reasonably quick turnarounds in its responses to, and considerations of, this particular project.



Where the search for value for money indicates that a PPP or PFI solution will give better value for money than traditional procurement, then my Department will quite rightly seek to ensure that a PPP or PFI solution is pursued. As the Antrim case has evolved, it has become increasingly clear that the PFI option is likely to provide the better value that we are seeking if limited funds are to be used to best advantage. I understand that a revised business case, incorporating all the necessary information, is now being finalised by the Department for Regional Development. My Department expects to receive this in the next few days, and I hope that it may be possible to make an announcement soon.

*The sitting was suspended at 5.43 pm.*

*On resuming (Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair) —*

## FIRE SERVICE: AWARD

*6.00 pm*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I have received notice from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that a statement is to be made on the Fire Service. I call the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** A LeasCheann Comhairle. Sula ndéanaim an ráiteas ba mhaith liom an deis seo a ghlacadh le leithscéal a thabhairt do na Teachtaí cionnas gurbh éigean leagan úr Gaeilge den ráiteas a sholáthar i mbeagán ama. Bhí gá leis seo le rudaí a bhí mí-chruinn sa bhunleagan a cheartú.

Before making my statement I would like to apologise to Members for the fact that the Irish version had to be replaced at short notice. This was necessary to correct inaccuracies.

Le do chead, a LeasCheann Comhairle, déanfaidh mé an ráiteas anois.

Is mian liom faisnéis a thabhairt do Theachtaí den Tionól Reachtach faoi na socruithe atá á ndéanamh le honóir a thabhairt don tSeirbhís Dóiteáin as an tseirbhís as cuimse a rinne siad le triocho bliain anuas.

Buailfidh an t-Údarás Dóiteáin bonn a bhronnfar ar gach trodaí dóiteáin a bhfuil ar a laghad trí bliana de sheirbhís leanúnach le dea-iompar curtha isteach aige/aici idir na blianta 1969 agus 2000. Bronnfar meadáille ar fhoireann tacaíochta na briogáide a bhfuil cúig bliana seirbhíse acu le linn an achair seo.

Beidh an chéad bhronnadh sa Halla Mhór, Foirgnimh na Parlaiminte, níos moille sa samhradh nuair a bhéarfas mé na chéad duaiseanna do roinnt trodaithe dóiteáin agus do roinnt de fhoireann tacaíochta na briogáide.

Obair an-chontúirteach í an múchadh dóiteáin agus cúis mhór bróin é gur gortaíodh an iomad trodaí dóiteáin agus iad i mbun a gcuid oibre agus go bhfuair cuid acu bás ag cosaint beatha agus sealúchas an phobail. Murach calmacht agus éifeacht ár gcuid trodaithe dóiteáin agus cuidiú lucht tacaíochta na briogáide, bheadh na mílte marbh atá beo inniu. Tá mé cinnte go mbeidh iomlán na dTeachtaí ar aon intinn liom go bhfuil bronnadh na mbonn agus na meadáillí seo tuillte go maith mar chomhartha aitheantais as an obair rí-thábhachtach seo.

I wish to advise Members of the arrangements being made to pay tribute to the exceptional service of the Fire Service over the last thirty years. The Fire Authority will strike a medal that will be awarded to all fire fighters having at least three years' continual service with good conduct; this includes service between 1969 and 2000. Other brigade staff with five years' service, which includes service within this period, will be presented with a medallion.

The first award ceremony will take place in the Great Hall, Parliament Buildings, later in the summer, when I will present the first awards to a number of firefighters and brigade support staff. Fire-fighting is very dangerous work, and it is to be regretted that many firefighters have been injured, and a number have lost their lives while protecting the public and trying to save property. Many people owe their lives to the courage and skill of our firefighters and the important contribution of brigade support staff. I am sure that all Members will agree with me that the award of these medals and medallions is well-deserved recognition for this vital work.

**Ms Lewsley:** I commend the Minister for recognising the work of the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade by awarding this medal. It is most appropriate given the low morale over recent months and the fact that over the last 30 years the Fire Service has provided an excellent service and shown a commitment to the community throughout the troubles, sometimes putting their own lives at risk. Would the Minister agree that given that public safety is at the core of this issue, there is a need to redress the balance to bring the local fire brigade numbers into line with the services in the rest of the UK? Considering the size and the population of Northern Ireland, it would also be beneficial if the Fire Service were to receive a significant increase in funding to enable it to increase its recruitment programme to provide adequate coverage in all areas in the North of Ireland.

**Ms de Brún:** I welcome the Member's tributes for the Fire Service. It is to be understood that the fire brigade here is a labour-intensive organisation with over 900 whole-time and over 900 part-time firefighters. The target establishment for the whole-time firefighters is 919 personnel, 899 of whom are in post, leaving a shortfall of 20. The target establishment for part-time firefighters is 980, and 917 are in post which is a shortfall of 63. Those are comprehensive numbers in terms of staffing levels here. Following the comprehensive spending review in 1999, additional moneys were allocated to the Fire Service. The moratorium on recruitment was, therefore, able to be lifted. Twenty-five additional firefighters were recruited in August 1999, and a further 25 recruits had their passing-out parade only last week. The fire authority is experiencing difficulty in recruiting part-time firefighters, but its

preference is to recruit part-time firefighters on a 24-hour call-out basis.

In terms of the question the Member asked about money and investment, the Fire Authority baseline budget allocation has risen, and this is significant. It has risen from £43.7 million in 1998/99 to £51.4 million for 2000/01. An additional £4.9 million was allocated last year, which is an increase of £8.5 million in real terms. The £51.4 million allocation for this year represents an increase of £2.9 million over the 1999/00 allocation, representing a 3% increase in real terms.

We have also seen modernisation and improvement in the standard of fire services, which is being pursued through the development and efficient maintenance of a fire brigade fleet and fire-fighting equipment. The comparative cost of fire services in England for 1999/00 was £30,024, in Wales it was £32,055 and here it was £26,654, so there are significant comparisons.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Of course, it does not take a statement from an IRA/Sinn Féin Minister to get Members on this side of the House to congratulate the Fire Service for their sterling work in preserving property, life and limb from fire and danger in this society over recent decades. Can the Minister confirm to the House how many fires the Fire Service has had to attend and put out as a result of Provisional IRA bombs? What has been the cost to the Fire Service in terms of manpower and resources in dealing with such bomb attacks and tackling fires caused by terrorism in Northern Ireland?

Did the Minister, when meeting the Fire Service, apologise to it for the years of bomb attacks that placed the lives of firemen in jeopardy because of the activities of members of her party? Has she called on her community to cease from stoning and attacking firemen and stopping them from doing their duty? Should the Minister not be embarrassed by coming to this House and announcing an award to a Fire Service that her party tried to expunge from existence in Northern Ireland?

**Ms de Brún:** It is not possible to disaggregate those fires and other incidents that the Fire Service has attended over the last 30 years which specifically emanated from the conflict or from any section of the community from those which occurred for other reasons. We can all recite specific incidents which occurred in the course of the conflict over the past 30 years and engage in pointing the finger of blame. I had hoped that today would not be about political point-scoring. That is certainly not my intention, and I hope that Members will not wish to engage in that either. Today we give due recognition to the Fire Service's labour for all sections of the community throughout the period, often at great personal risk to its members.

**Mr Neeson:** I sincerely welcome the Minister's statement. The awards are long overdue, given the Fire Service's bravery over the years of the troubles. Even now its members are being attacked on the streets by all sides. This is not the time for making political statements. Rather we should be thankful for this announcement.

I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to reviewing existing Fire Service provision throughout Northern Ireland, bearing in mind that, in recent times, there has been a significant population growth in a number of areas which still only have part-time firemen and facilities. The time has now come for full-time Fire Service provision to be made in these areas.

**Ms de Brún:** I thank the Member for his kind words which I shall ensure are passed on to the Fire Service. It is fitting today that we give recognition to the Fire Service. We all wish it well in the work that it is carrying out today, just as we wish those well who have carried out such work over the past 30 years.

I have given some details of significant investment in existing provision. I should be happy to write to the Member if he wishes to raise specific areas with me where it is felt that existing provision should be altered.

**Mr J Kelly:** Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I too welcome the Minister's statement and concur with those who have pointed out that this is not an occasion for political point-scoring. We have met members of the Fire Service Union and, indeed, the Fire Authority itself on several occasions, and those meetings were extremely amicable.

In the health authority we have spoken about the integration of the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service. Would the Minister like to comment on that? Does the Minister recognise the need for North/South co-operation between the fire brigades? Have any formal arrangements been put in place for this?

**Ms de Brún:** There is already good co-operation between the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service in training and communications. The inclusion of responsibility for fire and ambulance services under a single Department will, of course, now provide greater opportunities for increased co-operation and efficiency, including joint training and the sharing of premises for vehicles. I also expected it to lead to the development of a common communications infrastructure and joint approaches to the provision of information to the public about access to public safety.

6.15 pm

With regard to North/South co-operation, the Fire Service maintains a good working relationship with brigades in the South. There is a formal arrangement with Donegal County Council in which the Fire Service

provides fire and emergency cover for East Donegal. The cost of doing so is a retainer of £3,500 per annum and a charge of £195.50 per appliance per call out. Cross-border protocols exist between local fire stations also in terms of responding to emergencies. Contacts have been established with the Dublin Fire Brigade for joint training initiatives and for considering questions of, for example, advanced technology. There is ongoing co-operation therefore. As part of their fleet replacement programme, smaller fire brigades in the South purchase some of the Fire Service's older appliances that have become surplus to requirements.

**Mr Davis:** I welcome the announcement of the award to the Fire Service. Does the Minister intend to give posthumous awards? I believe that the first person who died as a result of a bomb explosion was Mr Wesley Orr from Lisburn.

**Ms de Brún:** We are talking about bringing forward proposals that have been under consideration for some time in terms of the recognition for firefighters. The type of award that was to be brought forward had been discussed between members of the Fire Service Past Members' Association and previous Ministers with responsibility for the Fire Service. I have not yet given any consideration to further awards, or other forms of awards. I think we need to mark quite clearly our regret that nine firefighters lost their lives, and that hundreds of firefighters were injured in the last 30 years. Again, I have to say that it is not possible to disaggregate the specific causes and the specific contexts in which those occurred. It is a matter of regret to us all that firefighters lose their lives defending our population, and we should give them every recognition for the service they have given.

**Mr Gallagher:** I welcome the Minister's statement and the recognition of the invaluable service given by the personnel in the Fire Service. Will the Minister include the families of those who have lost their lives at the awards ceremonies? At the first gathering, which will probably be the main focus of attention, does she intend to have a geographical spread of people from all of the fire stations throughout Northern Ireland present?

**Ms de Brún:** I thank the Member for the questions. He raises very important points. The specific details have not yet been laid out, and I will certainly bear in mind the points he has made.

**Ms Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat, Madam Deputy Chair. I also welcome the Minister's statement, and I think an award to the Fire Service is long overdue. I have a couple of questions.

Can the Minister inform us of the total number of house fires that have taken place over the last two years? Will she work with the Minister for Social Development to ensure that all public and private sector

housing will be fitted with smoke alarms as a matter of urgency to reduce the number of senseless deaths?

**Ms de Brún:** I fully support the points the Member made in her question about the need for smoke alarms. I am sure she will agree that the Fire Service has recently undertaken significant initiatives to ensure that smoke alarms are not only fitted but tested regularly. There has been some success in this, and I want to pay tribute to it for this. I should certainly be quite happy not only when it is necessary but when we wish to see co-operation between different Departments to ensure that it is possible. I shall write to the Member with a specific answer.

**Mr Dalton:** I wish to welcome the statement from the Minister today and make it known to the House that some tribute should be paid to Mr Harry Martin, the secretary of the Retired Firefighters' Association, who has steadfastly campaigned for this medal for the past five years. It is through Mr Martin's sterling work that this has been brought to people's attention. I approached Mr Martin some time ago to become involved in trying to promote this issue as well, and the Minister will be aware of this from some of the correspondence on the file. I am glad to hear that this is going to happen, for the Fire Service deserves to be recognised for the work it has done for the entire community. The medal will go some way towards recognising the service that has been given by the Fire Service to all members of the community, from whatever side. I welcome this statement today.

**Ms de Brún:** I concur absolutely. I previously made reference to the Retired Firefighters' Association, but not specifically to Mr Harry Martin, and I welcome the opportunity to do so now. His work in bringing this to the attention of the Ministers responsible for the Fire Service has been commendable. I am glad — in fact, honoured — to have been given the opportunity to take this work forward.

**Mr Carrick:** I am honoured to welcome the tribute to firefighters' courage over the last 30 years in particular. I should like the Minister to comment on her reply to a question when she said that it was a source of regret that nine firefighters had lost their lives as a result of the troubles. Will she now go further and lend credibility to her statement by condemning the terrorists for their actions that led to those deaths?

**Ms de Brún:** I must point out to the Member that I did not say that. I pointed out that nine firefighters had lost their lives over the last 30 years. It is not possible to disaggregate figures into those who lost their lives in the conflict and those who lost their lives fighting fires in other circumstances. I have therefore stated clearly that I note not only that firefighters have lost their lives, but that hundreds of others have been injured fighting fires. It is not for the Department to try to disaggregate the

causes of those fires. My wish today is to pay tribute to the firefighters' service, and it is a source of regret to me that firefighters have been injured or lost their lives in carrying out this tremendous work.

**Mr Davis:** I can assure the Minister that Mr Wesley Orr was killed by a bomb explosion in Belfast. It should not be too hard to find that out from the Department.

**Mr Dodds:** I join with all those who have welcomed this long-overdue award for those who have served in the Fire Service. We all agree on the tremendous, sterling work that they have done, especially in the difficult circumstances of the last 30 years.

I would like to question the Minister further about some of the statements that she has made. Surely it must be possible to have these figures disaggregated. Whether or not it is possible, she may not wish to do it now, but it must surely be possible to have figures supplied on who was responsible for arson and bomb attacks over the years. At the very least, the Chief Constable issues certificates on many of these attacks, so the information will be on record.

Further to the previous question, instead of obscuring the issue of who was responsible for particular deaths, will the Minister take the opportunity now — regardless of which terrorist organisation was responsible — not to waffle or be ambiguous but to condemn clearly those terrorist outrages and make her position absolutely clear?

It is also time for the Minister, instead of coming here and paying tribute to the Fire Service, which is incumbent on all of us, to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the other emergency services, notably the police and the Army, instead of condoning the murder and maiming of their officers and soldiers.

**Ms de Brún:** While I have said that it has not been possible to disaggregate figures, I am in no way taking away from the fact that at the very beginning of my statement I made it very clear that I wish to advise Members of the arrangements which are being made to pay tribute to the exceptional service of the Fire Service over the last 30 years. The context in which I made that statement is therefore very clear, as was the context in which those firefighters carried out their work over the last 30 years. I have, however, no intention of being diverted from what today is about. The suffering which all sections of the community have endured over the past 30 years, as a result of the conflict, is a matter for regret. Firefighters suffered too, and I regret that and I recognise that. *[Interruption]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Minister has a right to be heard.

**Ms de Brún:** I feel very strongly that on a day when we have come to pay tribute to the firefighters we



should focus on applauding the Fire Service for its service to the community rather than score political points or engage in pointing the finger of blame for the past 30 years of conflict.

**Mr Morrow:** I have listened to what the Minister has to say, and I would like to start by saying that this recognition of the Fire Service is long overdue. It is something, regrettably, that has come about because of pressure from, and lobbying by, the Fire Service and others. I also concur with what Mr Dalton said about Harry Martin. He is the gentleman who pioneered this and spearheaded the attack, as it were, on the Departments to bring this recognition about.

However, the statement that the Minister has delivered here this evening has a hollow ring to it. The fact that she deliberately sidesteps this and is not prepared to condemn terrorists who caused the death of nine firemen — *[Interruption]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Member should ask a question and not make a statement.

**Mr Morrow:** It should be a very simple task for the Minister to find out how the nine members who were killed lost their lives. What were the circumstances and who caused their deaths? Could we have less waffle and more direct answers please.

**Ms de Brún:** I feel that I have dealt with these points again and again. I do applaud the work that Harry Martin has done. I do recognise that this question of recognition for firefighters has been under consideration for some time, and I am very glad to have been able to bring this forward today. It is not possible for me to give the circumstances, in all cases, of those who have been killed or injured over the last 30 years.

6.30 pm

**Mr Beggs:** I welcome the announcement of the medals for the good service of the fire officers over the years. Rather than just give out medals, however, will the Minister acknowledge that the Fire Service in Northern Ireland receives less, per thousand of population, than other regions of the United Kingdom? Will she also accept that underfunding can mean that it takes longer to deal with emergencies and that can result in the loss of lives?

**Ms de Brún:** My view is that we compare well in terms of investment here. The Fire Authority has a baseline budget allocation that has risen from £43.7 million in 1998/99 to £51.4 million in 2000/01. An additional £4.9 million was allocated last year, an increase of 8.5% in real terms. On this year's resources, £51.4 million represents an increase of £2.9 million over the 1999/00 allocation, a real terms increase of 3.6%.

The Fire Service needs to be efficient and effective — public safety depends on that. I am committed to maintaining and improving our Fire Service, but we should not underestimate the significant resources that are available or the fact that we compare reasonably favourably in terms of those resources.

**Mr Berry:** I would like to commend and salute the Fire Brigade for the tremendous work and dedication with which it has served Northern Ireland over the last thirty years. I must say that we have not received answers on this side of the House. Can the Minister confirm how many firemen, over these past 30 years, have been murdered due to IRA/Sinn Féin activity? Is it possible for the Minister of Sinn Féin/IRA to confirm to the House that she condemns the work of the IRA over the past 30 years? When is she going to condemn the work of Sinn Féin/IRA? This is rank hypocrisy on her part.

**Ms de Brún:** I have dealt with both these questions.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** I also congratulate the members of the Fire Service; they have shown courage and determination in protecting the lives of innocent, law-abiding people throughout the Province. Lip-service to this is something that the firefighters do not really appreciate. Without looking deeper into the figures that have been mentioned today, it is clear that nine persons died over the years of murder and mayhem. It would be easy for any Minister to find out exactly who those persons were and exactly how they died at the hands of terrorism.

Does she agree that the courage of these firefighters is in sharp contrast to the cowardice of the IRA men who murdered them?

**Ms de Brún:** I have saluted the courage of the firefighters, and I salute them again. I have said that I will not engage in political point scoring, and I will not do so now.

**Mrs E Bell:** The message from the Minister is that she recognises and acknowledges the work of the firefighters over the years, and I am very pleased to have heard it. Can the Minister assure me that the investment and the reorganisation mentioned in the statement will come about as quickly as possible?

I have had many meetings with local firefighters as a result of the dispute that was recently solved, and there is no talk of who did what or when. People are talking about setting up a good fire fighting service that is recognised by, and has the confidence of, everyone. I welcome this as a step towards achieving that.

**Ms de Brún:** Certainly I will ensure that the necessary investment is made available and that there is no delay. I will carefully consider any recommendations that come forward for improvement, but I would point

again to the significant investment that is there at present.

## EQUALITY COMMISSION

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** We move now to the Equality Commission motion. The Business Committee has allocated two hours for this debate. Given the number of Members wishing to speak, I have decided to allow the mover of the motion up to 15 minutes, and a further 15 minutes will be available for the winding-up speech. All other Members should limit their speeches to eight minutes. This will be reviewed during the course of the debate.

**Mr Campbell:** I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the publication by the Equality Commission of their tenth annual monitoring report, criticises the worsening under-representation of the Protestant community, particularly in the public sector, and calls upon the Equality Commission to address this problem as a matter of urgency.

It is more than 22 years since the first publication by what was then the Fair Employment Agency on the subject of fair employment. Many other publications and reports have followed. There have been many references in all of those publications to the fact that Roman Catholic males are twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestant males. This simplistic cliché has underpinned almost all Government legislation since 1978. There has never been any attempt to accept that, at the outset of Northern Ireland's troubled existence, the leaders of Roman Catholic opinion in Northern Ireland called for Catholics not to take positions in the Civil Service, the largest single employer in the country. It was gross hypocrisy then, almost fifty years later, for that same community to complain about not getting the jobs it had previously advocated not taking up.

Since the violence erupted in 1969 there has been a huge increase in security-related employment, and because of IRA intimidation there has been a low uptake from Roman Catholics in that sector. Unfortunately, very little reference is made in successive fair employment reports to these uncomfortable but factual positions. At the outset others and I were very critical of those early reports in that they excluded any reference to the discrimination against Protestants. Initially, those of us who campaigned on that issue were dismissed as being inaccurate or as being only partially correct.

After the evidence began to mount, the defence from the Fair Employment Agency, later the Fair Employment Commission, against these allegations was that unfairness against the Protestant community was contained to very small geographic areas. Today I intend to demonstrate that there is widespread disadvantage being suffered now by the Protestant community right across Northern Ireland.

I want to turn now to present day events. Quite often in the Equality Commission reports we get facts and figures which can mislead people. The most relevant section of the tenth monitoring report is chapter five, entitled "Applicants and Appointees". I have made the point over and over again to successive Government Departments that the composition of a company or a public sector body, many of whose employees were employed twenty, thirty or forty years ago, is not important. That is of little relevance. What is of relevance is what those companies and the public sector are doing now, not whom they employed in 1960, 1970 or 1980, but whom they are employing today. That is the relevant and most significant section of any report.

The motion refers to the public sector. In table 41 from chapter five of the report we can see exactly how many people applied for positions in the public sector. This is not a small position in some corner; this is not some minor firm; this is the public sector, which had 125,448 applicants, one in four of the entire employed population of Northern Ireland. We are not talking about a sector or a small geographic area. We are talking about a swath of people looking for employment — more than 125,000 of them. If we exclude, as the Equality Commission has done, the applicants who cannot easily be put into either Protestant or Roman Catholic categories, we are left with 55% who are Protestants and almost 45% who are Catholic, and that in itself shows a very slight under-representation of Protestants. It is known that of the available workforce in Northern Ireland approximately 57% are Protestant, so we have a slight under-representation of Protestants applying for positions in the public sector.

This cause for concern is minimal, however, compared to the concern we have about those who were appointed from the 125,000 plus applicants — 16,101 people in all, a figure which breaks down to show 52% Protestants and almost 48% Catholics. I want to be absolutely clear, so that people know exactly what we are talking about, that this covers all sectors across Northern Ireland and shows not only an under-representation of Protestants applying for positions in the public sector, but a further under-representation of Protestants actually getting jobs in it. Only 52% were successful while Protestants make up 57% of the working population in Northern Ireland. As I say, more than 16,000 were recruited, and only 52% of them were Protestant.

I want to look at a couple of sectors to emphasise the point. In the health sector, 36,000 people applied for employment last year, of whom 49% were Protestant. Remember, it ought to have been 57%. Now, if we had expected 57% of those recruited to be Protestant, we would have been disappointed. Only 48% were Protestant — an under-representation of Protestants being employed in the health sector. Now lest anyone

think that we are talking about a small number of people, over 6,000 people were offered employment last year in the health sector, and only 49% of them were Protestant.

We now turn to the huge education sector within the huge public sector where 16,564 people applied for jobs. Only 53.8% of them were Protestant — a 4% under-representation of the Protestant community in people applying for, not getting, jobs. What happened after that? Only 48% of them were successful. The pattern is emerging in department after department, and this time we are talking about 3,666 people who were successful in getting employment in the education sector — another very sizeable number of people.

6.45 pm

I will move on to the issue of how this under-representation is defended. Often when I and others quote these statistics, which as I often say are not our statistics, but Government statistics from the agency set up to monitor the public sector, a defence is made which I call the quality defence. That means that there is a fall-back position. Some Government officials and some people in the old Fair Employment Commission would have said "Yes, the number of Protestants being employed is quite small, as you, Mr Campbell, and others, allege, but the quality of the jobs, the people at the top end of the public sector are very predominantly Protestant." In other words, it is this nonsense that I hear from some commentators that Catholics get the menial jobs and the Protestants get the cream. That is a total and utter fallacy. The fallacy is proven by table 43 in chapter 5 of the monitoring report.

What does it tell us? It uses a breakdown called the Standard Occupational Classification, which runs from SOC1 to SOC9. SOC1 jobs are the most highly paid positions: managers and administrators. SOC2 covers the professional occupations. SOC3s are associate professional and technical occupations. And so it goes, down to the lower grades at SOC9. If the myth and the nonsense were accurate, one would expect to see the highest numbers of Protestants at the higher grades, if what I hear from the pan-Nationalist front was accurate. In reality, it is the reverse. If we look at SOC1, SOC2 and SOC3, the three highest grades in the public sector, they have the lowest Protestant success rates. The higher the grade in the public sector, the less likely you are to find a Protestant. That is what this report tells us.

Looking at SOC1, 48% of those appointed last year were Protestant, and almost 52% Catholic. At the second highest grade, 47% were Protestant and 53% Catholic. At the third highest grade, 48% to just over 51%. You have to go right down to the bottom grades to get a higher number of Protestants, yet there are those who would tell us that Protestants get the most jobs and the best jobs. In reality, Protestants do not get their fair

share of jobs, and the jobs that they do get are less qualified and lower paid. That may be uncomfortable, and people may rail against it and complain about it and not like it, but it is reality. They will have to face up to it. Where does that bring us?

**Mr Fee:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Campbell:** Yes.

**Mr Fee:** The report is extremely detailed. Will the Member read out from the report that he has in front of him all the figures for all the classifications? Will he point out that the trick in the figures is that as Protestant representation decreases, the figure for non-returned or non-determined background increases in direct proportion?

**Mr Campbell:** I thank the hon Member for that inaccurate intervention. The Equality Commission has actually said that, over the years, the non-determined are decreasing in number, not increasing.

I want to come to my conclusion. There have been many figures, and I appreciate that those who have not got an intense interest might be somewhat confused, but I have tried to cut through the confusion and use these statistics to show that the myth and the campaign of nonsense is just that. It is utter nonsense.

In conclusion, this report proves three things. First, it proves that Protestants are slightly under-represented in the number of applicants to the public service. This cannot be refuted. Secondly, Protestants are even more under-represented in the numbers appointed to the positions for which they have applied. Again, this is irrefutable. To say otherwise is to deny the statistics contained in the report. Thirdly, Protestants are losing out in the higher grade of classification in the public sector, and, again, this cannot be refuted.

That brings us to what we have come to know as the equality agenda. Many people, both in this House and outside it, have campaigned on an equality agenda and have emphasised the need for equality. This infers that there is inequality at the moment. These statistics show that there is inequality but that it is suffered by the Unionist community. The Protestants are the people who are under-represented in the public sector and this needs to be addressed immediately by the Equality Commission. It must devote sufficient resources to an investigation of this problem as a matter of the utmost urgency.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** As a great number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak, I am forced to advise the House that the time allocated to each Member will be reduced to five minutes.

**Dr Birnie:** Madam Deputy Speaker, at least you are practising rigid equality by reducing everyone equally.

I too welcome the Equality Commission's tenth annual monitoring report. I will make some important statements of principle at the outset. My party stands full square on the principle of equality of opportunity — accepting the principle of the best man or woman for the job. The 1998 Northern Ireland Act, in the relevant sections, discussed equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity need not mean — and this is a crucial distinction — equality of outcome. This has been the subject of much ideological and political debate in many countries throughout the last century. This was a debate between liberal democracy, where value is ultimately placed on equality of opportunity and freedom, and totalitarian systems of politics, where attempts were made in vain to have everyone on the same level.

Public policy designed to create equality of opportunity should be directed towards individuals rather than geographical regions. It is individuals who are poor, unemployed or disadvantaged, not patches of ground. The key thing in the labour market, which is the specific point of this motion, is recruitment on merit. It is worth noting that even if recruitment is on merit — where the best person gets the job in every case — this could still be compatible with an unemployment rate differential between the two main sections of our community, or indeed with perceived imbalances in the percentage composition of employment in given enterprises. Chapter 5 of the report, which the proposer of the motion emphasised, shows the figures for recruitment inflow into jobs. We can see that in 1999 48% of all public sector appointments went to Catholics and 46% of private sector appointments likewise.

In both cases this represented more than the relevant share of the available labour force. This does not, of itself, prove discrimination or unfairness, but it is at least a cause for concern. It may be argued from some of the Benches that, in some sense, positive discrimination is justifiable to rectify a perceived historical wrong. However, there are at least three main responses to such an argument.

The first is a historical reply. How much actual and systematic discrimination against Catholics was there under the old Stormont Administration? There has been a huge debate on that issue among historians, economists, sociologists and others, and the result is by no means clear. Secondly, there is a moral reply. One should not try to put right one wrong by making another one today. Thirdly and lastly, there is a legal response. Positive discrimination is plainly illegal under current fair employment law. Where it is happening, that is wrong, and it is a legitimate cause for concern on the part of the Assembly.

Given the specific evidence in chapter 5 of the report, which was highlighted by the proposer of the motion,



and given the evidence on recruitment flows, I support this motion. Thank you.

**Ms Lewsley:** I oppose this motion, and in doing so I will attempt to dispel the myths surrounding equality in employment in Northern Ireland — myths, sadly, that Mr Campbell seems intent on repeating today. In his motion, Mr Campbell spuriously attempts to imply that Catholics have somehow received special treatment in Northern Ireland at the expense of Protestants. That is not only untrue, it is demonstrably untrue.

A myth linked to equality in employment is the claim that all new jobs go to Catholics. While the net increase in jobs is similar to the increase in the number of Catholics in the workforce, this in no way means that all new jobs have actually gone to Catholics. There is absolutely no evidence of discrimination in the jobs' market. This can be illustrated by looking at the applicant to appointee rates. In 1999, 44.7% of public sector applicants were Catholic, and 44.4% of these were appointed; in the private sector Catholic applicants were 46.5%, with 46.2% appointees. It is interesting to note that the job applicants tend to be young, and the proportion of Catholics among the young is higher than among the workforce as a whole. Also, there are more Catholics who are unemployed and, therefore, applying for jobs and, as should be expected, getting jobs. The main problem is the under-representation in the Senior Civil Service where, of 232 staff, only 50 are Catholics.

Even if the Civil Service's own targets are realised, which is unlikely, the figure would only rise to 30% by 2006. The SDLP favours setting up a review in this area to see how progress can be speeded up. There is also acute under-representation of Catholics in security-related occupations. The Catholic population is 42% of the workforce. When Senior Civil Service posts and security occupations are excluded, that percentage rises to 44% — slightly higher — but most of those jobs are lower paid ones held by women. There is a higher proportion of women in the workforce, 42%. It is to be expected that if Catholics will not apply for security-related jobs, then they will apply for the lower paid jobs. The SDLP has, therefore, called for the new police service to be subject to quotas on recruitment, and for it to be possible to keep the quota in place for more than 10 years. The Government has agreed to this.

We have called for a guarantee that the quota will be kept in place for 10 years, and that it will apply to police support staff. As the Police Bill stands, it will only apply where there are 10 similar posts available at the same time. This will never happen. The SDLP agrees with the Equality Commission that it should apply where there are two similar posts.

7.00 pm

The main function of fair employment legislation is to eliminate discrimination in the employment and dismissal of employees. Not one single element of fair employment law can be held up by Mr Campbell to demonstrate that such laws discriminate against Protestants. Put simply, fair employment laws are religion neutral. They favour neither Catholic, Protestant, Sikh nor Muslim, so reform of the fair employment laws is quite unnecessary.

If, as Mr Campbell claims, there is an under-representation of Protestants, perfectly adequate measures already exist to address that, the same measures that would be applied if there were an under-representation of Catholics or of any other religion in Northern Ireland. Fair employment legislation does allow for some affirmative action to be taken in order to achieve a balanced workforce: encouraging applicants from under-represented communities; revising redundancy policies; providing training for the long-term unemployed; and so on. However, none of those measures discriminates. The principle of employing the best person to do the job still holds true.

Mr Campbell has previously cited over-representation of Catholics on Newry and Mourne District Council and Down District Council. These councils have taken affirmative action measures to redress this imbalance. I note that he failed to mention those councils which are not dealing with this issue, for example, Castlereagh Borough Council.

The Equality Commission was established as part of the Good Friday Agreement, and it espoused equality for all. I propose that we do not support this motion.

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat. I sometimes wonder whether it is worth replying to motions from what can only be described as the flat-earth society — people who attempt to ignore all historical evidence — *[Interruption]*

Are you going to make me sit down?

**Mr Campbell:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We heard very clearly on this side of the House what appeared to be a threat from the hon Member, Conor Murphy. He asked someone on this side of the House if he was going to make him sit down. In everyday parlance outside the House that sort of language is normally associated with aggressive, corner-boy tactics and a punch-up.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I am not aware that such a remark was made. I will check Hansard and come back.

**Mr C Murphy:** DUP Members would recognise corner-boy tactics since it is chiefly they who use them in the Chamber.

Anyway, with regard to the motion from the “flat-earth society”, Mr Campbell’s argument about applicants and appointees asks us to ignore all the discrimination of the past 80 years and just deal with today — forget about everything that has gone before, just deal with today. It also ignores the fact that the age group most likely to be applying for jobs at the moment is different from that of what he refers to as the overall population. I think that he is referring to the 1991 census. He also asks us to ignore the recent statistics which show that Catholics in that age group are better qualified. Finally, he asks us to ignore the Equality Commission’s report and its interpretation of that report and deal with the Gregory Campbell interpretation instead. The Equality Commission has said that one of its key challenges is the continuing under-representation of Catholics at senior grades in the Civil Service. Mr Campbell obviously knows the report better than the commission does.

Overall, Protestant male employment has gone down by 0·7%, and Protestant female employment has stayed the same. The only statistics that I could see that reflected any of that was in the section on standard occupational classification six, which deals with personal and protective services and employment in the security industry. Indeed, Catholics only make up 27·4% of the employees in this area. A possible reason for the marginal downturn of Protestant employment in this sector may be that a large number of RUC officers are availing themselves of early retirement, in comparison with the number being recruited.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

The argument has been made that the representation of Catholics in the workforce in the public sector now reflects their proportion of the economically active population. There are a number of points to be made: this excludes the security-related occupations; it ignores the fact that Catholics are employed in the lower levels of the public sector; it ignores the large numbers who are economically inactive; and it ignores the fact that a younger Catholic workforce is coming on stream, while the Protestant workforce reflects an ageing population.

The report does not examine where the minute increases in Catholic employment or the minute decreases in Protestant employment are the result of natural wastage in the workforce, for example, where more Protestants are retiring than Catholics. The report needs a broader analysis of occupational classification such as tenure or duration of employment to get a real picture of the employment differential. The 1997 labour force survey states that the unemployment rate for Catholics is 12% as opposed to 5% for Protestants. In my constituency of Newry and Armagh it is 15% for Catholics as opposed to 2·9% for Protestants. The agency describes the unemployment rate for Catholics

as being substantially higher than for Protestants, but says that the Government are committed to narrowing the gap. It is worrying that some of the recent attempts to undermine the unemployment differential as a measure of disadvantage and discrimination have come from the Office of the First and the Deputy First Minister. We will continue to be very vigilant about this.

I hope that the Equality Commission ignored the attacks on the unemployment differential as a measure of disadvantage and discrimination —

**Junior Minister (Office of First and Deputy First Ministers) (Mr Haughey):** Can you give us an example of such a recent attempt that has come from the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers?

**Mr C Murphy:** During the last debate on the equality scheme, your fellow Junior Minister attacked the unemployment differential as being a proper measure —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Please address your remarks to the Chair.

**Junior Minister (Office of First and Deputy First Ministers) (Mr Nesbitt):** Will the Member take a point of information? It is not a point of order.

**Mr C Murphy:** I will if the Chair will allow me time to finish my contribution.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I will allow you time to finish your contribution, but I remind you to address your remarks to the Chair.

**Mr C Murphy:** You did not remind the Junior Minister to do the same.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Junior Minister was asking if you would give way, and he was entitled to address you directly. In other instances remarks should be addressed to the Chair.

**Mr C Murphy:** Further to that point or order, Mr Speaker. The Junior Minister asked me a question, and it would be sensible to address my response to him.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I did not ask him to answer a question; I asked him if he would take a point of information, not a point of order. Will he take a point of information?

**Mr C Murphy:** I do not have the time left, but I am sure that we will continue to have this argument. There is a concerted campaign in Unionism to undermine the unemployment differential as a measure of discrimination, and we will continue to be vigilant.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Let me put it on the record. What I said last time I will stand over from a statistical point of view, from a labour-market point of view. I was not trying to undermine any party or any individual. I stick to the objective statistical fact about unemployment.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry, Mr Nesbitt, but that is not a point of order.

**Mr C Murphy:** Thank you for further time, Mr Deputy Speaker. As you quite rightly pointed out, it was not a point of order.

I conclude my remarks by expressing the hope that the Equality Commission will ignore this and continue to deal with the urgent matters in its remit.

**Mr A Maginness:** An analysis of the report of the Equality Commission shows that over a period of 10 years very significant progress was made on the historic imbalance in the employment for Catholics.

That is something to be welcomed rather than criticised or belittled. It is progress that has been made in our society, and it is important for us to reflect on the fact that progress has been made since the introduction of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. The preceding Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976 had very little power, and between that period and 1990 the situation for Catholics at work did not improve very much.

This shows the effect of the determination of the Fair Employment Agency and the Fair Employment Commission to tackle the problem of employment for Catholics since that time, and that is something to be celebrated rather than criticised. In some areas there are still significant deficiencies. If one looks, for example, at the heavy engineering industry in Belfast, one can see considerable under-representation of Catholics. The same is true in the security forces and in the higher levels of the Civil Service. This motion is trying to cherry-pick one aspect to show that the Protestant community is suffering from some form of reverse discrimination. That is absolute nonsense, and when one looks at the figures, and at the totality of this report, one can see quite clearly that that is not happening.

Let me take issue with Mr Campbell, who talked about “the simple cliché of Catholic unemployment”. How insulting can one get? Anybody who is unemployed suffers. Nobody is unemployed because he wants to be, and anyone who is unemployed is suffering serious disadvantage. To belittle people and to belittle that section of the community and refer to them as a simple cliché is outrageous. For any responsible Member of this House to use that sort of language to insult people is something to be deplored by all Members of this House. I hope that Mr Campbell will withdraw that remark, because it is a searing insult to people and seriously damaging.

When one looks at the overall situation in Northern Ireland and at the continuing problem of the over-representation of Catholics within the unemployed sector, one has to address that and ask why we have this historic problem. I believe that new TSN is one way of

addressing it. There is no point in our coming to the House and bemoaning the problem — we have to have policies that will direct the attention of the Administration and public services to eradicating it. That is something with which we can all agree, because there would be a net benefit for the whole community. I look forward to the day when there is full employment in this community and when this unseemly scrabble over statistics on imbalances in the workplace is finally put to rest.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Maginness, your time is up.

**Mrs E Bell:** I welcome both the report and the debate. Even though we tend to disagree, it is healthy that we discuss these important matters. In an earlier debate I stated that equality means different things to different people. I can now say the same thing about the statistics in the Equality Commission’s report. Statistics can be interpreted in many ways depending on the reader and what they wish to extract from them. Indeed, as I am sure everyone knows, Mark Twain referred to them as

“lies, damned lies and statistics”.

For the benefit of others in the House that should be that the Devil can quote the Scripture for his own.

7.15 pm

The report was actually quite heartening, particularly from the point of view that jobs in all sectors appear to be more accessible to all job seekers in Northern Ireland. Concerns on the issues of gender and religious persuasion have been, and are continuing to be, addressed. One of my principal concerns on the issue of monitoring is that it does not seem to take into account that it is still very difficult, if not impossible, to employ people in areas of Northern Ireland where they do not feel comfortable. Some people, because of gender, religion, race or ability, do not feel comfortable and perhaps do not feel safe, not just in the workplace itself, but also in travelling to and from their place of work.

If we examine the tables in chapters three, four and five of the report, which outline the composition of authorities, public and private sector bodies and appointments to them, they confirm the fact that in some areas the situation somehow determines the make-up of the workforce. We must try to read such a report objectively.

I have also been particularly heartened by the increase in female employment, not only in the traditional service areas, but also in public sector management. I have examined the tables and figures given in the report, particularly those relating to the public sector, which appear to cause Mr Campbell concern. I do not see any substantial evidence to suggest that his views are completely right. The report states



that an increase in the participation of Catholics in the workforce was approximately half of one percent each year over the ten years of the monitoring. I do not think that that is too worrying.

Protestants continue to be fairly represented in Northern Ireland's workforce and still find themselves in the majority in many sectors. The statistics, of course, do not show an increase in the percentage representation of Catholics in various sectors. However, after years of gross under-representation of Catholic people in our workforce, at least progress has been made towards achieving a just and balanced situation. Therefore, these figures should be warmly welcomed instead of being used to set off alarm bells. However, I say to Mr Campbell, if alarm bells are set off, the Equality Commission should be asked to account for that. Mr Campbell is actually implying that there is — positive though it may be — religious discrimination against Protestants. As another Member stated, this is illegal and it should be dealt with. I hope that Mr Campbell will be taking that matter to the Commission.

All in all, I am glad to see that in both the public and private sectors there is redress in the balance of Catholic workers. It is noted that there is still concern with respect to the percentage representation of Catholics in the security sector, but let us hope that this too will be reduced and not necessarily through quotas.

There should never be tokenism of a religious or a gender nature, and I think the report shows that that is not the case. The Civil Service, as has been mentioned, also needs to look at the gender and religious background of its senior grades. I hope, as a member of the Commission, that all our recruitment procedures will be open, transparent and accessible and fair to all.

Beneficial as these statistics may be in monitoring Northern Ireland's workforce, I long to see the day that the focus will be taken away from whether an employee is Catholic or Protestant; male or female; able or disabled, or is of any particular race. Instead, I hope that jobs are awarded to candidates on merit alone. I hope that one day a person will be capable of proving him or herself the best candidate for a job just for being the person they are, and not for what the statistics say they should be. I cannot support the motion.

**Mr Weir:** I support the motion. When the Government are faced with the issue of equality they can take one of two routes. Either they can support equality of opportunity for all, which is the correct route, or they can try to eliminate the unemployment differential between the two main communities. That is clearly the route which the SDLP is going down in supporting quotas in the RUC. Unfortunately, that has been the net effect of the fair employment legislation over the last 25 years.

**A Member:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Weir:** Unfortunately, I have only five minutes, so I shall not give way.

If one compares employment statistics from 1971 onwards, one will find that the Catholic share of the workforce in 1971 was about 29%. It is now nearly 40%. The number of Protestants in employment now compared with 1971 is down by roughly 15,000. The number of Catholics in employment has risen by about 84,000. Yet in spite of this large increase, in both actual and percentage terms, a differential gap remains with regard to the number of Catholics employed. As has been claimed by some other Members, such a gap does not mean that there is employment inequality, for while the Catholic percentage share of employment has increased throughout that period, it has constantly been chasing a moving target, particularly because of birth-rate differentials and other factors.

I also question whether the figure of 39.6% for the Catholic share of the workforce is correct, since it is based on public-sector employees and those in private-sector firms employing more than 25 people. Indeed, if one compares the 1991 figure with the census figure, one will find that about 170,000 people are not included. These, generally speaking, are people employed in small firms. Figures suggest that they have a higher Catholic recruitment rate.

I should like to move to the substance of the motion. The statistics tell us a number of things. First, in public-sector recruitment figures for nine of the last 10 years, the percentage of Catholics appointed was higher than their share of the workforce, and in the one year when it was not, it was more or less the same. In the private sector, this was true for each of the last 10 years.

Let us break that down using another statistic. I have carried out a little research on this. There were 37 public bodies in 1997 with a higher percentage of Catholic employees than their share of the workforce, 41 with a higher percentage of Protestants than one might expect. Using these statistics, how have they performed since 1997? Of the 37 public-sector bodies with a disproportionately high number of Roman Catholics, in 24 cases the percentage of Catholic employment has actually risen. In only 10 of them has it gone down.

Of the 41 public bodies with a disproportionately high number of Protestants, the percentage of Catholics in 1999 rose in 29 and decreased in nine. There were 23 bodies with a disproportionately high number of Roman Catholics in 1991. Of those, 17 had actually increased their percentage of Roman Catholics by 1999. Of the five where that percentage decreased, in only one case was it by more than 2%.



The same can be seen on the Protestant side, where 32 public bodies had a disproportionately high number of Protestants. The Catholic percentage has increased in 27 of them and decreased in only three. We are seeing a two-tier reaction on fair employment. Where there is a disproportionately high number of Catholics in the public sector, that number is increasing. Where there is a disproportionately high number of Protestants, it is decreasing. Those statistics clearly show that there is discrimination.

With regard to the broad sectors of health and education, where there has been a disproportionately high number of Catholics, that percentage has increased. In the other sectors where there is a disproportionately high number of Protestants, it has decreased. This clearly shows discrimination.

I urge Members to support the motion.

**Mr Dallat:** Many years ago, when the SDLP campaigned for funding for the Fair Employment Agency it was very much opposed by the DUP. I am delighted to see so many copies of the equal opportunities report tonight — that is progress.

I once read a paperback called ‘How to Lie with Statistics’. It is an absolute must for the politician who wants to make a case out of nothing. I threw it away because I want to live in the real world — not the world of make-believe.

For years I followed with interest Mr Campbell’s claims of discrimination in his native city, and I often wondered if he was really genuine in his quest for fair employment. My wishes were granted when he got the DUP nomination for East Derry — mind you, the local papers are still talking about the statistics for that. He won the seat, and I was glad. This was because I hoped he would bring with him the strong anti-discriminatory principles he has been telling us about all these years. But not a bit of it. Indeed, I suggest he would defend to the death the high moral ground of those employers in his new constituency who have serious problems redressing the imbalance in their workforces but stubbornly refuse to carry in their advertisements the ice-breaker “We are equal opportunities employers”.

That is the problem with statistics. You can add them, multiply them, or do what you like with them. You can say the tank is half empty or half full, depending on whether you are a pessimist or an optimist. Unfortunately, Catholic male unemployment is still twice as high as that for Protestants. Over the last ten years the figures in the public service have not changed significantly. There is a slight fall in Protestant representation, matched by a slight increase in Catholic percentages — that is all. In local government, taking an average of all 26 councils, 63.4% of all employees are still designated as Protestant. In several categories

Catholics are particularly under-represented, especially in the higher grades. In the four worst councils, the average percentage of Catholic employment is less than 8%.

Nevertheless, there has been improvement, and all right-thinking people should be encouraged by that progress because in the end every one is a winner. When genuine equality has been established, the old system of begging for a job on the basis of religion, rather than ability and skills to do the job, will be gone, and this country will have come of age. Fair employment legislation is no longer peculiar to Northern Ireland. We may have pioneered it out of necessity, but it is now common practice for countries all over the world to monitor performance figures, not only on grounds of religion but on gender, age, disability and all the other categories listed in the Equality Commission’s report. That is nothing more than common sense and good practice. The figures Mr Campbell quotes are cleverly selected to make a case where there is none, but I am not suggesting that he has been reading my book “How to Lie with Statistics”. However, he could well have written it.

Fair employment is still an emotive term. It whips up fears and encourages prejudices. Fair employment legislation is just as important for the Protestant community as it is for the Catholic community. All persons are entitled to have their rights protected. Let us work the legislation by keeping our attention focused on real politics. Let us work together in harmony so that new high paid, skilled jobs are created and no one is unemployed or made to hold down jobs which require lower skills than they have. That is the work faced by politicians in the future, and that is what we should be about, rather than living in the past, which failed everyone and benefited no one. No one in their right mind condones discrimination against Protestants; there is nothing to be had in reversing the roles.

Unfortunately, the motion is divisive and that is regrettable because it denies the Assembly the opportunity to speak with one voice on a subject that is common to everyone. The SDLP in no way condones discrimination against any group of people and we are seriously concerned that Mr Campbell will be successful in creating a chill factor among Protestants. That is precisely what happened in Down Council where a DUP member made claims of discrimination where there were none and created a problem as a result of his claims. I am totally against the motion, and I am sorry it was discussed here at all.

**Ms Gildernew:** Go raibh maith agat. I have listened with interest to the contributions made here on the issue of equality of employment, and I have to say that if this issue were not so serious, comments made by those on the Unionist benches would be laughable. For eighty

years, since the inception of this state, discrimination has been carried out wholesale on the Nationalist community. For years, your name and the school you attended were more of an indication of your ability to do a job than your qualifications. When hundreds of young Catholics boarded boats and planes in search of employment, the shipyard in Belfast was employing men on the basis that their father, brother or uncle had worked there before them.

Now, after years of work in the community, intense lobbying by Nationalist representatives and the Irish Government, and international pressure, due in no small part to the MacBride principles, we have finally got legislation in place to try to address this. However, there is no getting away from the fact that Catholics are still more likely to be unemployed than Protestants in the Six Counties.

We are now hearing about studies being carried by Unionist advisors who are attempting to redefine the criteria for ranking deprivation. Attempts are being made to devise a formula to find the pockets of deprivation complained of by the UUP and DUP. The consequence of this will be that pockets of deprivation will be given ranking equivalence to ward upon ward of deprived Nationalist and Republican communities.

7.30 pm

**Mr Kennedy:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Gildernew:** No, I do not have enough time. Everyone knows that the argument that the UUP and DUP have made over pockets of deprivation amidst affluence having some sort of equivalence to wards of multiple deprivation has no theoretical basis in social science. However, it is likely to be presented in such a way as to suggest it does. This attempt to equalise or neutralise deprivation fails when one examines statistical evidence in constituencies like Fermanagh and South Tyrone, where Catholic unemployment stands at 13.3% compared to 3.9% Protestant unemployment. Republicans have concerns that the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is not seriously addressing equality matters. Indeed, it is not just Republicans but many Nationalists who regard high ranking civil servants and advisors as people who wield too much influence over the future of the equality agenda, especially when one of those advisors has already stated his 'religious blind' approach when dealing with equality matters. This approach is in direct conflict with affirmative action programmes, action plans and timetables.

**Mr Kennedy:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it right for a Member of this House to impugn the integrity of a civil servant or anyone else engaged in the work of government?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That is not a point of order.

**Ms Gildernew:** There is therefore a strong argument for the Equality Unit to become the subject of the closest scrutiny possible. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Kennedy:** I question your ruling.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** You cannot question a ruling from the Chair. You will not question — *[Interruption]* Sit down, Mr Kennedy. *[Interruption]* Order. Sit down, Mr Kennedy.

**Ms Gildernew:** Go raibh maith agat, Deputy Speaker. Examining the latest labour force surveys — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Kennedy:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Kennedy, I advise you now that if you do not sit down I will have you named and removed from the Chamber.

**Mr Beggs:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you refer the matter to Mr Speaker for consultation as to whether it was appropriate as a point of order?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As you know, Mr Beggs, it is for the person in the Chair now, and no one else.

**Ms Gildernew:** Examining latest labour force survey reports, which are the most recent available statistic denoting long-term unemployment, one finds that the survey for 1997 revealed an alarming differential of 2.9% for Catholic males when compared to Protestant males. Such a figure was the highest differential since the 1960's. Furthermore, page 9 of the most recently published labour force survey report states quite clearly that Catholic males have been typically twice as likely as Protestant males to be unemployed. Yet, we hear Mr Campbell refer to the worsening under-representation of the Protestant community, particularly relating to the public sector.

Since this statelet was artificially created, its over-representation by the Protestant community has been well documented. The statelet has been policed by one section of the community, and has also been serviced by that same Protestant community in the Civil Service. Therefore, one of the many problems that the Equality Commission needs to address, urgently, is the religious and gender composition of the Civil Service.

Attention must be given to the fact that there is still an under-representation of Catholics throughout the service, especially at the higher levels. There is a need for an urgent review of its compositional make-up. While noting how few Catholics are employed, consideration also needs to be given to how few women are employed, and how few of them hold managerial and professional positions in the standard occupational classification ranking.

If such data were examined, Mr Campbell would learn that it is the under-representation of the Catholic community and the over-representation of the Protestant community that must be dealt with. Sinn Féin asks the Equality Commission to address this matter urgently.

I do not support the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I have listened carefully to Members on both sides of the House, and I would like to begin by making some general comments.

First of all, equality is at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement. It must be applied to both communities and in an even-handed way. By recruiting only on merit, we are doing just that. The right man or woman should secure the job solely on that basis.

The Equality Commission's report, its tenth, makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of what is a very sensitive issue for both the Catholic and Protestant communities. Is there or is there not discrimination? Is there or is there not fair employment? Is there or is there not fair promotion? Is there or is there not fair recruitment? These are very sensitive issues to both communities. Therefore, as I said on 6 June when I last spoke on the subject, I will measure my words carefully. I will endeavour, Mr Deputy Speaker, to stand over every word I say.

As always with statistics, they need to be read and interpreted very carefully and not quoted ambiguously. There are structural changes we must be aware of — for example, the age structure of the population. There is a higher proportion of the younger age group in the Catholic community. Also, immigration, emigration and birth rates are different with respect to the Catholic and Protestant communities. These factors must be considered in the analysis of the statistics. The key test is, as noted, applicants and appointees, and how they move into employment. They may come from the unemployed or from the inactive population. They may be students or mothers who were not working and now seek work. Those entering employment come from different sources. Therefore, it is never easy to draw conclusions about the differential aspects of unemployment and about whether there is fairness in employment. Everything must be carefully analysed.

I mentioned the unemployment differential. I am conscious that Mr Campbell refers to the under-representation of Protestants, the corollary of that being the vast increase in work for Catholics that is seen to be happening in Northern Ireland. I want to make it clear: there are more Catholics unemployed. If more Catholics are unemployed there is more disadvantage. If there are more Catholics unemployed and they are all seeking work and are all equally qualified, and if we are working on the merit principle then it follows that, on a proportionate basis, more Catholics would be getting

jobs than Protestants. That is not detrimental to the merit principle or to equality of opportunity, and it is not unfair. Therefore, we must be very careful in our analysis of the statistics. I will not say any more about the unemployment differential, and I have to tell Mr Conor Murphy that I will stand over the comments I have made on the subject.

Let me now deal with the point in the motion about the worsening under-representation of the Protestant community. As I said, statistics are to be interpreted carefully. Therefore, I cannot support Mr Campbell's motion. In my view, the jury is out on it.

Let me just give one or two statistics. The Protestant workforce is 60.4%, but 58% of the available workforce is from the Protestant community. Therefore, the proportion in work is higher than that available for work from the Protestant community. The private sector employs 60.2% of Protestants, but the public sector employs 61%. Remember, Protestants make up 58% of those available for work. I know Mr Campbell quotes Government statistics, but there is a difficulty with Government statistics. Government statistics from the Department of Finance and Personnel state that the number of applicants from 1996 to 1998 from the Protestant community was 46.7% while 51.5% of those appointed were Protestant. These statistics are not exactly the same as those in the monitoring report from the Fair Employment Commission or the Equal Opportunities Commission.

We have two sets of statistics that say a slightly different thing. Let me just give you one of the reasons for the difference. The Equality Commission's report stated that if one person applied ten times for a job, it would count as one application. However, the Department of Finance and Personnel, if one person applied ten times, would count it as ten applications — a totally different basis for the statistics, yet both are, to use Mr Campbell's words, "Government statistics".

Yes, there are statistics and selective statistics. Mr Campbell referred to health and education. You could equally refer to the Equality Commission's report on district councils. According to page 54, 56.8% of the district councils were Protestant, as were 58.1% of those who were appointed, so there are statistics and statistics. I cannot support the precise wording of Mr Campbell's motion. It criticises the worsening under-representation, and the jury is still out on that.

**Mr Hussey:** May I have an interpretation of Standing Order 58(1)(e), which refers to any Member who

"uses unparliamentary words which he/she refuses to withdraw".

Is it in order for a Member of the House to impugn the integrity of hard-working civil servants?



**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I will ensure that Hansard is examined, and I will notify the House if unparliamentary language has been used.

**Mr Hussey:** Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. If it is found that unparliamentary language was not used, will it be in order for the Deputy Speaker to apologise to the Member who he assumed was out of order?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As far as I am concerned, the Member was out of order. I have made it clear to the House that I will ensure that Hansard is examined. If unparliamentary language was used, that information will be conveyed to the House.

Before I call Mr Haughey, may I ask that Members, whether Ministers or otherwise, address their remarks to the Chair and not to other Members.

7.45 pm

**Mr Haughey:** I will endeavour to bear in mind what you have said, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I could not agree more with the comment of my Colleague Mr Dallat that he found it extremely difficult to keep patience with this sort of nonsense. Mr Campbell endeavoured to give the House some facts. Let me give you some facts that derive directly from the statistics. Protestants make up 58% of the available workforce. Catholics make up 42%. Overall, the Protestant share of the workforce is currently 60.4%. That is 2.4% higher than their numbers in the available workforce. In the private sector, Protestants make up 60.2% of the workforce, which is 2.2% higher than their share of the available workforce. In the public sector, they make up 61%. In the Northern Ireland Civil Service between 1996 and 1998, 46.7% of applications were from Protestants, and that resulted in their getting 51.5% of the appointments.

**Mr Morrow:** The Member is supposed to address the Chair.

**Mr Haughey:** Is a point of order being made, Mr Deputy Speaker?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Haughey:** Catholics made 44.7% of the applications and were awarded 42.8% of the appointments. In the higher reaches of the Civil Service there are 232 staff, of whom 50 are Catholics: 21.5% of the workforce. Only one Northern Ireland Civil Service category has an under-representation of the Protestant community. That is the 114 careers officers. When monitoring began in 1990, Catholics made up 34.9% of the workforce. In 1999 they were assessed at 39.6%. That is an encouraging increase, but it still falls short of the 42% of the available workforce who are Catholic. There is still work to be done.

Whereas fair employment legislation is based on the merit principle at the point of employment, and redress is possible through the courts, affirmative action is also possible. We in the SDLP would have liked to see a great deal more of that, but as certain people will have learned over the last 30 years, you cannot get all that you want. The affirmative action that we would have liked to see does not extend to the sort of measures that I thought — wrongly, I am afraid — I had in front of me.

Moving on, I agree emphatically with my Colleague Alban Maginness about TSN. Research indicates that a number of factors cause relative deprivation in the Catholic community and give rise to greater difficulty in gaining employment. The Catholic community has a younger age structure. There is reluctance on the part of Catholics to seek employment in security-related occupations. There is a higher proportion of Catholics in the lower socio-economic groups where unemployment is highest. A higher proportion of Catholic than Protestant families have large numbers of children. That is a very telling point. In both communities, families with large numbers of children are more prone to unemployment.

That brings me to an important point about new TSN. New TSN targets social disadvantage. We hope that that will lead to an erosion of the differentials in unemployment between the two communities, not because it discriminates in favour of the Catholic community but because it targets social disadvantage. Targeting social disadvantage helps those, both Protestant and Catholic, who happen to be socially disadvantaged, and therefore it is a non-discriminatory attack on the reasons for the differential in unemployment.

I have very little time left, but I would like to ask Mr Campbell a question. I hope he will answer. I do not want him to evade it. There are people in the DUP, and further afield, who believe that Protestants are currently being unfairly treated in the labour market. There are many people in my party, and in other parties, who believe that there is a continuing problem with fair employment and that the difficulties lie disproportionately on the Catholic side of the community.

Can we agree on one simple conclusion from all of this — that there is a difficulty with fair employment? That says to me that we need the toughest and the strongest possible legislation to outlaw discrimination in employment. Does Mr Campbell agree with me on that? We need the toughest and the strongest possible Government agencies to deal with the problem of inequality in education and with discrimination where it exists. We need to monitor the whole situation so that the Government can take appropriate measures. Predictably, but regrettably, Sinn Féin Members tried to lay blame on the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in relation to these matters. I



regret that their concern about fair employment did not extend to their Colleagues —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Haughey, withdraw your remark.

**Mr Haughey:** — who over the years waged an economic war which disproportionately affected employment in the Nationalist community.

**Mr Molloy rose.** *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. *[Interruption]*

Order, Mr Molloy. *[Interruption]* Mr Molloy, I am on my feet, which means that you will not be on yours. Mr Molloy, I am on my feet, and you will not be on yours. *[Interruption]* You will sit down, Mr Molloy. *[Interruption]* Mr Molloy, you will sit down. *[Interruption]* Order, Mr Molloy. *[Interruption]* Sit down, Mr Molloy.

I call Mr Campbell.

**Mr Campbell:** I think that a period of cool, calm reflection is required, and I hope I will be able to bring something of that to the debate. I will try to deal with some of the issues that were raised.

In dealing with the factual position underlining and underpinning the motion, I had hoped that those who oppose it would have had some substance to their argument. I had hoped that they might not revert to hyperbole, to emotive phrases and to simplistic catchphrases. I had hoped that would be the case, but I am afraid to say that I have been disappointed. However, when a community and a series of public representatives are faced with cold, hard facts that they may want to quibble about, that they may want to dodge, that they may want to try to avoid or evade and cannot, then they have to resort to clichés. I had hoped that they might actually engage in the substance of the debate, but sadly, all too often this was not the case. Ms Lewsley made reference to the numbers of unemployed, and she is right of course. Proportionately there are more unemployed Roman Catholics than Protestants, but there is an underlying assumption that the 125,000 people who applied for jobs in the public sector all came from the ranks of the unemployed. Why should people assume that this is the case? Of course it is not the case. A sizeable number of them may be, but not all of those applying for jobs in the public sector are unemployed. To imply that the unemployment ratio should be used as a benchmark against which the numbers of public sector applicants are assessed really is a nonsense. I hope I have dealt with that.

I am not going to give credibility to those who represent terrorism by naming them, but several Nationalist Members had the breathtaking hypocrisy to mention that the security-related sector has to be taken into account — I thought they would have avoided it

like the plague. These people, who for 30 years have advised Catholics not to take jobs in the security-related sector, are now saying that Catholics are under-represented in the security-related field.

**Mr Hussey:** Does the Member agree that Catholics were not just so advised but intimidated and physically abused?

**Mr Campbell:** That is what I meant by “breathtaking hypocrisy”. They were advised not to take positions in the security sector, and the small number from the Roman Catholic community who did were intimidated. Members, some of whom are associated with the organisation that did the intimidating, are now getting to their feet and saying that there are very few Catholics in the security sector. There are very few Catholics in that sector because their affiliates shot them when they did work in it.

The SDLP does not escape blame. Since 1972 it has advocated that the Catholic community should not take up employment with the RUC, the UDR or the Royal Irish Regiment, yet many SDLP Members have asked tonight, as a defence, about the security-related sector. The position in the security-related sector would have been much better if the SDLP had advocated that its community should join. They are responsible for the under-representation of Catholics in the security-related sector, although not as much as the IRA, which shot people when they did come forward from the Catholic community.

I thank Mr Weir for his reference to the differential gap. At the outset I referred to the cliché about Catholics being more likely to be unemployed than Protestants. Certain people seem to have a blind spot, because statistics available in the Irish Republic show that Catholics in Counties Donegal and Monaghan are three times more likely to be unemployed than Protestants. Is that because of discrimination? If it is, what are the Dublin Government doing about it? That situation cannot be because of a Government agency, a conspiracy or a sense of paranoia in the establishment in Dublin to deprive the good Catholics of Monaghan and Donegal of employment. The reasons for such a situation in the Irish Republic need to be addressed.

References were made to the principle of equality, and I was amazed at the junior Minister, Mr Nesbitt, referring to equality being at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement. If equality is at the heart of the agreement then we will see within a week the terms of that equality. If the Unionist community is demonstrated to be opposed to this agreement, and if a greater number of Unionists is against this agreement than for it, then there will have to be a fundamental reassessment if equality is at the heart of it. However, that is a matter for next week, and I will not proceed down that avenue.

The other junior Minister, Mr Haughey, referred to the overall workforce breakdown, and my concluding remarks will deal with that.

8.00 pm

It is somewhat confusing for the average layperson hearing these figures being bandied about to come to terms with the overall principle underpinning the motion. That is why I attempted to keep it as general as possible and why I studiously avoided being selective, despite the accusations. If we look at tables 41 and 42 on pages 47 and 48 of the tenth annual monitoring report, we see that 55% of public-sector applications are from Protestants, but only 52% of all appointees are Protestant. People can avoid, evade or dodge that. They can try to get under it, climb over it, or get round it, but they will have to face up to it eventually. That is equality at work.

The Protestant community is demanding true equality. As of the tenth annual monitoring report, it does not have that. People can try to take us up a sidetrack or bring us into bypath meadow, but they cannot evade the central issue — the Protestant community's under-representation in the public sector in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Haughey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Campbell:** I will not give way. I have less than a minute. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry, Mr Haughey, but Mr Campbell has indicated that he will not give way.

**Mr Campbell:** I will conclude by referring to remarks made by Mr Haughey and by talking in a straightforward manner so that the public and Members may be clear. Look at the higher echelons of the public sector in Northern Ireland. The higher the echelon, the smaller are the numbers of Protestants gaining employment. That is what the facts say. One cannot deny the facts; one cannot avoid them. That is what they say. The lower the grade in the public sector, the more likely it is that Protestants are employed there. The reality is the reverse of the propaganda.

I urge Members to vote strongly in favour of this motion in order to make the Equality Commission face up the facts contained in the tenth annual monitoring report and to allow us to get something done about it.

**Mr Haughey:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Member has 15 minutes to sum up. That gives him five minutes to answer my question.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Campbell, do you wish to give way to Mr Haughey?

**Mr Campbell:** Yes, I will give way for a brief intervention.

**Mr Haughey:** I have just made a point of order; it was not a point of information. It was to point out that Mr Campbell has five minutes left in which he could answer the question. Does all of this mean that we need the strongest possible fair employment legislation?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That was not a point of order. I assumed that you were asking Mr Campbell to give way.

**Mr Campbell:** I thought that Mr Haughey was trying to intervene. I allowed him to intervene, and then he declined.

With regard to the point raised by Mr Haughey, a lack of tough legislation is not the issue. The issue is how that legislation is being implemented when it comes down to Mr Weir's point about under-representation in either section of the community. Is there equal validity being given to the under-representation of Catholics in a workforce, as there is to the under-representation of Protestants in a workforce. The reality is that there is not. There is not the same emphasis or resources being deployed to deal with under-representation of Protestants, as I made clear at the outset.

The Equality Commission, the Government and the previous Fair Employment Commission based the whole rationale for their fair-employment legislation on the fact that Catholics are more likely to be unemployed than Protestants. They will not move away from that underlying principle. Until they do, we will be in an awkward position.

**Mr Haughey:** Does the Member mean that we need different fair employment legislation? Do we need even tougher fair employment legislation? Is that what the Member means? Is he proposing that we have different and tougher fair employment legislation?

**Mr Campbell:** I thank the junior Minister for that point. I thought I was making it clear, but let me make it even more clear. It is not the lack of legislation; it is how that legislation is being implemented. If, despite the effective legislation that is on the statute book, the Equality Commission can devote its time and resources to dealing with the under-representation of Catholics in certain sectors of the workforce but will not devote time and resources to dealing with the under-representation of Protestants in certain sectors of the workforce, the problem is not the legislation; the problem rests with those who are implementing it. The equality of the implementation of that legislation is what is at the heart of this motion.

**Mr Weir:** Does the Member agree that a further statistic which shows the level of discrimination against the Protestant community in terms of employment in recent years is that, because of the improving economic situation since 1991, Protestant employment has risen

by only 11%, whereas Catholic employment has risen by 36%?

**Mr Campbell:** I thank my hon Friend for that statistic. It certainly makes a point. It illustrates how those who raise the old bogey-stories about the breakdown of the workforces from years ago — are trying deliberately to miss the point. The point we are making in this motion is that we must talk about the flow of workforces, the appointees and the applicants. That is what tells us what is happening in the workforce now — in the year 2000. That is the important issue — not employment levels in 1962 or in the 1970s and 1980s. We need to know what is happening now. That is what will form the basis for the future breakdowns of all our workforces. That is why this motion needs support from this House. That is why the Equality Commission needs to act to stem the flow and halt the under-representation of Protestant applicants and appointees in the public sector.

8.15 pm

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 21; Noes 27.*

#### AYES

*Roy Beggs, Paul Berry, Esmond Birnie, Norman Boyd, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Wilson Clyde, Robert Coulter, Ivan Davis, Nigel Dodds, William Hay, Derek Hussey, Roger Hutchinson, Danny Kennedy, William McCrea, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Peter Robinson, Peter Weir, Jim Wells, Sammy Wilson.*

#### NOES

*Eileen Bell, P J Bradley, Joe Byrne, John Dallat, Bairbre de Brún, Arthur Doherty, Mark Durkan, John Fee, David Ford, Tommy Gallagher, Michelle Gildernew, Denis Haughey, Joe Hendron, John Kelly, Patricia Lewsley, Alban Maginness, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Gerry McHugh, Francie Molloy, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Dermot Nesbitt, Dara O'Hagan, Éamonn O'Neill, Sue Ramsey, John Tierney.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Adjourned at 8.19 pm.*





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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 3 July 2000

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## JOEY DUNLOP

**Mr Speaker:** It is with regret that I advise the Assembly of the tragic death in a racing accident of the motorcycle ace Mr Joey Dunlop.

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey):** There can be no one in the Assembly, in Northern Ireland or further afield, or in the world of sport generally, who has not yet heard the tragic news of the death of Joey Dunlop. He reached the pinnacle of his sport of road racing. He was idolised by legions of fans throughout the world. His untimely death has left a void, both in Northern Ireland and in motorcycle racing, that will never be filled.

Only two weeks ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Joey at a reception in Ballymoney. I was immediately struck by his modesty and the high esteem in which he was held by the people of his home town. He was never too busy to help others. He found time to carry out charity work for those less well off in Romania and the Balkan countries. His huge talent on the motorcycle was matched by his generosity of spirit. We will never see his like again.

I am sure I speak for all Members and for everyone in Northern Ireland in offering my condolences to his wife Linda and to his family and friends. Northern Ireland has lost one of her finest sons: Joey Dunlop.

**The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon):** I add my condolences and those of my party to those expressed by the Minister. Very few sportsmen, from whatever sport, are known by their Christian names. Joey Dunlop was never known as anything in Northern Ireland but Joey, and everybody knew immediately who was being talking about. They also knew the quality of commitment and expertise that he brought to his sport.

This is a tragedy, not just for his sport, for his family and for his community, but for those of us who value sport in our lives and who value the example of someone who really did set a remarkable example of

courage down through the years. He will be sadly missed but we are the better for having had Joey as a representative of our community, both at home and abroad, for so many years.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** When I paid tribute to his last races and the victories that he won — three in a row — little did I think that I would be standing here today to lament with all of Northern Ireland and his fans throughout the world the tragic death of Joey Dunlop. It has been well said that great grief is not good at talking. The language of grief is the tear, the lump in the throat, and the feeling of a kindly pressure upon the hand. We want Linda and the family to know that this is how we feel today.

To the God of all comfort and grace, we commend the family at this time. They are passing through a very dark valley, and they need all the support and prayers that we can offer them.

We salute the memory of Joey Dunlop. He was a legend in his own right, and he can never be replaced. He remains, and will remain, the “King of the Road”.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As a member of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and on behalf of my party I add my voice to the messages of sympathy to Joey Dunlop's wife Linda and their children.

We all regarded Joey Dunlop as a tremendous sporting hero and a great sporting ambassador who achieved excellence in his lifetime, in his disciplined contribution to his sport. His death is a great loss to the entire community.

**Mr Neeson:** On behalf of the Alliance Party and the Women's Coalition, I would like to express the great shock I felt when I heard the news yesterday of Joey Dunlop's untimely death. He was undoubtedly one of Northern Ireland's greatest ambassadors. He had support across the community, and he was a giant among sports people in the Province. He was a legend in his lifetime.

I met him on several occasions, and he was a very sincere, warm family man. Not only did he care for his own, but this modest man cared for others, particularly in the Balkans.

In the last Assembly Joey was honoured by the Speaker when a special event was organised for him in 1985. I had hoped that this Assembly would have a similar opportunity. Sadly, this is not to be. To his wife Linda, his family and the rest of his friends, we extend our deepest sympathy at this very sad hour.

**Mr Boyd:** On behalf of the Northern Ireland Unionist Party, I express our sympathy to the family circle on their sad and tragic loss and offer our thoughts and prayers to them at this time.

## ASSEMBLY SITTING OF 27 JUNE 2000: MATTERS ARISING

**Mr Speaker:** During the sitting of 27 June, a number of matters were drawn to the attention of the Deputy Speakers with which I will now deal.

As recorded in Hansard, page 357, Mr Gregory Campbell asked for a ruling on an alleged threat from another Member. From a reading of Hansard I can say that there is nothing unparliamentary in the language that was used. However, from viewing the videotape recording it is clear that, on all sides, tempers were beginning to rise. I would remind Members that they are all required, whether speaking or sedentary, to observe due courtesy to other Members at all times, particularly, but not only, during sittings of the Assembly.

During a later part of the same speech — Hansard, page 358 — an exchange between Mr Conor Murphy and Junior Minister Mr Dermot Nesbitt revolved around whether Members should address each other in the Chamber even when asking a direct question. Members should always speak through the Chair, and should be aware that when in a speech they say “you”, they will be taken as referring to the Chair. Even when making a request that another Member give way, the request should be made through the Chair, although clearly it will be for the Member speaking to decide whether he will give way.

I would remind Members that there is no such thing in parliamentary practice as a point of information. A Member may seek to intervene, and the Member speaking may choose to give way or otherwise. Members may also make points of order, which are ruled upon from the Chair.

Also, Mr Hussey — Hansard, page 363 — asked for a ruling on whether unparliamentary language had been used when a Member referred to civil servants. I have read Hansard and there is nothing unparliamentary about what was said. However, perhaps this is an opportunity to set down how such references should be made. References to officials should always be to an official position rather than to a named individual. It is in the nature of government that officials carry out a wide range of responsibilities on behalf of their Ministers. Officials given discretion in these circumstances must be accountable for their decisions in the same way as Ministers. Equally, officials should expect some degree of protection from public castigation because they cannot respond for themselves in an equally public way. However, officials who have made public statements on their own initiative cannot necessarily expect that these statements will be immune from comment in the Assembly or indeed outside it.

I remind Members that it is not in order to refer to officials of the Assembly at any time. Clerks and their staff are here to assist Members in the performance of their duties but are at all times under the direction of Members. Members themselves must bear responsibility for the actions carried out on their behalf. On occasion, this means, of course, that the Chair must take responsibility for certain matters.

**Mr Shannon:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to ask a question about Hansard, page 334. This relates to the arts and culture debate last week. How come there are 11 or 12 spelling mistakes in the Ulster-Scots transcription? I would like your assurance, Mr Speaker, that whenever Ulster-Scots is used in the Assembly, it will be transcribed correctly in Hansard.

**Mr Speaker:** I will attempt to review the Hansard record as requested by the Member. I would, however, draw two matters to his attention. First, a transcription is provided, not a translation. Secondly, I regret to say that in trying to provide this facility, we have had substantial difficulty in finding any agreed grammar or syntax for the language in question. I will, however, review the matter and respond to the Member.

**Mr Shannon:** I gave the Hansard staff a copy of what I said, word for word. They asked for it, and I gave it to them. However, they ignored it and put their own grammar in. I took the time and made the effort to have it done correctly through the Ulster-Scots Heritage Society, so they had absolutely no reason for not transcribing it correctly.

10.45 am

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I fear that the Member does not entirely understand the Hansard process. If the Member reads what is said in English in Hansard, and then views the video tape of what was said, he will find — on occasions to his pleasure — that the editorial staff have made substantial corrections to clarify what was said in English.

The Official Report is not meant to be verbatim; it is meant to be a proper report. I suggest that when Members read what they have said they will often be rather more pleased than they are sometimes justified in being. Having said all that, and being no authority at all on Ulster-Scots, I will, as I have said, review the matter that the Member has raised and be in touch with him about it.

**Mr R Hutchinson:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you agree that it is an absolute disgrace that civil and religious liberties were denied to the Orangemen of Portadown yesterday? I call upon the House to back their right to march on the Garvaghy Road.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member knows perfectly well that this is not a point of order, and not a matter

that is appropriate for him to raise at this time. He is in danger of abusing the responsibilities of the House.

## STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

**Mr P Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you intend to establish any procedures with regard to Ministers making major statements outside the House, instead of coming first to the House and giving details here?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member will be very aware that that is a substantial point of contention in another place where he sits. It is no easy matter to resolve.

## AGENDA FOR GOVERNMENT

**The First Minister (Mr Trimble):** With permission, Mr Speaker, we wish to make a statement on the agenda for Government. This is the first opportunity we have had to make a statement to the House on this issue. I am making this statement on behalf of the Executive as a whole, and individual Ministers will, in the course of this week, be making more detailed statements on aspects of the agenda.

Following last Thursday's Executive Committee meeting the Deputy First Minister and I announced an agenda of actions to address some key concerns and help to improve and modernise services. We wanted to announce the agenda at that stage when the Executive was together — giving visible expression to our overarching theme: "Moving Forward Together". However, the Executive recognises that full and further information must be presented to the Assembly, which is why we are making this detailed statement this morning.

Devolution is about local politicians taking responsibility and decisions on local issues. People will expect the Executive and the Assembly to pursue policies and programmes which make a difference to their lives. We, for our part, need to listen to people to find out what is important to them and what changes they would like to see. In taking forward the work on the programme for Government with the Assembly and its Committees, we will be doing just that.

We will need to decide on strategies, objectives, policies and programmes which will help to improve and modernise Northern Ireland in the first few years of this new century. In doing so, we will wish to draw together the work of different Departments and agencies. Often it is only when we bring together the resources of different Departments that we can start to crack the major problems that we face. At the same time we will need to decide how to make best use of the resources available, and link the programme for Government to the budget. We are going to have to face difficult decisions on priorities. We will be seeking views on what our programme for Government should contain. Ministers are already seeking Committees' initial views on the programme, but I can assure Members that we will be coming back on a number of occasions.

Later this year we will be presenting the outcome of the work on the programme in draft form for the Assembly and its Committees to consider. The programme for Government will take effect in the next and following years. Preparatory work is proceeding. Our more immediate issue is what we should and can do in the remainder of this year to start us in the right direction.

We have identified five clear areas in the agenda covering the economy, health and education, the environment, tackling disadvantage and social exclusion and modern and accessible public services, and we have identified actions which will contribute to dealing with those areas. We wish to see a step change in the economy by which we mean increased growth and employment taking advantage fully of the opportunities that a peaceful society will bring. There is significant scope for our economy to advance. We should therefore ensure that our economic development agencies are best organised to meet the new challenges. This change was also recommended by the 'Strategy 2010' review.

We need to encourage and develop the information-age society. In the short term we intend to help accelerate work on the 'Leapfrog to the Information Age' initiative, which is intended to progress Northern Ireland towards a highly attractive, dynamic and supportive knowledge-based society.

On 19 June the Minister for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment announced the new support programme for university research to the House, which will develop the local universities' research capacity and strengthen their research base, increasing the amount of research of the highest international standard. The support programme will be funded partly by the private sector. The work on developing the research programme is included in our agenda and it will help to contribute to the creation of the knowledge-based society.

The Executive also agrees that we need to do more for the long-suffering agriculture industry. We are working for the achievement of low BSE incidence status, and we have allocated £500,000 to enable the beef industry to avail fully of export opportunities.

We are also addressing the need of farmers to benefit from the new technology-based society. We will be enhancing the access of farmers to information technology, focusing particularly on farmers in the west, where progress in training farmers and members of farm families has been slower than in the east of Northern Ireland. Farmers will also be given electronic access to high quality, user-friendly business support information to help them run their businesses.

Better health and education are important to us all. We want to ensure that our schools have the information technology they need to improve the skills of our young people. We also want to improve the condition of schools, in particular to upgrade sub-standard facilities in smaller primary schools. On health we need to improve the situation with waiting lists, and we have allocated £5 million for this programme.

We must also give emphasis to the importance of public health. The Health Minister is planning to launch a new public-health strategy to improve our health status, which is among the worst in Europe, and to address the significant inequalities that exist. The strategy will be wide ranging and will include accident prevention, the need to improve the health and well-being of the elderly and action on the high levels of teenage parenthood in Northern Ireland, and it will involve other Departments where relevant.

**The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon):** The Executive has also agreed that we should highlight examples of actions which we wish to undertake in the coming weeks and months, areas where urgent and early action is needed. The agenda demonstrates that the Executive Committee can agree, and has agreed, a package of measures targeting specific needs. These measures are additional to the already agreed programmes and activities which Ministers and their Departments will be taking forward and developing this year.

In drawing up the agenda we have decided that it should be resourced from a modernising fund. That fund will support the projects that we are highlighting this morning, amounting to £27.6 million in total; a second tranche will be available to support additional actions later in this year. Allocations made from the fund are solely for the specific purposes identified.

The First Minister has already detailed some actions to improve the economy and to achieve better education and health. I will now cover actions which will support our aims of tackling disadvantage and social exclusion, making the environment safer and providing improved, modern and accessible services.

We must tackle disadvantage and social exclusion and the agenda includes a number of actions which are intended to do just that. We know of the concerns that there will be a gap in EU funding for certain groups and projects.

We have allocated £3.2 million to tackle that problem. We want to do more for the disabled. A number of actions in the agenda will benefit the disabled including housing adaptations, work on accessibility to cultural and sporting events and the implementation of the new disability legislation.

We have also committed ourselves to important initiatives on targeting social need (TSN) and equality legislation. On TSN we have allocated finance to enhance research so that we can ensure that the programme is fully evaluated and monitored. Work will commence on a single equality Act to extend protection to groups not already covered by anti-discrimination legislation and, where appropriate, to harmonise protection upwards. This is a key objective.



In relation to the environment, we need to address the most urgent health and safety work on the railways pending the completion of the railway task force's work on the long-term future of the rail system. We are aware of the need to improve safety on our roads, where we continue to see an appalling loss of life and injury. The additional resources will allow us to appoint 10 new road safety education officers to enhance contacts with schools. There will also be an intensification of the road safety advertising campaign, focusing on young drivers and, especially, drink driving.

With our aim of a better, safer environment we will also target some resources on improving health and safety at sports grounds.

With regard to planning matters, we are providing additional resources to initiate work quickly on the Belfast metropolitan plan covering the six relevant district council areas. We are also taking steps to reduce the planning applications backlog.

We also plan an arts and culture programme of events to develop a better appreciation of our cultural diversity.

The people of Northern Ireland deserve better and more modern services. We will set in hand over the coming months a fundamental appraisal of the structures and location of public service. We will open a representative office in Brussels to improve our links with Europe. We will progress North/South co-operation through the establishment of the tourism company by the autumn and an action plan to reduce the barriers in place for those who move from one side of the border to the other on a short-or long-term basis.

The agenda represents examples of what we will be doing. The actions indicate our determination to work together for the benefit of all. We know that we can make real improvements to people's lives when we move forward effectively together.

**Mr Speaker:** I am allowing the maximum of one hour, which is the longest time available under Standing Orders, for questions to the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on their statement.

**Mr B Bell:** I welcome the statement from the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. I was interested in the Deputy First Minister's reference to a second tranche. Will he state how much will be in this second tranche and when a decision on it will be reached?

**The First Minister:** Perhaps I can answer that question, Mr Speaker. We have endeavoured to identify resources that can be used for the agenda for Government and group them together under the heading of a modernisation fund. We intend to have a second tranche in the autumn; part of the reason for this is to allow time for further work to be done on this for consideration after the summer. We must be prudent

since, by then, there may be other activities requiring extra resources that will have to be considered. We will decide on the extent of the second tranche after the summer recess.

**Mr Fee:** I too welcome the statement and the level of detail that the Ministers have provided on what they can achieve over the next number of months.

11.00 am

I certainly hope that the fundamental appraisal of the structures and location of public services will ultimately lead to a decentralisation of public sector employment, because that is central to the well-being of rural and border constituencies. I also hope that it will lead to a rationalisation of the plethora of boards, trusts, councils and agencies.

My specific point though is much more parochial. I welcome the fact that there is going to be more investment in and new structures for North/South co-operation. However, it is not just in the public sector where we need some regulation and some help. Can the Ministers tell us how they can reduce the disadvantages people experience in living on one side of the border and working on the other. They suffer difficulties with currency, taxation and all of the problems associated with having banking and other services in another jurisdiction.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for the question. The issue of decentralisation will be central to the review of public services. It would be unwise to speculate on the nature or the extent of that review at this stage. However, it is a review which must be fundamental in the sense that the Member has spoken about. Like him, I am aware of the difficulties that people face in their everyday lives and in the area of North/South co-operation. Our office, which has overall responsibility for that, is becoming more and more aware of the difficulties faced by citizens moving North or South to pursue careers. Difficulties arise for such citizens especially if they are establishing residence. The problems are not dissimilar in many ways to difficulties encountered between other European states.

Therefore, we propose to consider ways in which institutions, public and private, can reduce obstacles in the range of areas that matter to each person who falls into this category. Such areas include housing, health, education, childcare, taxation, social security, pensions, vehicle registration, telephones and banking. People face a very comprehensive range of problems, and we hope to be able to bring in agreed proposals before the plenary North/South Ministerial Council meeting planned for early autumn.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** It is to be regretted that the Executive has set a precedent by going to the press

before consulting the House about its statements. It would be better if the House were to hear first what it intends to do and what public moneys it intends to spend and had the first opportunity to question Ministers about these matters.

The statement says that the Executive recognises that full and further information is needed. Would the Chief Minister care to tell the House what that full and further information is that was not given at the press conference? That is the first thing that the House is entitled to know.

When it comes to the matter of money for helping our beef industry — when we do obtain low BSE incidence status — the statement says we have a sum of £500,000. However, the following paragraph talks about farmers. How much money will be made available directly to the farmers, because it is they who are facing the burden and heat of the day? I do not hear many meat plant owners or directors saying that they are going to commit suicide or that the banks are pressing them and they have to buy a smaller car. The farmers are feeling those pressures. Perhaps the First Minister will tell us the amount of money he is prepared to give to farmers to help them look after their farms as time progresses.

Page 3 of the agenda for Government states that there is a gap in EU funding for certain groups and projects. Will the Minister list the groups and projects that he has in mind? I am sure that the people concerned are anxious to know whether they are included in that list.

The statement refers to a better appreciation of our cultural diversity. Our cultural diversity would be best served if people who have been attending church services over many years were permitted to return home from them. We should face up to the sort of cultural pressure that is put on people attending their places of worship on the sabbath day — a practice that has continued for at least 150 years.

With regard to the £400,000 per annum, which the Minister of Finance and Personnel said would have to be spent, what percentage of that money will go towards the salaries of the people employed in the Brussels Office?

**The First Minister:** Dr Paisley has raised a range of points. First, on his point about cultural diversity, he was of course referring to the difficulties at Drumcree. The Assembly has no responsibility for that matter, although many might wish that we had such responsibility. There are a range of views in the Assembly on that issue. The hon Member will recall that I expressed my views on that subject at some length at the weekend. I may repeat them on occasion, but this is not the time. We are discussing the agenda for Government at present.

I understand the points that were raised about holding a press conference on Thursday, before making this statement. One has to bear in mind the consequences of the Assembly's sitting for only two days a week. If we were to try to adopt the rule that is honoured sometimes more in the breach than in the observance across the water, we would have considerable difficulty, unless the Assembly sittings were to change. I am not suggesting that the sittings of the Assembly should be changed, as there were good reasons for choosing the pattern that we have adopted. However, there will be days when the Assembly does not sit, and following an Executive meeting, such as we had on Thursday, there will be important matters to put into the public domain. I believe that our course of action was reasonable. My statement contains further information than that contained in the press release last week. I cannot look at that press statement now and compare it with this one, but I am sure that this one contains further information. Even more information will be available during the week, as Ministers make detailed statements on the measures that I and the Deputy First Minister have outlined.

The Member raised a number of questions with regard to the funding arrangements for agriculture. Dr Paisley knows that none of this money will go directly to farmers. European state aid rules prohibit the Executive from offering direct grants to farmers, and the Assembly cannot breach those rules. It would be nice if we could, but we cannot. There is £500,000 to take advantage of the low-incidence BSE status which we hope will be achieved before long. Arrangements will have to be made, but it is too early to say precisely how that money will be spent.

We wish to offer the industry whatever support is needed. That could take the form of additional marketing support, or resources could be deployed to support meat plants taking necessary measures. All of this is, of course, subject to discussions with the industry and the European Commission.

There will be an additional £560,000 for the other measures included in the statement regarding enhanced access to information technology. The sum for helping small farmers run their businesses more competitively by using information and communication technology will be £240,000.

There is a problem with gap funding in the community and voluntary sector, since the detailed negotiations on the next round of European structural funds will not be completed until autumn. We are pursuing this matter as vigorously as possible. We are on target to meet the autumn deadline and have managed to make up some ground on the issue since resumption.

I am not, of course, in a position to list all the community projects in receipt of EU funding or to say which projects will be assisted by this gap funding. The Departments and other organisations responsible for overseeing these funds are seeking to identify projects facing a threat to which assistance could be given. Not all schemes will require such assistance, since not all of them have spent all their money. This will be taken into account when deciding whether gap funding will be supported. Not all existing schemes supported under Peace I will be supported under Peace II, a consideration one must also take into account.

The funding for the European office includes both capital and recurrent expenditure. I am not presently in a position to make a statement on how much will be spent on salaries.

**Mr Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas na maidne seo faoin chlár rialtais. Ba mhaith liom díriú ar chupla pointe agus cupla ceist a chur.

I welcome the statement. In essence, the Executive is trying to develop a coherent way of redistributing the available finance, particularly in the run up to the agreement on a programme for Government. I suppose suspension has prevented the various departmental Committees from having any real input into this agenda.

In specific terms, I welcome the announcement of £3.2 million towards bridging the gap in European funding. The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have already addressed this matter, but I am anxious to know, if possible at this stage, how far that £3.2 million will go towards meeting the needs of these groups?

Can the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister tell us when we shall be able to measure what effect the new TSN will have on those areas most in need?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his question. It is impossible to make a projection on the £3.2 million, since there is never enough money in any allocation, however much it might be. However, it is an indication of our intent to ensure that whatever hiatus there may be is dealt with as effectively as possible.

As the Member will realise, new TSN is a huge cross-departmental task. The Departments have made their initial responses, which are being assessed. It is very difficult to ensure that commitments under new TSN are carried out in a co-ordinated way so that essential assessment can be made of them. We have agreed ongoing assessment to monitor the effects.

Regarding the specific element, one of the important factors in new TSN is making sure that we have the statistical analyses required for the basic assumptions. No formula ever works completely, but we have to get a

programme in terms of those analyses, whatever form or shape they take, so that we know we are working on the basis of proper information. If we have, and when we have, as we will have, the proper information, it will be for the entire political process to ensure that the new TSN is working as it was designed to work, to benefit those who are disadvantaged or marginalised in whatever way they are.

11.15 am

**Mr Neeson:** I share the concerns expressed by Mr Robinson and Dr Paisley about the procedure.

The First Minister referred to the economic opportunities. Will he elaborate on what he means by

“We should therefore ensure that our economic development agencies are best organised to meet the new challenges”.

Secondly, the Deputy First Minister did not have the opportunity to answer the question I asked last week about the new office in Brussels. How does the Executive propose to recognise the work of the Northern Ireland Centre in Europe (NICE)?

**The First Minister:** The proposal is to reorganise the development agencies as suggested in ‘Strategy 2010’. We need to bring that work up-to-date, and we hope that there will be a number of options to be looked at and considered. I cannot add to that at this stage. There will be consultation with the Assembly, with industry and with other interested bodies. The object of the exercise is to ensure that we are providing an efficient and effective service in support of economic development. It is about delivery of service. The objective is to be customer-orientated, open, accountable and accessible. I know that sounds a little like “motherhood and apple pie”, but the objective is to try to streamline in that direction.

On the question of the European office, yes, we acknowledge the work that has been done by the Northern Ireland Centre in Europe. That has been quite important, and I am sure that it will continue to be important. Discussions are ongoing between our office and NICE about the future. I am not in a position to say more than that because the discussions have not been concluded. We would like to see a co-operative relationship with NICE, but we need to know first of all what NICE’s plans are. How does it propose to carry forward its work and how can we help it?

**Ms Morrice:** We welcome the statement and particularly the reference to the joined-up aspect of government which we believe will be very important in future years.

The First Minister mentioned, and we welcome it, a plan of action on the high levels of teenage parenthood in Northern Ireland. The Women’s Coalition would be



particularly interested in an explanation of what type of action is envisaged.

Secondly, there was a reference to the aim of achieving a better and safer environment. While we welcome this important move with regard to road and rail safety, we would like to understand why there has been no mention, indeed, a sad lack of mention, of tackling the important issues of pollution, recycling and waste disposal. What are the intentions there?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for the questions. We have to focus on the fact that this agenda for government is not all-encompassing. It does not claim to be and, by its very nature, it is not. It is a selection of areas that should be dealt with, and I repeat that it is not totally comprehensive. It cannot be. I recognise the problems that the Member mentions, for example pollution. It is something which I feel very strongly about, but that will be dealt with by the Departments. I said Departments, because it is a matter that concerns the administration and budgets of a number of Departments.

Teenage parenthood is a cross-cutting issue and will be dealt with by the Department of Health. It is going to be central to the Minister's approach and to her proposals. The equality aspect will also affect the Office of the Centre. The Office of the First and the Deputy First Ministers and the Minister of Health will both be dealing very closely with the matter, as will the Department of Education.

When we discuss this programme for government we see how much there is in it which is actually cross-cutting. Nothing can simply be corralled in terms of one Department, and the more we are able to equip ourselves to deal with the cross-cutting issues, the more effectively we will deal with them.

**Dr Birnie:** I thank the First and the Deputy First Ministers for their report. My question relates to the reference made by the Deputy First Minister to bridging moneys for community groups, hitherto supported by "Peace I", during the gap until "Peace II" flows out. There has been recent disquieting evidence that some "Peace I" supported projects are unlikely to be sustainable in the long term. Indeed, in some cases there has been the possibility of the dubious use of money by such projects. Can either the First or the Deputy First Minister say how such bridging moneys are to be targeted to avoid the repetition of such mistakes in the future?

**The First Minister:** That funding which is intended to try to cover or help with the gap that the community and voluntary sector can expect is in the region of £2 million from the Department for Social Development and £1.2 million from the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment. The

intention is to try to provide some help to bridge the gap. Obviously that help will be selective. It will depend on circumstances that I mentioned earlier. Whether projects are likely to be supported under Peace II is one consideration that will have to be made.

The Member mentioned the question of whether all proposals and schemes supported under Peace I have been as well administered as they could have been. This, of course, is a perennial concern with regard to European money generally and, indeed, the peace programme in particular. When we were in Brussels, Commissioner Barnier, who is responsible for this, made it very clear that one of his key concerns is that European money is spent in an appropriate manner. He wanted to be assured that the local Administration responsible for supervising expenditures would take all the measures possible to ensure that there is not misappropriation of funding. In the United Kingdom we have a very strong framework through audit and other means to ensure that money is spent appropriately. That is reflected in reports made by the Audit Office from time to time.

The point that the hon Member made about sustainability is very appropriate. We cannot repeat too often that this is likely to be the last significant amount of money coming from Europe under the likes of the peace or regional programmes. With a change in priorities in the European Union after enlargement it is unlikely that this will come again for us. Consequently, all community programmes of this nature need to have a strategy to deal with this. They need to have it thought through so that in a number of years' time they do not simply fall off the edge of the cliff. They need to have worked out how a project is going to be sustained or how it is going to be handed over to someone else or completed in the period concerned.

At present we are simply providing funding for a short gap until the autumn when we expect the money from the next round of structural funds to be available. The amount of funding may be modest, but I am sure that it will be welcomed by the community sector.

**Ms Lewsley:** I welcome the statement this morning and, in particular, references to equality and disability. Are we talking about the budget for housing adaptations? I assume this will come out of the housing budget. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that part of the money for that should come from the health budget given that some of the services delivered in housing adaptations are delivered by occupational therapists? I welcome the addition of 10 more road safety officers and the fact that support staff are to be put in place to enable this programme to be delivered and implemented properly.

**The Deputy First Minister:** This is a very relevant question. We all know that one of the difficulties with



housing adaptations for the disabled is the logjam in the occupational therapist's department and that the Housing Executive cannot move until it receives the reports from them. The resulting delays are quite staggering. I do not blame individual occupational therapists, nor do I blame them collectively. There are not enough occupational therapists to deal with the growing problem. This is one of the attempts to ease that burden. There was discussion as to whether it would be administered by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety or the Department for Social Development, and we decided upon the latter.

The £2 million will help provide much needed assistance in this important area, which demands continued growth and places pressures on other parts of the housing budget. The Housing Executive has confirmed that it will be able to spend the additional £2 million on the basis of referrals that have already been completed by occupational therapists.

In the health budget this year an extra £200,000 is being spent on the occupational therapy service. A further £400,000 has been put into the budget for disability aids and appliances. We should all be looking very carefully at how the Department is equipped to deal with these occupational therapy reports, because unless we deal with them, no matter how much money is allocated, if the blockage remains, delay will be inevitable.

**Mr Dodds:** Does the First Minister agree that the information provided to the House today is substantially less detailed than that which was provided to the media on Thursday? Will he confirm that the media were provided with the detailed figures allocated to various programmes and Departments on Thursday, which were printed in some papers on Friday, and that this statement today does not contain many of these.

No reference is made anywhere to the figure of £2 million for housing adaptations for the disabled in this statement. There is not further and fuller information; there is substantially less information. That is a disgrace and a shame and it is discourteous to the House. Just because he wanted to get a press headline on Thursday, the First Minister could not wait to make an announcement to the House today. Will he not also agree that other decisions were taken at the Executive which, for reasons of confidentiality, I cannot make reference to, but which will no doubt be made public in due course? Those decisions were not released to the press in advance of a statement to the House.

11.30 am

On a second point, may I ask the First Minister, and I would be interested in the Deputy First Minister's comments on this also — I suspect that he was in the lead on this one — if he intends to continue as part of

his great theme of moving forward together, his futile action against the DUP while, at the same time, refusing to take any action against Sinn Féin/IRA Ministers for their complicity in the murder of Mr McCoy or their refusal to fly the national flag on Government buildings?

Can we now get a detailed breakdown of allocations for programmes from each Department? The First Minister may need to refer to Thursday's press statement and, although that information was not in today's statement, it would be of considerable help to the House if he would read it out.

**A Member:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I have already ruled that points of order will be taken after ministerial statements and questions. *[Interruption]*

No, the ruling is that points of order will be taken at the end.

**The First Minister:** The Minister is, of course, perfectly correct. I have not repeated the information that was in Thursday's press release because it was already available to everybody. Would Members be happy to come here and simply repeat themselves at great length? *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**The First Minister:** We felt that it would be better to issue a statement rather than just read out a list of headings with a sum against them *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**The First Minister:** As I said in that statement, individual Ministers will be making more detailed statements in the course of this week, and we will have some of those today.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

One of the statements we will have today will be from the Finance Minister on the normal monitoring round. As Members know, in the course of a year, there are a number of monitoring rounds where we consider the allocation of moneys to be made available through extra receipts or underspends and so on. That will happen in the normal way. Last Thursday we made the significant point — and I think everybody in Northern Ireland recognised this — that this Administration is determined to make a difference; it will not simply be a continuation of direct rule. It involves locally elected Members working together, identifying their priorities and pursuing them. This we wish to do. The Minister has repeatedly asked me if we will continue with various matters. We might very well ask the Minister if he is going to resign and continue to be part of this silly stunt of the DUP. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**The First Minister:** People want to know when the DUP is going to drop this pretence. Everybody here knows that the DUP is part of this Administration, is part of this — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**The First Minister:** Members from the DUP have attended hundreds of meetings of Assembly Committees. They are boycotting only one Committee, which happens to be the most important of all. That says something about their priorities and their willingness to serve their electorate. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, please.

**Mr McHugh:** Go raibh maith agat a Chathaoirleach. I welcome the statement by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

Do the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister work in collaboration with the Dublin Government on economic development on a range of issues which would benefit agriculture on an all-Ireland basis to try to get the industry back into European markets?

Is the £500,000 for marketing additional money, or does it represent savings made by those in the export business, such as meat plants, from not having to spend their own money on marketing? There is a European market out there asking for people to export prime beef into it, yet we are unable to get there. That is partly because we are tied to the British Government's policy of acting as one unit, making it difficult for us to get low-incidence BSE status. I want to see us achieving that status as soon as possible. Is that marketing money additional money? Will the Minister work to get low-incidence BSE status as soon as possible?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for that question. I am sure he will indulge me by allowing me to reply to the previous questioner, who sought my views — *[Interruption]* I will give way if the Member wishes.

**Mr Dodds:** I am interested in this procedure. I would be happy for the Deputy First Minister to answer my question.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It is not normal to ask a Minister to give way when he is responding to a question.

**Mr Dodds:** I did not ask him to give way. He gave way to me.

**The Deputy First Minister:** It is difficult to know what level of petulance hon Members will reach. Does the Minister want to ask a question or is he denying that he wants to ask a question? I find it strange when Ministers — and, in case we forget, this is a Minister

who is asking questions, humiliating himself — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**The Deputy First Minister:** — by coming to ask questions of the Executive Committee, of which he is a part.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. Will the Deputy First Minister please address the Chair.

**Mr Dodds:** Collective responsibility in action. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I have asked the Deputy First Minister to address the Chair.

**The Deputy First Minister:** Working together and moving forward is important. It is important for this community, for this Administration and for everybody in the North of Ireland. If we had less child's play and messing about —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Please address the Chair.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I will return to the question.

As the Member said, £500,000 will be spent on achieving low-incidence BSE status. A further £560,000 will be spent on enhanced access to information technology, especially for farmers in the west, and £240,000 on helping small farmers with information technology and communication technology. That adds up to a total of £1.3 million.

This is not a panacea for agriculture's ills, but it lays a basis for dealing with the question of markets when the BSE issue is resolved. It has been recognised by the agricultural community as a good step, and I commend it to the Assembly as such.

**Mr Close:** I rise with trepidation after that ministerial tiff. I hope that if Ministers are treated like that, the Deputy First Minister will not launch into attacks on ordinary Members.

By and large, I welcome the allocation of moneys in this agenda for government, but I am extremely disappointed by the manner in which it was done. Do the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the other members of the Executive, not recognise that this establishment operates on a Committee system? There are scrutiny Committees. Why was the Finance and Personnel Committee, for example, not taken fully into consideration before these sums were allocated?

In this House — and certainly in this party — we do not want to be faced with what can only be referred to as a form of drip-feed of the programme for government. That must be made known in full. I fear that this is the start of the drip-feed, and I seek reassurances that I am wrong about this. Also, how was

this money arrived at? How much of this money came from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's March Budget? How much of this money is end-of-year flexibility and how much has been arrived at by the monitoring round which was discussed by the Finance and Personnel Committee? Can the First and the Deputy First Ministers understand how I felt early on Thursday morning when, having attended a meeting the previous day of the Finance and Personnel Committee, I discovered that I had been denied access to these additional figures? The press rang me up to ask for a comment on the agenda for government, and I did not know what they were talking about.

I raise these points in all sincerity, not to make some cheap criticism but to enable us in this House to begin operating fully, as it was intended that we should. The Scrutiny Committees need to be able to function fully. I have concerns, as a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee, about the amount of information that is made available to us. If we are to perform a proper scrutiny role, particularly when it relates to finance, it is vital that we are equipped with the full information.

**The First Minister:** I can understand the Member's annoyance at being asked for comment on figures on Thursday morning. I would have been equally annoyed had the journalists phoned me; indeed they would have got a pretty sharp response. There is a serious weakness somewhere in the system if details of policies, which at that stage were entirely confidential and had not then been considered by the Executive, were being circulated. This is a matter of great concern. We are ourselves greatly concerned about confidentiality problems with regard to Executive business. On Thursday morning nothing had been decided, and these matters were waiting to be considered by the Executive.

I appreciate the concern about making a press statement before coming to this Chamber, but if we were always to come here first, we would have problems with the sittings. If there are problems with information being leaked even before an Executive Committee meeting, consider how many more problems there would be, for example, in the interval between an Executive Committee meeting and a sitting of the Assembly in terms of a drip-feed of information coming through.

We have to consider how to do things in a structured way. The object of the agenda for government was to show that we in the Executive are, for the first time, beginning to identify some priorities ourselves. This is only a first step towards a programme for government. It is not intended to replace the work on the programme for government and there is not, as the Member suggests, going to be a drip-feed of the programme for government. The programme for government will be

prepared in a coherent manner. The work is ongoing and we will come to the Assembly and the Committees in the autumn with the intention of deciding final policy towards the end of the year. It will then be considered in the Budget. This is the intention. We felt — and Members may appreciate this — that to sit between now and November without having the opportunity, as a new Administration, to indicate our priorities and what we want to achieve would be seen with considerable disappointment by the Assembly and by society as a whole.

On the specific question of the sources of the money, those programmes and actions which are receiving additional resources will be funded from unallocated resources identified at this stage of the year. That does involve some of the additional spending that came from the March Budget. There was a certain unallocated amount. That was considered together with other funds coming mainly from underspends carried forward from last year under year-end flexibility arrangements. Indeed, some other additional resources have been identified, and significant among those were the receipts from house sales.

The agenda is not simply about putting extra money into specific actions. A number of actions are being pursued within existing budgets. Rather, it is about highlighting matters which we, as an Executive, have agreed to undertake in the coming weeks and months to underline our wish to improve and modernise Northern Ireland and to identify and tackle key issues.

11.45 am

**Mr McFarland:** A recent Audit Office report highlighted serious underfunding in the structural maintenance of roads. I ask the First and the Deputy First Ministers why roads' maintenance is not on the agenda.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I thank the Member for his question. We have not yet had the opportunity to consider fully the recommendations and the observations of the audit report published last week. We wish to see a full report from the Minister, Mr Peter Robinson, to the Executive Committee, on this. Like the Audit Office, we want the Department for Regional Development and its Minister rapidly to address the strategic issues relating to roads. Indeed, this must be looked at in the much wider context of an overall transport strategy. There is no doubt that it is a major issue. It affects everyone in the North of Ireland, and it affects all policy areas. That is why we believe that it is the duty of Mr Robinson to come and discuss these issues with the rest of the Executive Committee. We are fully aware of the difficulties with the underfunding of infrastructure, and that includes railways and school buildings especially. We are trying to do what we can immediately for school buildings, and we want to do the



same for roads. However, it makes it all the more difficult, and disadvantages people in the North of Ireland all the more, if those Ministers who are supposed to be dealing with these matters do not come to the Executive Committee to bring forward, with their Colleagues, the types of proposal that the hon Member is rightly seeking. They will have to be made, with or without the Minister, at some point.

**Dr McDonnell:** Will the Executive commit itself to embracing the information-age society and to pushing forward aggressively an electronic information communications strategy? What are the implications for the agenda of that?

**The First Minister:** I thank the Member for his question. There are a number of ways in which the agenda that has been announced demonstrates commitment to encouraging the information-age society. This is relevant to the university research programme to which we referred, to the Classroom 2000 projects for schools, to information technology for farmers, and to the allocation of an additional £1.4 million in support of the information-age initiative. The plan is entitled 'Leapfrog to the Information Age'. This reflects the importance that the Executive attaches to the development of the knowledge-based economy in Northern Ireland and was a key theme in 'Strategy 2010'. The information age initiative stressed that information and communication technologies must be a top priority for economic growth in Northern Ireland. The funds now being made available will be used to support and provide further impetus to the 25 actions detailed in 'Leapfrog to the Information Age' document, thus helping to drive forward the information-age agenda.

**Mr Campbell:** I welcome the opportunity to ask questions on the statement, although, like other Members in the DUP, and in other parties, I would reiterate the point about questions being asked by the press on Thursday while, four days later, Members still do not have the details of the expenditure commitments that were given to the press. This is Monday morning, and we still do not have them. I hope that the First and the Deputy First Ministers will rectify that problem.

I have a second question. The Deputy First Minister made a fleeting reference towards the end of the statement to an arts and culture programme of events to aid a better appreciation of our cultural diversity. What plans, if any, are in place for a more equitable funding programme to promote the cultural outlook of the pro-Union community in Northern Ireland?

The Deputy First Minister also commented on the need to address urgently health and safety work on the railways pending the completion of the task force's work on their long-term future. Was it an unfortunate error or a deliberate omission not to include any

commitment to the long-term development and viability of the rail network in Northern Ireland?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I say again, that if we had had a Minister at the Executive to fight the case for the rail network, it might have been easier for us to be informed and to make assessments about it.

Another reference was made to spin. I will deal with that because there is a difference between spin and information. *[Interruption]* In this statement we have set out the amount of money to be spent, whether it is new money or that within existing allocations, by the lead Department and what it is specifically meant to do. That is not spin. I ask my fellow Minister to put as much effort into communicating with other Ministers in the proper manner as he does into sitting like a child, making a noise in the corner, while — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Dodds:** We are all working together.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**The Deputy First Minister:** I would love to have time in the Executive to show the Minister how working together can be effective. *[Interruption]* I look forward to doing that.

**Mr Campbell:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I cannot take a point of order while the Deputy First Minister is speaking.

**The Deputy First Minister:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

My last point relates to cultural diversity. I believe that the Department dealing with this issue in Northern Ireland can make significant advances. It is a serious matter which should be addressed earnestly. But the more I listen and see, the more I believe that perhaps the greatest diversity exists in the various communities. If we started to look at the diversities in the two main communities, we might start to address some of the problems that the Minister and his friends have been a manifestation of this morning.

**Mr Molloy:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First of all, I would like to welcome this morning's statement by the First and the Deputy First Ministers. It is important that we get a clear picture of what is happening. It is unfortunate that time has been wasted by Ministers, who should be sitting in the Executive, asking questions in the House the answers to which they should already know.

I especially welcome the announcement of the money going to the health service. That is a very important subject, particularly with regard to waiting lists. There are extremely long waiting lists at Craigavon Hospital because of the transfer of patients there from South Tyrone. At last week's board meeting it was clear that the cost of the transfers last year was in the region of



£1.5m. There is a deficit before we even start. It is important to keep this in mind for the future. We must realise the cost of temporary transfers and try instead to provide a proper service in the area.

I also welcome the announcement on gap funding. At last week's hearing the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust said that the different groups that they were associated with already needed gap funding of £1.5 million in order to continue on to Peace II. It is welcome that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has put together funding to help that situation.

It is important to do research into TSN and tackle social need. We need to have some sort of injection of funds to ensure that we can reverse the discrimination of the past and redress the imbalance that exists between east and west of the Bann. We must ensure that people living west of the Bann have proper hospital services and the new schools that are required. There also is a need for a proper roads infrastructure in these areas.

I am certain that when we start to tackle social need those are issues that the Executive will want to deal with.

With regard to the railway task force — and I know the Minister is not present at the moment — we need to look at the railway structure to ensure —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Perhaps the Member would get to the question.

**Mr Molloy:** I have raised a number of issues. One was that we need a great deal more additional funds to enable us to tackle all these areas. I welcome the fact that the Executive is dealing with the issue of rural planning and area plans. Will the Executive confirm that there is money available to put all the area plans in place, not just the Belfast one, so that there are no further delays?

**The First Minister:** The Member touched on a wide range of issues, and I hope he will forgive me if I do not manage to cover all of them. On planning, there are significant additional resources there to help, particularly to speed up appeals and

deal with area plans. I do have to tell him, however, that one of the key focuses of the area plans — or at least the additional money that has gone in to it — is that the metropolitan plan for Belfast move forward. There is £250,000 under that heading, which is very urgently needed.

I welcome the comments that the Member made with regard about additional money for health. This is a matter of very great concern to us. We are trying to target this money on waiting lists. One of the most important things for people is speed of access to medical services. The waiting-list situation here continues to concern us and, indeed, the continuing

increase in waiting lists is partly due to winter pressures and partly to a failure by the former Administration to target this problem in previous years. As a result of that we have the worst waiting-list situation in the United Kingdom. Our waiting lists are significantly worse than those of Scotland, Wales and England, so we are putting additional money in to try to deal with that.

Obviously the location of hospital services is also important although, in terms of what the public want, it comes second after access. One needs to bear that in mind. There is a particular problem that has been mentioned with regard to South Tyrone. The Southern Board has informed the Minister of its decision to temporarily transfer acute in-patient medical services from South Tyrone to Craigavon. It is for Ms de Brún to consider the board's decision and the reasons for it before deciding on the way forward. I understand that she has made it clear that she would accept a decision to transfer services only if she were satisfied that that was unavoidable and that any changes must be the minimum necessary to ensure safety and quality and must also be temporary.

Of course the Member is quite right to say that this has consequential effects on Craigavon. As a result of the transfer of acute services, Craigavon has not been able to offer the same range of elective and outpatient services to people, because of the way it has been affected. We all hope that this will be a temporary situation.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The time is up.

**Mr A Maginness:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. During the course of questions I rose to make a point of order. Given the prolonged questioning by Mr Dodds as Minister for Social Development, and given the bizarre and rather pathetic nature of his questioning of the Deputy First Minister and the First Minister and the spectacle he made of himself — *[Interruption]* Let me continue my point of order.

Is it in order that a Minister — or someone who purports to be a Minister — should so demean himself as to ask a question that should properly have been asked at the Executive table and not in this Chamber?

12.00

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. The question as to whether a Minister has demeaned himself or otherwise is not a point of order. You may be aware that it is the convention in another place for a Minister not to ask questions of another Minister, but we do not have corresponding Standing Orders in this House. Perhaps, at some stage, the Procedures Committee will wish to consider altering that discrepancy in Standing Orders.

**Mr A Maginness:** Mr Deputy Speaker, on a further point of order. May I ask that, in view of your ruling,

this matter be referred to the Procedures Committee so that such a serious issue can be properly addressed and our Standing Orders amended to prevent a recurrence of this pathetic spectacle.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sure that the Committee and its Chairman will take note of what has been said, as reported in Hansard, and will look in to the matter.

**Mr Dodds:** It was obviously not so pathetic a spectacle when it caused such consternation among the ranks of the SDLP. It is entirely in order for any Member to stand up and ask a question, and it is entirely in order for me, as a Member for North Belfast and as a Minister, to draw attention to the total lack of detail in the information given to this House. However, I did so not in my capacity as a Minister but in my capacity as a Member, and concern was echoed from various sections of this House — and quite rightly.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Dodds, you are very well aware that that is not a point of order.

**The Deputy First Minister:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I have some guidance as to the basis for your ruling, which, I assume, applies to normal circumstances? From the depth of your knowledge and experience, can you give some guidance as to the emotionally disturbed state that Ministers go through in a pre-resignation period. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I cannot hear the Deputy First Minister.

**The Deputy First Minister:** And will you state that Mr Dodds is being not just foolish but demob happy?

**Mr Dodds:** Did you resign or not, Seamus?

**The Deputy First Minister:** I did — like a man.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. There is no use in continuing with this. I am now moving on to the next item of business.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. A question was asked of the Deputy First Minister. Rather than answering that question, he decided to go back to an earlier question asked of the First Minister, since he thought that the First Minister had not answered it adequately. Is it in order for someone to deal with a previous question rather than the current one?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That question has already been asked, and the Speaker will make a ruling later today. I am now going to ask —

**Mr P Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry, but I am not taking any further points of order. *[Interruption]* I have made it clear that I am not taking any further points of order.

**Mr P Robinson:** How can you refuse a point of order?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Mark Durkan, that he wishes to make a statement about financial expenditure in 2000-01. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Haughey:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is a serious breach of proper conduct.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I call Mr Mark Durkan.

## **PUBLIC EXPENDITURE (2000-01): REALLOCATIONS**

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement.

On Thursday 29 June the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister launched the agenda for government, which sets out how the Executive is tackling a range of issues immediately to demonstrate the difference that devolution makes for the benefit of all our people.

That included the allocation of £27 million of additional public expenditure to some of the action points in the agenda. This was possible in the context of a wider review of spending allocations, and my statement provides fuller details of the total picture to the Assembly. Members will find, attached to the copies of my statement, a table summarising the items which are receiving additional spending provision in this exercise. That table and the details of the statement are also being made available to the press.

It is in the nature of budget management that changes need to be dealt with, and the pattern of change can vary considerably from one year to the next, or indeed from one quarter to the next, given the wide range of unpredictable factors which can affect the planning and management of spending programmes. In this case, some £90 million of spending provision became available for reallocation by the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee judged that £63 million should be provided for a range of requirements and bids for a wide range of public services; in addition £27 million was available for commitment to the actions in the agenda for government. This is a first tranche of support for the agenda for government. Further support will be made available in the autumn.

This £90 million came from several sources. Eighteen million was available from the allocations added to Northern Ireland's budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his March Budget. That had been envisaged by the Secretary of State before the restoration of devolution as being for particular aspects of transport and education spending. However, the Executive Committee thought it right to take a fresh view on this as part of our overall review of immediate spending priorities, and in essence the £18 million became part of our total for reallocation rather than remaining a distinct pot of money. This meant that the Executive Committee was able to look across the whole range of issues and then judge how best to proceed.

The second major source of resources was the End Year Flexibility arrangements, which allow for money which has been unspent in one year to be carried

forward into the following year — either to the same area, or elsewhere. This source, including £6 million of additional receipts from the regional rate, accounted for £42 million of the sums which the Executive Committee addressed in this re-allocation exercise. These allocations include some quite novel allocations which show the Executive Committee making use of the available resources more actively and distinctly than would have been the case before devolution. In other cases, where we judged that the funds were best used in the area from which they had originally arisen, they were allowed to remain in that sector. In all cases, the criterion was the same: where was the money most needed, where would it give most benefit.

The final component of the £90 million available was in the form of £30 million of additional receipts or reduced requirements from the Departments which have become available in recent weeks. Savings from such sources are central to the in-year reviews of public spending, and again we are operating on the principle that all savings that arise in individual public services can and should be brought to the Executive Committee for allocation. If windfalls were left with the public service where they happen to arise, this could lead to substantial distortion of spending priorities which would not be in anyone's interest. Thus, it is regarded as very important that savings of this nature are brought back for reallocation by the Executive Committee. Again our aim is to reach conscious decisions on the best use for such funds, not simply to let them lie where they fall.

As many Members are aware, the largest component of savings came from additional receipts from house sales by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, amounting to £25 million. As I explained last week, extra receipts — that is those over and above the level planned in the public spending allocations at the start of the year — should be at the disposal of the Executive Committee and the Assembly, to be used to address emerging pressures.

Other savings which were also brought back for reallocation by the Executive Committee included £4 million which arose from unavoidable and unforeseen delays in the progress of roads capital projects and £1 million through a rephasing of the planned expenditure on the Springvale project.

These then are the three main components of the £90 million, which were considered for reallocation by the Executive Committee last Thursday.

I must stress to Members that it is unusual at this stage of the financial year to have available such a large sum for reallocation, and they should not expect this to be repeated during further monitoring exercises later in the year.

I do not propose in this statement to set out on a line-by-line basis the individual items which are receiving additional spending provision in their budgets as a result of this exercise. Many reflect routine estimating changes which need to be addressed to ensure the continued delivery of public services at an appropriate standard to the public.

I should also point out that these proposals are not concerned with the running-costs pressures which Departments have identified for this year. A separate exercise later in the year will deal with running-costs issues.

More widely, it has proved an extremely valuable opportunity in addressing needs which have arisen since the budget was agreed by the Executive Committee in December of last year. Through the availability of the additional resources from the Chancellor's Budget and the savings from Departments, it is now possible to meet a wide range of budgetary pressures, including the needs of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company for the public service obligation (£6 million); Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's animal health programme (£8 million); the IDB's selective financial assistance budget (£6.4 million); and capital programmes for voluntary schools and the pre-school initiative (£7 million).

All these reallocations will be subject to Assembly approval through Supplementary Estimates in due course. It will take some time for the detail of the decisions taken by the Executive Committee last week to be translated into detailed redistribution at the level set out in the Estimates such as those recently approved by the Assembly. When that detailed process has been completed, Supplementary Estimates will be brought before the Assembly and a new Appropriation Bill will need to be introduced. This will pave the way for full and proper authorisation of the proposed additional expenditure.

I believe that these reallocations are clear evidence that the Executive Committee is in the business of sound management of our finances. This means that the agenda for government, and, in due course, the programme for government, can be built on the very solid foundations which are represented by the reallocations of resources which I am announcing today. And the two aspects of this review of spending allocations in 2000-01 are highly complementary — the agenda on the one hand setting out some of the Executive's early initiatives for the region for the next nine months, and, on the other hand, the redeployment of resources to better effect within the wide range of ongoing policies and services, which I am addressing today.

I believe that the content of my announcement this afternoon is very positive from the point of view of

those who depend on the public services which we are funding. We have redeployed the resources available from areas where they are no longer needed or from centrally available resources to the pressures which are the most acute. I recognise that it is impossible to please everyone or deal with all the pressures on budgets that may exist. The Executive Committee has taken the opportunity to make some innovative actions in the agenda for government, but this would not have been possible without the resources available from sound oversight and management of public finances, and it remains our determination that this should continue. We will also ensure that the Assembly is kept informed of the proposals which may emerge through the various monitoring reviews during the course of the year.

**Mr Leslie:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wonder if you could — *[Interruption]*

I was taking the opportunity before the hour for questions started —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry, but we do not normally take a point of order until after everyone has spoken. We had agreed to that.

12.15 pm

**The Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy):** A LeasCheann Comhairle, go raibh maith agat. As Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee, I wish to welcome the Minister's important general statement today. We must have more detail, with as much advance notice as possible, in all these statements so that the Committees can start work on them. I know there are difficulties dealing with this in the Executive and when the Minister has to make a statement himself.

It is important that we view today's announcement in the overall context to see how this will affect us in future. This monitoring round has turned up a number of reallocations. Can the Minister state exactly when he expects the next round? Does he expect to turn up additional funds every time we have a monitoring round? Do we simply receive budget allocations which are then reallocated? If we achieve a tighter control of the budget, surely monitoring will not turn up a large amount of money for the finances of the Assembly will be more tightly controlled.

I draw particular attention to the £4 million for roads, which has been reallocated because of unavoidable and unforeseen delays. I know of my own area's demand for improvements to the road infrastructure. We heard about the condition of rural roads in the debate last week, and it seems strange that we should have to reallocate now, for there are a number of major projects. I could talk about the A29 from Dungannon to Cookstown or the A4 to Ballygawley, both extremely dangerous roads much in need of finances. Yet we are told that this is



part of a long-term budget. I should appreciate an explanation of how this comes about.

The addendum to the statement mentions the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and reduced income from timber sales. Is this another injection into the timber sales or the same one we discussed earlier in the year where money was put into the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development as compensation?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee for his comments. First, I have recognised before here and with the Finance and Personnel Committee that we have difficulties regarding the quality and timing of information that can be made available to the departmental Committee for its consideration. In many such issues, we in the Department are clearly dealing with bids and proposals from other Departments, not all of whom have necessarily shared their ideas with their own departmental Committees. That puts some constraints on us regarding the timing and scope of the information that we can present to the departmental Committee. Given the need for the Executive Committee's good conduct and a degree of confidentiality regarding certain proposals, exchanges and decision-making, these decisions are obviously for the Executive Committee itself. It puts constraints on what we are able to make available to Committees, the Finance and Personnel Committee in particular.

We must try to continue to improve this position, since I recognise Committee members' frustration. I share that frustration, since I would prefer more active and open engagement with the Committee. We tried to make such information as we could available regarding moneys accessible to us. We asked the Committee for its views and recommendations on possible allocations and on the pressures there are.

This monitoring exercise identifies money available through underspends and additional receipts, but let us also remember that it identifies where there are serious pressures in programmes.

In future, the monitoring exercise will identify pressures in certain areas of the budget; if we are lucky, it will also identify further available resources. As I said, we should not expect resources of this order to be the natural or likely outcome in future monitoring exercises.

Two questions were raised, the first of which concerned the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and timber sales. This is not a repeat of the old moneys; it is new money, but the reason for it is the same — the pressures created by the reduced price of timber, which is a global issue.

With regard to the second question, the £4 million that was yielded by the Department for Regional Development was for the roads programme and capital work which, for operational reasons, has not been spent this year. Further pressures on roads maintenance have not been addressed in this set of allocations, and those pressures will have to be considered later.

**Mr B Bell:** I welcome the Minister's statement, but I have a question on the issue of flexibility. About £6 million additional receipts were obtained from the regional rate. I wonder whether the Minister considered carrying that forward to alleviate this year's regional rate — I have asked questions on the regional rate before.

A question was asked earlier about the Finance and Personnel Committee not receiving answers to questions. Last Wednesday, an officer from that Department was unable to answer questions on any issue. That was frustrating, and perhaps this question could have been asked then — had we been allowed to ask it and to receive answers. I welcome the First Minister's assurances that that will not happen in future and that Committees will be taken further into account when dealing with budgets.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his question, and I simply repeat what I said earlier. I recognise the frustration felt by members of the Finance and Personnel Committee. I stress that it is somewhat frustrating for me too, as a Minister, that we cannot engage in the open flow of information in automatic response to all the questions that Members have, when these matters are being discussed by the Executive. That issue applies to other departmental Committees at the stage when proposals or measures for their Departments are the subject of Executive consideration. I ask Members to appreciate that such constraints create difficulties for officials as well. Officials want to be helpful, and I believe that they have a very good relationship with the Finance and Personnel Committee. However, there are constraints by virtue of the fact that we service the decisions made by the Executive. We are not at liberty to fully disclose all information. It is not our information — much of it is confidential Executive information.

The £6 million extra in rates came as a result of a higher yield from greater buoyancy. There are greater returns because of more new properties, and that is where that £6 million came from.

The rate has already been set for next year so there is no point in seeking to revise it downwards. The £6 million is a useful contribution to the moneys that we now have available. It is being allocated appropriately and will be spent well, as part of the wider £90 million. Perhaps the Member wants to identify which measures

he believes should not be funded in our allocation exercise.

**Mr Dallat:** I also welcome the Minister's statement. It represents the very positive side of the work of the Assembly, which is in stark contrast to the earlier scenes that were witnessed by a large group of young children of impressionable age in the Public Gallery.

Is the Minister satisfied that the additional moneys available for voluntary and community sector projects is adequate to ensure that the Assembly delivers on new TSN in rural and socially deprived urban areas?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his question. We should be clear that we are talking about some additional allocations. Given the scale of those allocations, I would not pretend that they are going to be sufficient to ensure that Departments or, indeed, the community and voluntary sector are best able to meet their responsibilities under TSN.

The work on TSN across the full range of Government Departments is developing. It is work that is being co-ordinated by the Equality Unit in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. These allocations are obviously supplementing what is already in budgets, and all Departments should increasingly be using sound TSN considerations as they are shaping and sharing out their various budgets and programmes. That is something we will continue to do.

In the allocations I am announcing and those announced by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in the agenda for government, we have tried to deal with some of the pressures in the community and the voluntary sector, not least, but not only, in respect of the question of the gap in peace moneys.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** I welcome the Minister's statement. It is in stark contrast to the fiasco we had to endure earlier. He said the decision was taken last Thursday, seemingly at the same meeting that we heard about earlier. There was no public fanfare about this. Respect was shown to the Assembly, and the detail, which we would expect, has certainly come.

I am somewhat surprised that the Department of the Environment allocation is only £530,000 for the Planning Appeals Commission. As Members will know, a number of areas in the Province, outside of Belfast, are behind in their area plans. That has curbed the natural development of those areas, their plans being out of date. My Committee, the Environment Committee, had highlighted that, and a proper allocation could have ensured that this was taken forward.

On the Department of Education he mentioned the pre-school initiative. Can the Minister now assure us that all pre-school places for children of the appropriate age will be guaranteed? I know of some children who

are 4 years of age and yet are not getting any pre-school education.

Regarding the Department for Regional Development, we had a debate on this matter. There was, in the Chancellor's statement, a direct allocation for roads. Has any of this money been syphoned off? How does that sit alongside the disquiet that we all unanimously expressed in the Chamber last week in the emergency debate on the need for expenditure on roads and railways?

Finally, on the Department for Social Development, we notice that a large part of the money is the £25 million that has been additional receipts from house sales. How does removing that amount from the Housing Executive sit with a current shortfall of £13 million? Many of the urgent adaptations for houses for the elderly, and the disabled have been put back. Money from house sales ought to have been allocated to remove the £13 million shortfall.

It would have been appropriate for the Minister to allow that money to have been covered, to allow the weak, the disabled and the disadvantaged in the community to have a proper standard of services.

*12.30 pm*

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his questions. However, I am unsure whether to thank him for the earlier compliments in his contribution. I will attempt to deal with some of the questions that have been raised regarding the pressures in the Planning Service. We tried, in the overall exercise, to respond to a range of pressures present throughout the budget. In this allocation we have added further money to the Planning Appeals Commission, as a large part of the backlog relates to congestion at that end of the planning system. The Member will also be aware of remedial action we took earlier in the year in giving the Department of the Environment permission to use some of its receipts to target some of the pressures building there. That was relief and assistance received by the Department in that area.

In terms of the education issue the Member raised, the money being provided for the capital work on the pre-school initiative is to enable the Department to achieve the target of 85% of the pre-school cohort to be in pre-school education by the start of 2002. The target for next September is 75%, and that capital is being provided to help the Department meet that.

The Member also raised the issue of the £25 million of additional receipts for the Housing Executive in respect of house sales. As I said in my statement, I do not think we can accept the premise that any programme that generates additional receipts should automatically retain them. All additional receipts should be available to the Executive Committee for allocation across all

Government Departments. Many Departments and programmes are under budgetary pressure, not just the housing budget. Not all Departments or services can show receipts. Many are not run in a way that would enable them to generate receipts. Remember that in the past, many other services have yielded funds for priorities in the housing programme. It would be wrong, therefore, to treat that money as simply housing money and not make it available for wider allocation.

The Member mentioned the £13.7 million shortfall that the Housing Executive has talked about. Let us remember that £6.8 million of that stated shortfall is a result of the reduction in the Chancellor's initiative money. The Chancellor's initiative money, offered in terms of the worst estates scheme, was £7.5 million last year. That was a one-off amount of money. The Chancellor's initiative money is £700,000 this year. It is incorrect for people to talk about the £13.7 million shortfall. People will be aware from the two exercises we have addressed this morning — the agenda for government and this allocation exercise — that, in fact, a further £5.9 million has been given to the Housing Executive. An amount of £2 million has been earmarked for adaptations for people with disabilities, £2 million to the SPED scheme — the Social Development Committee identified a £2 million gap there — and £1.9 million will go towards the Housing Executive administration grant. An additional £5.9 million is being put into housing. We were not able to address road priority issues in this allocation round; they will have to be considered later.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** May I remind Members that the time will be up at 12.50 pm, and for that reason I ask them to keep their questions as brief and concise as possible.

**Mr Close:** I thank the Minister for his statement which puts some flesh on the bones of the First and Deputy First Ministers' statement earlier today. I do have to ask why the various figures included in the Minister's statement were not available to the Finance and Personnel Committee when it met on 28 June — the day before the announcement was made. Some of these figures are from the March budget allocation from the end-of-year flexibility. I believe, and members of the Finance and Personnel Committee believe, that, even though we were suspended for a long time, there was adequate time for these figures to have been given further scrutiny by that Committee.

Will the Minister ensure that reference has been made to the second tranche of the agenda for government money and that those figures will be made available to the Finance and Personnel Committee in sufficient time to enable it to have an input? May I also ask for an assurance that the moneys for the autumn

monitoring round will also be made available to the Committee in adequate time.

The Minister referred to drugs savings and to an allocation of £2.4 million. It strikes me that there is some contradiction here. I am a little confused as to the allocation of £2.4 million on drugs savings. Also, can the Minister give me more information on the additional moneys for the Water Service for operating costs of £3.5 million?

Finally, I would like to welcome the additional allocation of £3 million to the Down Lisburn Trust for capital purposes.

**Mr Durkan:** Seamus Close is another member of the Finance and Personnel Committee who has contributed to the debate today. I repeat that I fully appreciate how frustrated members of that Committee are.

Let us also be conscious of the fact that the Department of Finance and Personnel, in carrying out these exercises, is serving and supporting the Executive Committee. So the information is to that extent in the possession of the Executive Committee. As far as this matter is concerned, I will continue to reflect the concerns and interests of members of the Finance and Personnel Committee to the Executive Committee. We will try to see what better means can be found to provide information to members of the Committee and to secure more useful and more effective input for the members of that Committee. This is something that we will continue to explore and improve on. I cannot at this stage give the categorical assurances that Mr Close is seeking, simply because they involve decisions that the Executive Committee will have to make, such as what information should be made available and when. The issues arising here involve a range of Departments.

People are concerned about almost getting into an open bidding exercise with every Department's bid published and that in turn tending to create inflationary pressures on the bids. Everybody has to be seen to be bidding so he can cover himself, and the departmental Committees may be adding to that bidding exercise. These are the sorts of concerns that people have had and the reasons for taking a more limited approach. This does need to be sorted out and worked through.

The Member asked about the second tranche. It is intended that there will be a second tranche in the autumn. I failed to make the point earlier, in response to a question from Mr Molloy, that the next normal monitoring round will be in October, so in September we will be looking at what that monitoring round is offering us. It will be in that context that the second tranche of money from the agenda for government will be dealt with.

As for the question on drugs savings, that really relates to GP fundholders. That funding is to cover the



restoration of the fundholder savings that were borrowed to help address winter pressures last year. Those savings are a statutory entitlement and can be drawn down by the fundholders over three to four years.

**Mr B Hutchinson:** There have been a number of criticisms this morning of the way in which the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister handled their announcement. I have been pleased by the way the Minister of Finance and Personnel has handled his, and particularly by the amount of information he has given us.

The First Minister said that one of the reasons he could not wait until the Assembly sat was for fear of leaks. Why did the Minister of Finance and Personnel not feel the need to make his announcement at a press conference? Was it because he was confident that there would be no leaks from his Department?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his question. The Executive took several decisions on Thursday. The Executive decided that the decision on the agenda for government should be the subject of a press announcement by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister with the rest of us in attendance. The Executive Committee also decided that I should make a statement on the remaining moneys for allocation here today. I was not going to do a press conference beforehand or separately. I believe that, as with the budget statement, matters of routine budgetary operation are appropriately presented by myself, once I am in possession of an Executive Committee decision, here before the House. That is consistent with Standing Orders and with the legislation, and that is the approach I have taken.

It was not free of leaks. At the press conference given by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister last Thursday, one journalist asked about a further £64 million for allocation. Somebody somewhere had the information. Thankfully no one was sufficiently motivated to follow that up, otherwise I would have been in difficulties before the House this morning.

**Mr Leslie:** I thank the Minister for his statement. I heard his cautionary remarks on the potential size of future outcomes from in-year monitoring. However, the Deputy First Minister seems optimistic. He is clearly expecting further largesse next time round. He promised a further tranche, and we must hope that he keeps on "tranching".

The Minister referred to these reallocations being subject to Assembly approval through Supplementary Estimates in due course. This is a little misleading. Essentially the Supplementary Estimates will be a *post facto* confirmation of the decisions announced today. His wording did not reflect the true position. I have no particular objection to that course of action. The key

point, which has been highlighted many times, is that normally we would have a longer run-up to these decisions with more opportunity for them to be discussed. I do not expect the Minister to reiterate his remarks in that regard. We are all aware that there is quite often a difference between the apparent import of a statement and the actual effect of the small print.

Will the Minister comment on the £4 million clawed back from the roads budget due to unfinished projects? Under resource budget accounting, would the same thing happen or would a capital allocation of that kind become inalienably part of the budget to which it had been allocated?

12.45 pm

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his points. First, with regard to the Estimates, these must, by their nature, reflect decisions that have already been taken. It would be bizarre if I, as Minister of Finance, were to bring forward Estimates that had not been adopted or agreed by the Executive. Serious difficulties arise if Ministers appear to be acting in a somewhat semi-detached basis from the Executive Committee. I can only bring forward Estimates that are based on decisions that have been made by the Executive Committee.

In any other Chamber of this nature debates on Estimates and appropriation tend to follow decisions or clear statements of intent that have been made by the Administration. This is not always pleasing to Members, and we need to improve the current systems. These issues will be addressed by the Committee on Procedures, among others.

We cannot take it for granted that such moneys will continue to be available. Some moneys were available in the last monitoring round which came from the previous period of devolution. However, I hope this does not create habit-forming expectations of certain moneys. There are also very real pressures, such as the costs of running Departments. These costs are building up very seriously in some Departments, and members of the departmental Committees are aware of this. We will not have much latitude in these exercises.

The Member asked about the implications of monitoring exercises. He gave the example of the roads budget and the £4 million that was underspent last year. He also asked whether in future this money would fall back into the programme. We will be putting forward legislation to bring in a full resource accounting and budgeting scheme. The thinking behind this is to ensure that the budget is conducted on a more programmed basis and that there is a strong focus on output rather than the conventional emphasis on input. We will be trying to change that. The monitoring round for the resource accounting budget will still exist, although the



nature of this will change. The moneys available and assumed entitlements will change, partly because the nature of budgetary commitments will change. The move to resource accounting, however, will not necessarily mean that Departments will automatically retain any underspend from the previous year.

**Mr A Maginness:** I welcome the Minister's statement and warmly welcome the allocation of £6 million towards public safety for the railways and the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company. These changes are long overdue. Secondly, I am sad that the Minister has had to allocate £2 million towards the special purchase of evacuated dwellings. In my constituency, only this morning, there was an attack on a family, who happened to be Catholic. Unfortunately that family will have to avail itself of this scheme.

**Mr Durkan:** The First and the Deputy First Ministers previously announced an allocation under the agenda for government of £3 million for rail safety. My announcement supplements that with a further £6 million allocation to the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company in respect of its public service obligations. That makes a total of £9 million. Members will be aware that the indication at the time was that £18 million was still unallocated from the Chancellor's Budget and that the Secretary of State had suggested that £8 million go to transport. The Executive has, therefore, allocated a total of £9 million in this overall exercise.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind the Minister that time is running out, and he should bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr Durkan:** On the other point, it is a matter of regret that we are having to allocate further moneys to support the special purchase of evacuated dwellings schemes. Clearly, that is an area in which we would like to see expenditure reducing. It is a programme that all Members want to see ending in circumstances where the difficulties and untoward activities giving rise to the need for that programme have completely abated and been abandoned in society. However, we recognise the pressure that is there, and I know that the Social Development Committee had identified it. We understood that, while £1.5 million was provided in the original budget, on current unhappy trends about £3.5 million will probably be needed. That is why we have had to make the additional allocation of £2 million. It is regrettable and deplorable that the intimidation of Protestants and Catholics gives rise to the need for that budget.

## POINTS OF ORDER

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Before moving on to the next item of business, I understand that Mr Leslie has a point of order.

**Mr Leslie:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask you to advise the House on the timing of the issuing of ministerial statements. My understanding is that they were to be issued one hour before the statement itself. Consequently, at the end of the First and Deputy First Ministers' statement, but before they started questions at 10.50 am, I went outside to collect the statement that we have just heard from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, which was not available at that time. I returned to the Chamber and went out again about half an hour later, by which time it was available. Fortunately for the Minister, due to events beyond his control, the start of his statement was a little later than 11.50 am, which was implied by the timing of the previous statement. It may well be that that statement got under the wire in terms of being available one hour before. However, if my understanding of the one-hour rule is correct, then, in principle, that statement should have been available at 10.50 am.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Standing Orders state

"A Member of the Executive Committee shall make statements to the Assembly on matters for which the Executive Committee is responsible. He/she shall where possible make a written copy available to Members as early as possible before delivering the statement in the Assembly. Where this has not been possible he/she should state to the Assembly the reason or reasons."

I hope that that clarifies the issue.

**Mr A Maginness:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I raise an issue that occurred at the beginning of this question and answer session. Certain remarks were made that were quite audible on this side of the Chamber, but perhaps not in your hearing. They emanated from Mr Peter Robinson. The gist of those remarks, which were directed at you, Mr Deputy Speaker — and I will rely on Hansard to confirm them — was that we need somebody decent in the Chair. Those remarks, to my hearing, were clearly levelled at you. I am sure that in the difficult period that you were experiencing at that time in the Chair, because of the general unruliness of the House, you did not hear them. However, I regard those remarks, as I am sure other Colleagues who heard them do, as showing contempt for the Chair, and an attack on your personal integrity and the integrity of the Chair. I ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to consult with Colleagues and to check Hansard to see if, in fact, the remarks were made and, if so, to ask the Member to withdraw them.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Mr Maginness. I will indeed ask that Hansard be examined, and no doubt a report will be made to the House.

## **WATERWAYS AND LANGUAGES: NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL SECTORAL MEETING**

### **Waterways**

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey):** I will make the statement on waterways first and then take questions on that matter. I propose to follow that with the statement on language and then be available for questions on language. If it is in order, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to proceed in that manner, rather than mix it all up.

The first meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in sectoral format for inland waterways and languages took place in Belfast on Wednesday 21 June. The inland waterways meeting was held in the morning, followed by language in the afternoon. Following nomination by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, Ms Bairbre de Brún and I represented the Executive Committee. The Irish Government was represented at the waterways meeting by Silé de Valera TD, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, and for the language meeting by Minister Ó Cuív, Minister of State. I am making this report on behalf of myself and Ms de Brún, who has approved the report.

The inland waterways meeting opened with an oral progress report from Mr John Mahony, interim chief executive. The council noted that Waterways Ireland had responsibility for the Shannon Erne waterway from 2 December 1999, and from 1 April 2000 it had responsibility for Lough Erne and the Lower Bann navigations in Northern Ireland, and the Royal Canal, the Grand Canal, the Barrow navigation and the Shannon navigation in the Republic of Ireland. Ownership of Shannon Erne Waterway Promotion Limited transferred to Waterways Ireland on 16 June 2000. Waterways Ireland will have its headquarters in Enniskillen with regional offices in Dublin, Carrick-on-Shannon and Scariff in County Clare. The council noted that temporary premises had been established at each of these locations and that options on sites for permanent premises were being pursued. To date 230 staff have been seconded to Waterways Ireland.

*(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)*

The council noted that ESB International and Ferguson McIlveen have been commissioned to update their earlier feasibility study on the restoration of the Ulster Canal. This will provide an updated cost estimate for the project.

The council approved Waterways Ireland's proposed activities for the period up to December 2000, including a detailed programme of works, estimates of expenditure

and targets for other work including staff recruitment, financial arrangements, equality and human rights issues, development of a promotion strategy, property acquisition, health and safety issues, liaison with user groups and proposals to commence reviews of by-laws.

The council also considered and agreed Waterways Ireland's proposals for its organisational structure and staffing levels, the distribution of functions between headquarters and regional offices, and interim pay and grading proposals. When Waterways Ireland is fully operational it will have around 381 staff, of which 257 will be industrial and 124 professional, technical and administrative. Of the 124 non-industrial staff, 70 will be based in Enniskillen, and the majority of these will be new posts.

The council also agreed to Waterways Ireland's outline draft equality scheme. Following public consultation the scheme will be referred back to the North/South Ministerial Council in final format before submission to the Equality Commission. That completes the statement on Waterways Ireland.

*1.00 pm*

**Mr J Wilson:** I thank the Minister for his report, and particularly for that part which we are dealing with now, Waterways Ireland, and the waterways of the island of Ireland.

Will the Minister give us an assurance that established groups like the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and the Ulster Waterways Group, who have an interest in the waterways of Ireland, will be consulted and kept informed of development plans by Waterways Ireland as they unfold? I am assuming that he will keep the House informed of such plans. Will the Minister also elaborate on how he thinks Enniskillen will benefit from having the headquarters of Waterways Ireland there?

**Mr McGimpsey:** I will take the three parts in reverse order. As I indicated, Enniskillen will benefit from 70 jobs. We estimate that about 80% of those will be new posts, so around 55 to 60 new professional, technical and administrative jobs will be created.

I will certainly keep the House informed of developments on the Waterways Ireland board. As we get reports through I will make them known automatically to the House. It is very important that interested groups are kept fully up to speed about and consulted on the work of Waterways Ireland and all such similar bodies. The development of waterways will complement other public and private sector businesses who will be consulted, including the Tourist Board, local authorities and — and this is very important — other groups who have an interest in waterways.

**Mr McCarthy:** I welcome the meeting by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and representatives

from the Irish Government on the waterways strategy. It certainly makes good sense to have co-operation right across the island and at the highest level. Waterways Ireland has the potential to capitalise on a huge tourist business throughout the island and in Northern Ireland, in particular. To date the inland waterways in Northern Ireland have experienced a great many problems and continue to be at a great disadvantage to those in the Republic. The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee is presently engaged in a full public inquiry to see what the problems associated with the angling and fishing fraternity are. Can the Minister assure the House that sooner rather than later Northern Ireland will enjoy the benefits of easy, accessible, enjoyable and affordable activities for everyone on all our waterways?

Of particular interest to some Members is the large investment in Lagan navigation. This is also of particular interest to Lisburn Borough Council. Will the Minister agree that his Department has a responsibility to promote the Lagan navigation and will he look for support, if necessary, through the North/South Ministerial Council?

**Mr McGimpsey:** Yes, I agree completely that the inland waterways activities is a navigation body. The benefits will be primarily economic. There is an enormous potential out there to attract tourists. We have only got to look south of the border in the Irish Republic and in England at the sort of experience they have with their inland waterways. Also on the Continent where they see the huge potential for water-borne tourism. People like to have their holidays on water, using canals, or cabin cruisers. We have an enormous potential in this area, and that is what we are looking to capitalise on.

Currently, we have only two navigable waterways. One is the Lower Bann and the other is Lough Erne. Canals formerly in existence are now defunct. The Ulster canal is one, the Newry canal is another, and the Member is quite right about the Lagan navigation. Some work is being done on that by Laganside in the City Council boundary and also by Lisburn Borough Council. We would see that as very much part of the priorities and of the agenda to get the Lagan navigation and the Ulster canal into operation. That brings up the fact that Lough Neagh does not have a navigable process, or navigable channels. Therefore navigation will have to be looked at in Lough Neagh.

The benefits are primarily economic, and there is potential for those rural communities along the path of the canal to ease their difficulties by tapping into those benefits through the development of arts and tourist craft shops, restaurants, pubs and so on. That is the experience in other parts of Europe.

**Mrs Nelis:** Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle. I would like to welcome the Minister's statement. I am

pleased that meetings on inland waterways are now being held. Inland waterways have the potential to create both tourism and jobs. May I ask the Minister whether Waterways Ireland will give some consideration to the issue of licence differential?

As he will know, the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into fisheries, fishing and the angling fraternity. One problem that surfaces frequently is licence differential and the effect that that has on the angling community and tourism. This is an important issue requiring serious attention.

May I also ask the Minister how Waterways Ireland proposes to examine the various concerns about hydroelectric schemes. The Erne Anglers Association gave evidence at the inquiry and raised serious concerns about the Ballyshannon hydroelectric scheme. However, we also have a host of these in the North, and these schemes sometimes operate illegally. It seems that the problems raised by anglers and the impact that these have on the angling fraternity have no means of being addressed.

Finally, will the Minister say how the new body will relate to the various other regions? I am thinking of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission and the Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland in particular.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I agree with the underlying issue raised by Mrs Nelis about licence differentials and the associated concerns and difficulties. However, the meeting on inland waterways was not concerned with fishing licences or angling. It was concerned with navigation and the Lough Erne and lower Bann navigation ways. It was also concerned with the economic benefits that can flow from developing our inland waterways.

The licence differentials are primarily the concern of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission and the Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland. Previously if one wanted to fish in the Foyle Fisheries catchment area and used an FCB licence one could have it endorsed accordingly, or one could buy a licence for one area and a licence for the other, or one licence for one area and have it endorsed for the other.

That process now continues except that Carlingford Lough is out of the Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland's area and part of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission's area. However, that cross-border body is not under my area of responsibility; it is under the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Whilst I can talk about licences from the Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland, I do not have the authority to discuss licensing for Foyle.



**Dr Birnie:** I welcome the report from the Minister and wish to ask him what arrangements exist between the North/South body for waterways and the Rivers Agency in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure the cost effective management of flood defence. Also what is the extent of staff transfers from the Rivers Agency to this North/South body?

**Mr McGimpsey:** I will answer the last part of the question first. As regards transferring staff, the Rivers Agency is currently carrying out work for Waterways Ireland under a service level agreement that will last for two years. The Rivers Agency has 460 staff and 10 are being transferred to Waterways Ireland — it is only a very small part of the total. Waterways Ireland does not have responsibility for flood defence, that lies with the Rivers Agency. Waterways Ireland is concerned with navigation, and in Northern Ireland terms, we are talking about Lough Erne and the lower Bann. Flood defences remain a matter for the Rivers Agency.

**Mr Poots:** I would like to ask the Minister to state the basis on which we are employing an extra 70 members of staff and what impact that will have on the amount of money required by the Culture, Arts and Leisure Department to pay for that.

**Mr McGimpsey:** The current year funding for Waterways Ireland is £11.5 million. Northern Ireland's contribution is £1.3 million, and that has been allowed for in the budget. The creation of 70 jobs in Enniskillen — of which we estimate 80% will be new jobs — is essentially for headquarters, administrative and technical staff. A major item of work is the feasibility study into the Ulster canal and how it can be opened. That is a major project with large sums of money attached.

**Mr Dallat:** I welcome the Minister's statement and his positive outlook for Waterways Ireland. In terms of joined-up Government, will he assure us that the very real benefits this body will bring will be exploited by the new international tourism company, jointly owned by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Bord Fáilte with its northern headquarters to be established in Coleraine?

**Mr McGimpsey:** I assure the Member that we will be making every effort to co-operate. One of the prime *raison d'être* for this initiative is tourism, and one of the main features for the tourist body in selling tourism and in attracting tourists will be the potential of our waterways. In terms of canal development, we are a long way behind the Irish Republic where there is an extensive and well-developed canal system. Our canal system is not developed, and that is what we are looking to do. Major benefits will come from that, and it will be one of the selling points for a tourist body in attracting people.

**Mr M Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat. What steps has the Department taken to stop the pollution of inland waterways, and would the Minister agree that such pollution discourages the angling aspect of tourism?

**Mr McGimpsey:** I thank the Member for his question. Waterways Ireland does not have a responsibility as regards pollution. That responsibility lies with other Departments. Pollution is obviously a matter of enormous importance, and if we are trying to sell water-borne tourism by developing canals, and the water quality is poor, that will have an impact on the project's feasibility.

The matter is one which requires joined-up Government and the ability of Departments to sympathetically work together and complement each other. I take the Member's point and I assure the House that it is something we are trying to achieve. To be specific, water quality would be a matter for the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

1.15 pm

**Mrs Carson:** I welcome the Minister's report, especially since the Enniskillen jobs are in my constituency, and 70 new jobs in that area will be welcome.

I welcome the statement that there is going to be a feasibility study for the restoration of the Ulster canal. I hope that the study will also incorporate the Coalisland canal in that area. It is a pity this body was not up and running a few years ago, so that we could have had more control over the waterways coming into the Erne system. There has been an infestation of zebra mussels from the Shannon system, and I hope the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure will endeavour to make sure that this manifestation is contained and does not develop further.

I look forward to the Minister's paying close attention to this environmental issue, if it is part of his remit, and to his addressing other issues, such as the craft that are coming onto our waterways from the South of Ireland. I also hope that the Department will institute a feasibility study into the size and power of the craft on inland waterways; some of them are no longer suitable for inland waterways. I look forward, with interest, to seeing how this new body works for the advantage of Northern Ireland's waterways.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Matters such as the size of craft reflect back to the question Mr Wilson asked earlier and also the ability of Waterways Ireland to take on board the views of interest groups, local authorities and other Departments. It is very important that that be done and that issues such as the size of craft and jet skiing are taken on board.



The issue of zebra mussels is not specifically the responsibility of Waterways Ireland, but it is the responsibility of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in terms of the angling estate, and the reality is that there is no answer to zebra mussels. In fact, I had never heard of zebra mussels until a few months ago. Apparently they are very small mussels the size of your thumb; they are inedible and have come in from the Caspian Sea. There are no natural predators, and their population is exploding. Our concern is that they are consuming the habitat that native fish rely on. Queen's University and other universities throughout Europe are looking at the issue, but, to date, nobody has come up with an answer of how to control them.

**Mr Molloy:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to re-enforce the point made earlier by Mrs Carson about the Ulster canal and the need to include in the feasibility study the Coalisland canal. There is a need to have access to the town of Coalisland from the Ulster canal up the Coalisland canal. The two are interlinked, and it is very important that they be done at the same time in order to establish that link.

Secondly, with regard to the issue of zebra mussels, there needs to be some way of controlling vessels travelling from the Shannon waterway, which is infected, right up the Blackwater and into Lough Neagh, which is not infected. If there are no controls, the fishing stock in Lough Neagh will be severely damaged. We need some way of ensuring that when boats come into Lough Neagh they are clean and safe.

I welcome the placement of the office in Enniskillen, and I seek reassurance from the Minister that those who will be employed there will be new employees and that equality will become a main part of the agenda in the recruitment of staff for that office.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I will answer the questions in reverse order. The Waterways Ireland Board, under the agreement, is currently producing its equality scheme which, in common with all other Government Departments, bodies and public authorities, will be lodged with the Equality Commission in September.

Of the estimated 70 jobs for Enniskillen, 80% will be new, many of them locally recruited, depending on skills available in the area. The head office, which will be the main focus for the Waterways Ireland operation, will be in Enniskillen. If the Ulster canal were open now, there would be difficulty avoiding the transfer of the infamous zebra mussels. That would have to come as part and parcel of the planning study as the Ulster canal is developed, since we recognise the danger to Lough Neagh. There are means to ensure that boats are sanitised as they move from one waterway into the other, pending our developing a means of controlling the mussels.

The Ulster canal is a big scheme, half lying in the Irish Republic, and half in Northern Ireland. The last estimate for its renovation, in 1998, was £70 million. We are now looking at an update of that cost, and how we address it will be another matter. The Ulster canal will link with Lough Neagh, which will require work on a navigation way through it, since there is none at present.

Relating to another question, the Lagan navigation — the linkage from Belfast — will also be connected. Our future plan is that one will be able to get into a boat in Belfast and travel to Dublin using canals and waterways.

## Languages

**Mr McGimpsey:** In the afternoon, the language sectoral meeting opened with a report from the chairperson of the Language Body, Maighr  ad U   Mh  irt  n. In the absence of Lord Laird of Artigarvan, Mrs U   Mh  irt  n reported on behalf of both joint chairpersons on the progress in developing the body as a whole and in taking forward its remit in regard to the Irish language and Ulster-Scots. She stressed the value of the body as a means of promoting greater respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to cultural and linguistic diversity.

The interim chief executive of the body's Ulster-Scots Agency, Mr John Hegarty, made an oral report to the council. He indicated that initial preparations to carry out the functions of the Ulster-Scots Agency were well under way. He indicated that early meetings of the board of the agency would concentrate on devising a corporate strategy, which would in turn determine the operational business of the agency. The agency has been putting in place administrative systems and liaising with Ulster-Scots and other language and cultural organisations, officials, researchers and sociolinguists to identify both the broad issues around promoting the language and culture and local priorities. The council noted the current position and looked forward to working closely with the board of the agency.

The interim chief executive of the Irish Language Agency of the body, Miche  al    Gruag  in, made an oral report to the council. He indicated that the transfer of functions and staff from the former Bord na Gaeilge had gone smoothly. He also reported on the good progress made in devising a corporate strategy for the agency and preparing a business plan. He briefed the council on a number of its current operational activities. The agency has continued to carry forward the work agreed for the former Bord na Gaeilge, An G  m and An Coiste T  arma  ochta (Terminology Committee). It has also taken over responsibility for funding several Irish-language organisations named in the Irish devolution legislation and for maintaining funding for the small number of

Irish-language organisations which were previously core-funded from the mainstream budget of the former Central Community Relations Unit (now the Community Relations Unit of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister). The council noted the current position and looks forward to working closely with the board of the agency.

The council considered a request by the chairperson of the board of the Irish Language Agency for the provision of assistance in carrying out her duties and agreed a means by which this could be done.

The council considered and agreed a proposal by the Irish Language Agency of the body to establish a temporary office in Belfast.

The council agreed to meet again in sectoral format in September 2000.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I very much welcome the report and wish to acknowledge the very positive fact that the work of the Language Body is operationally under way and that the North/South Ministerial Council focused on this area at its meeting on 21 June.

My questions relate to budgetary details and associated matters, such as the delivery of tangible benefits to Irish language activists on the ground in local communities. How much money has been invested to date in this body, and how much have the respective Governments invested? When will the funding be released to Irish language groups so that they can make future provision for programme content to enable them to forward plan in terms of employing people to deliver these projects?

I am very conscious of the urgency regarding this matter given that the Good Friday Agreement compels statutory agencies to take resolute action to promote language and that very many so far are failing to live up to their obligations. Three examples are the courts; directional road signs and broadcasting agencies such as UTV, which does not appear to acknowledge that the Irish language even exists.

I nGaeilge agus very briefly, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an tuairisc seo agus tá mé sásta go bhfuil obair an Fhorais Teanga trasteorann faoi sheol anois. Is í an cheist atá mé a chur ná: cén uair a bhéas Gaeilgeoirí agus grúpaí atá ag obair ar son na Gaeilge abálta torthaí na hoibre seo a fheiceáil agus cá mhéad airgid a bhéas ar fáil don Fhoras seo? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

**Mr McGimpsey:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I will try to answer all of the points, and please forgive me if I miss some. No doubt Mr McElduff will come back to me if I do.

With regard to the allocations, the indicative funding for 2000-2001 will be £7,879,000. Northern Ireland will provide £2,300,000 of that. The Ulster-Scots Agency will receive £667,000 and the Irish Language Agency will receive £7.2 million. This roughly equates, for the Irish Language Agency, to level funding over a number of years when one takes into account previous funding through Northern Ireland and also through the Irish Republic and Bord na Gaeilge. There is roughly a flat funding, as I understand it.

For the Ulster-Scots Agency it represents roughly a fourfold increase in funding up to £667,000. That is the funding that is available indicatively. Because of suspension and the interregnum, work on applications was suspended so there is work to be done there. As I indicated, the board, in the report to the meeting, said it was looking forward to coming forward with its strategy. It will be the body responsible through the Irish Language Agency and the Ulster-Scots Agency for funding the various groups the Member mentioned. I imagine that that will be in common with normal funding in terms of the criteria set and also the level of demand, and, of course, that has to relate to the resources available.

I am not capable at this time of giving a definitive answer. I will have to wait until I see the strategies and corporate plans from the various bodies before we can begin to project. Indicative funding is based on experience in the past, and we will take it further on that basis.

The agreement charges us with promoting Irish and Ulster-Scots — for example, where there is appropriate demand. Mr McElduff mentioned road signs. I do not have any response to make with regard to the demand for bi-lingual road signs. We will take such matters as they arise, and every issue will be examined and determined on its own merit. The main responsibility for street names lies with local authorities, and therefore is not necessarily the responsibility of the Language Body.

**Mr Shannon:** I have a number of questions for the Minister. In the report on languages, paragraph 10 refers to a “corporate strategy”. Can the Minister indicate when the corporate strategy will be finalised, and when the core issues for Ulster-Scots will be addressed?

1.30 pm

In his previous answer, the Minister said that Irish language resources will be £7.2 million and that resources for Ulster-Scots will be approximately £700,000. When does the Minister hope to see parity and financial equality for both languages? Lip-service is only being paid to the Ulster-Scots language, which is completely inadequate and unfair. It does not reflect the

opinion in the Province and of those who regard themselves as Ulster-Scots people.

Paragraph 12 of the report states that the council considered a request by the chairperson of the board of the Irish Language Agency. Will the Minister clarify what that request was? Was it for financial, manpower or womanpower assistance? What are the agreed means referred to in the statement?

In Paragraph 13, where will the funding to set up the temporary office in Belfast come from? Obviously, secretarial help will also be provided for the temporary office. Will the budget for Ulster-Scots be financially disadvantaged as a result? Where will the temporary office in Belfast be located, and will it become a permanent office, as sometimes happens?

I also have a question about Ulster-Scots and tourism. Has the Minister given any thought or consideration to the introduction of Ulster-Scots' trails, or something similar, to take into account the 250,000 people who come from Scotland to Northern Ireland every year, to see what we have in Northern Ireland? What steps are being taken to take advantage of the income that would be generated and the interest that people have in the Ulster-Scots language, traditions, culture and history?

**Mr McGimpsey:** I thank the Member for those questions. As with previous questions, I shall try to catch them all. On support to the chair of the Irish Language Agency, we are talking about appointing a deputy chair, as it is an unpaid, voluntary post which has been much more time consuming than was previously thought. It is not anticipated that there will be financial consequences, and it is certainly not anticipated that there will be any disadvantages for Ulster-Scots.

A corporate strategy for the Ulster-Scots Agency is currently under way, as I said in my report. The strategy and corporate plans of the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Irish Language Agency will inform the Language Body. Those two reports — on Ulster-Scots and Irish — are necessary to inform the Department, to allow us to develop our strategy. We have a duty to be as best informed as we can.

It is a matter for the Irish body to determine where its temporary office will be. I am on record as saying that it should be in a neutral venue, and the same applies to the Ulster-Scots Agency, which will also have an office in Belfast. It will also begin with a temporary office and a search by both bodies is under way. On the difficulties of parity between Ulster-Scots and Irish, I do not agree that there is unequal treatment. My policy is to provide fair treatment for everybody in the community, including those of Ulster-Scots and Irish identity. Like Mr Shannon, I am an 'Ards man, so I am very familiar

with growing up in an Ulster-Scots environment, although I was not aware of the heritage and identity that I had when I was growing up. The vernacular and the way we spoke was just something that we all did. We simply had an understanding that it was not quite English.

I have no hesitation in saying that there will be equal treatment for everyone, and also fair treatment for the languages of ethnic communities. It is wrong to use the treatment of one language as a benchmark for the treatment of the other, because one is not comparing like with like. Ulster-Scots as a language, a culture and a heritage is in its infancy compared with Irish and Gaelic. There is a great deal of work to do. Under direct rule the funding for Ulster-Scots was £118,000. Under this process funding will be £667,000 in the first year. That is a fourfold increase. There is a limit to the ability of the Ulster-Scots community to absorb resources and use them profitably in order to develop. There is a lot of work going on with the agency, the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council and the Ulster-Scots Language Society.

As Mr Shannon is aware, and this reflects an earlier point he made, one of the problems that Hansard is encountering and that the Agency has identified and is working hard on is the codifying of Ulster-Scots. It has never been codified. Work on a dictionary and the grammar is currently underway. There is also discussion about whether to rely on Scots or to go back to the seventeenth century and try to build it up from the roots. I know they are working hard to resolve that.

As far as Ulster-Scots heritage trails are concerned, I entirely agree that there is a huge tourist potential there. In Irish America, approximately 40 million Americans consider themselves Irish, and about 56% of them, at the last estimate, consider themselves Scotch-Irish or Ulster-Scots. They call it Scotch-Irish; we call it Ulster-Scots. There is a massive tourist resource for Northern Ireland on that side of things. The Ulster-American Folk Park is an example of how things can develop. There are exciting prospects for developing not just the language, but also the culture and heritage, and how that can be sold in terms of cultural tourism.

**Dr Adamson:** I thank the Minister for his report on inland waterways and languages. I also congratulate him on his fine pronunciation of the Gaelic.

The report says that the Irish Language Agency has continued to carry forward the work of these various agencies. I am familiar with the work of the former Bord na Gaeilge and An Gúm, but I am not as familiar with the Terminology Committee. Could the Minister tell us a little about the Terminology Committee, what its functions have been and how these will be progressed in the new Irish language body?



**Mr McGimpsey:** The short answer is that I am not familiar with the actual details of the body and of An Coiste Téarmaíochta, the Terminology Committee, and how that integrates. That would be a matter for the Irish language Agency, reporting to the Language Body. I imagine they are carrying on as in previous years, using that as their precedent. Again, I am not familiar with the details. I can certainly make an effort to find out, and I will write to Dr Adamson on that. Neither the agencies or the body have produced a corporate plan. It is behind time, but that is to do with the interregnum and the suspension. They are working hard on that, and the functions of the Terminology Committee should be spelt out clearly when it is published.

**Mr McMenamin:** I thank the Minister and welcome his report.

Irish and Ulster-Scots, at present, are seen in Northern Ireland as foreign languages. Does the Minister believe that it is imperative to establish a cultural heritage programme to co-ordinate and focus efforts to put young people in Northern Ireland in touch with vital elements of their culture such as language? Does the Minister agree that more Irish language teachers and special language counsellors need to be appointed to assist our young people to offer Irish and Ulster-Scots as attractive choices?

**Mr McGimpsey:** In terms of our cultural heritage — and it is a shared heritage — I believe strongly that mutual co-operation in the form of working and helping everyone to understand our cultural heritage will help foster greater understanding and respect among our society. I come from an Ulster-Scots background but did not understand it as I was growing up.

It is important that we understand where we are coming from. In terms of the instruction of the Irish language, if the Member is referring to its role in the classroom or as a form of Irish language medium education, that would be a matter for the Department of Education. With regard to promoting the Irish language, that is something we are already doing. We are also promoting Ulster-Scots and the languages of our ethnic communities; it is important we do not forget about them. I was at a linguistic diversity conference last week in the Indian Centre in Clifton Street. It was remarkable to discover the number of ethnic minorities who are now indigenous to Northern Ireland and who have been almost subsumed or buried underneath the Irish, the Ulster-Scots and the English heritage. This is another important area which has to be promoted. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure will specifically promote the language of ethnic minorities as well as Irish and Ulster-Scots. How they do this is a matter for the agencies and a matter for the body.

**Dr Birnie:** I want to ask the Minister two questions about the Ulster-Scots Agency. First, can he elaborate

on measures being put in place to promote that culture in broad terms, broader terms than simply the language, important though that might be? Secondly, can he comment on measures being put in place to promote liaison between the Ulster-Scots Agency and any relevant institutions outside of Northern Ireland, particularly and obviously in Scotland?

**Mr McGimpsey:** In terms of liaison with other groups it is very important to develop the link between the Ulster-Scots agency and its work in Scotland. It is a matter for the Ulster-Scots Agency to determine how they are going to do this. We have a mechanism through the British/Irish Council, as Dr Birnie is aware, which is a very important function of the British/Irish Council, allowing us to promote Ulster-Scots through that linkage. In terms of codifying the Ulster-Scots, the Scots have already done much work on this in Scotland for Lannans and also for Doric, and I think the Ulster-Scots are hoping to learn from their experience.

There is a discussion going on about whether they should base their codification on the experience in Scotland or whether they should be looking at how the language has developed in Northern Ireland historically. In terms of promoting the Ulster-Scots culture, that, as I said, is a matter for the Ulster-Scots Agency, and it has its corporate plan to bring forward. It is currently working hard on it, and I know that the chair of the Ulster-Scots Agency and the body itself are keenly aware of the potential of promoting the Ulster-Scots heritage and culture and see enormous advantages for all of our society, and, as a by-product of that, there is the economic potential. I cannot be more specific. We must await the corporate plan and the strategy, and when we get an opportunity, we will look at it and comment on it.

1.45 pm

**Mr McCarthy:** I welcome the cross-border meeting to discuss languages. I particularly welcome the statement made by the chairperson of the Language Body. She stressed the value of the body

“as a means of promoting greater respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to cultural and linguistic diversity.”

Nobody could disagree with that sentiment. I could not but notice that, in the report, the names of both the chairperson of the new body and the interim chief executive of the Irish Language Agency were printed in the Irish language. I am disappointed that the interim chief executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency did not have his name in the Ulster-Scots language. Why?

Will the Minister confirm that, as Mr Speaker suggested this morning, there is a real difficulty in finding people to translate the Ulster-Scots language? If that is the case, is the Minister confident that we are engaged in a real and genuine desire to resurrect or



promote a language or dialect that will benefit everyone, not only ourselves in Northern Ireland but all those throughout Ireland who are interested in languages?

**Mr McGimpsey:** Yes, there is a genuine attempt, and it is an attempt that I am confident will see major advances in the understanding of Ulster-Scots by all of us. I see that as a fulfilling exercise for a large section of the population. It is a serious operation. The organisations involved, such as the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Heritage Council, are dedicated to promoting the Ulster-Scots language and cultural heritage.

I agree with the Member that one would have expected to see Mr John Hegarty's name in Ulster-Scots. I assure the Member that that will be the case the next time I come before the House to make a report on Ulster-Scots. We are talking about equitable treatment. Whatever principle applies to Irish also holds for Ulster-Scots. I will ensure that that happens in the future.

**Mr Dallat:** I welcome the Minister's statement. Will the Minister assure the Assembly that the various broadcasting media in Northern Ireland will play a significant role in ensuring that they too are part of the equality agenda for the Irish language and that their performance will be monitored so that we will know how successful they are in targeting this aspect of social need?

**Mr McGimpsey:** The Member will be aware that broadcasting is a reserved matter. Specific provision has been made for Irish-language broadcasting. I expect that to be actioned. If it is not, I expect to hear about it. I am not clear on the exact monitoring mechanism, but I expect that the Irish Language Agency, for example, will be able to report on what happens in that important area.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** That concludes questions on the statement.

## **AGRICULTURE: NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL SECTORAL MEETING**

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Question Time starts at 2.30 pm; that leaves 45 minutes for the statement by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** I should like to report to the Assembly on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in sectoral format in Dublin on Monday 26 June 2000. Mr Dermot Nesbitt and I attended that meeting. The Government of the Republic of Ireland was represented by Mr Joe Walsh TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. This report has been approved by Mr Nesbitt and is also made on his behalf.

This was the first meeting of the council in its agriculture sectoral format and the areas of co-operation as presented to the plenary meeting on 13 December 1999 were agreed. The broad areas of co-operation are: common agricultural policy (CAP) issues; animal and plant health research and development; and rural development. Within these areas the council reviewed the high level of existing co-operation between the two Departments and discussed a range of matters for enhanced co-operation. The council recognised the important contribution already being made to the development of agriculture by the two Departments and endorsed a proposal that officials prepare a detailed programme for joint action for consideration at the next council meeting in sectoral format.

On specific issues, the council noted the difficulties in both the North and the South in implementing new area-based schemes for less favoured area payments. In seeking to secure European Commission approval, the Agriculture Departments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are working to minimise the risk of their new schemes producing big winners and big losers while at the same time ensuring that their schemes comply with EU regulations. Both Departments agreed to keep in touch regarding these difficulties and in their respective negotiations with the European Commission. On BSE the council noted my continuing efforts to achieve low BSE incidence status for Northern Ireland. In particular I welcomed the support of Minister Walsh and that of EU Commissioner Byrne.

The council also noted the activity which has taken place in the area of animal and plant health and research and development, and officials in the two Departments will now consider how continued activity might be formalised. For the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in its agriculture sectoral format, officials will produce a programme of work identifying

those areas with the greatest potential for enhanced co-operation, together with a timetable for further work.

The council received a progress report on the joint study of the pig meat processing capacity in Ireland commissioned by both Agriculture Departments in December 1999. The council acknowledged the very severe contraction in the pig industry, particularly in Northern Ireland and noted that the study, together with the views of the two Agriculture Departments, would be presented to the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting in its agriculture sectoral format. We also noted that there has been an improvement in the price of pigs in recent times, which is very welcome.

On the broader rural development front, the council agreed to reconstitute a steering committee on cross-border rural development. The terms of reference of this committee, together with the rules of procedure, were agreed. The committee, which was first established in 1991, comprises senior officials from both Departments. It will consider ways to promote maximum co-operation in the implementation of rural development and EU programmes. The committee will also exchange information on experience and best practice in both jurisdictions in relation to rural development. It will also continue to develop common approaches to cross-border area-based strategies and rural development research.

A detailed work programme will be drawn up, and the agreed proposals will be tabled for endorsement at the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in its agriculture sectoral format. The council agreed that it will meet on a quarterly basis in this format and that the next meeting will take place in October in Northern Ireland. The council also agreed the text of a joint communiqué, which was issued following the meeting. A copy of the communiqué has been placed in the Assembly Library.

**The Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley):** How much time was spent discussing the number of BSE cases in the Irish Republic? These seem to be increasing. The figures that I have before me are quite alarming. They show that in Northern Ireland there were six cases in 1998-99. I understand that so far this year there has been one case, whereas the numbers in the Irish Republic go into hundreds. Did the Minister take time with her colleague to discuss that matter? It seems strange that she is delighted that the Minister in the South is backing her case for low incidence BSE status for Northern Ireland, while at the same time there seems to be a rising tide of BSE cases in the Irish Republic.

**Ms Rodgers:** I thank the Member for his question. My main concern is to get low incidence BSE status for Northern Ireland. I am aware that the Northern Ireland figures are better than those in the Republic, and it is for

this reason that I am actively pursuing low incidence status for Northern Ireland. I did not discuss the situation in the Republic. I am pleased to inform the Member that, in relation to low incidence BSE status for Northern Ireland, I have the full support of the Minister for Agriculture, Joe Walsh, and that will be extremely important when our case reaches the stage of going before the member states.

**Mr McMenamin:** I thank the Minister for her report. Has the Minister any views on the development of a common approach to developing cross-border rural development strategies?

**Ms Rodgers:** I think that developing cross-border rural development strategies is extremely important, and they have been very beneficial to areas on both sides of the border. For example, in the integrated approach involving the Clogher Valley and Ballyhaise in Cavan, farmers on both sides have co-operated in improving their situation. One of the problems for such areas in the past has been that they have, in a sense, developed in a back-to-back approach, which has had a negative impact on areas on both sides. There is now the potential, within the developing cross-border rural development strategy, to allow those areas to work in an integrated basis using EU funds. This can be of real benefit to the rural communities on both sides of the border that have suffered from a back-to-back approach in the past. They can now work together on the basis of an integrated approach.

**Mr J Kelly:** Thank you, A LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. Can the Minister have any input to the question of planning in rural areas? Is there any way of alleviating the difficulties that the farming community is experiencing presently by, for example, trying to encourage planners not to be so restrictive in relation to planning where land has become almost obsolete and is the only form of income a farmer might have at present?

Also, while the rural development programme is important in the drive towards economic and social revitalisation of deprived rural areas throughout the North of Ireland, would she give consideration to ensuring that all sections of the rural community are involved in their own rural regeneration?

**Ms Rodgers:** I thank the Member for his two questions. I have no formal role in planning. That particular area is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, but I hope to work closely with it because I recognise that there are problems relating to planning, particularly for diversification in rural areas. I will work closely with the Department of the Environment, but I do not have a formal role in the development of the planning strategies.

2.00 pm

The second part of the Member's question concerned the involvement of rural communities. There has been quite a lot of welcome involvement by rural communities in the designing of their projects and in identifying their needs. Because rural communities know their needs better than anyone else, they are best placed to identify those needs. That has been going on with the help of officials. Local involvement is an integral part of the rural development programme, and I hope that the new rural development strategy continues to strengthen and encourage it.

**Mr Ford:** If the Minister permits, I will ask two questions. First, I welcome the reconstitution of the steering committee on rural development, but I note that the Minister's statement specifically says that it comprises senior officials from both jurisdictions. Is there any value in senior officials exchanging information if that information does not reach the ground where it might be of direct benefit? Can she explain how that will happen? I suspect that at times we have an information overload at senior level, yet sometimes the practical examples are not communicated to people working on the ground.

Secondly, the Minister referred earlier to the difficulties in implementing the new area-based schemes under the less favoured areas (LFA) proposals. Both jurisdictions are having difficulties getting those plans approved in Brussels. Can the Minister provide some more detail on when Northern Ireland farmers are likely to hear anything concrete on that? Unfortunately, to hear that we have problems with Brussels is not new; it would be much more beneficial if we could hear when those problems were likely to be resolved.

**Ms Rodgers:** I thank the Member for his two questions. I will try to oblige and be very patient. I hope that everyone is not going to ask me two questions together.

In response to the Member's first question about people at senior level, officials take on board the views of everyone when discussing these issues. In the rural development programme people are involved at all levels, and local people are particularly involved in local action groups, the INTERREG programme and community networks. Although senior officials are clearly the people who will be steering it along, as has been the case in the past, it will be in conjunction with rural communities and the people on the ground. Their views will be taken on board.

In relation to the LFA schemes, we are, as the Member is aware, currently revising our proposals. There will be further discussions with Brussels this month and after that there will be further consultation. The reality is that Brussels sent back the scheme that we

put forward for the less favoured areas, as it sent back the schemes put forward by other UK regions and the Government in the Republic of Ireland. Our scheme was aimed at minimising the numbers of losers and winners and had an environmental component based on area rather than on headage. I am afraid that, in conjunction with the less favoured area farmers, we did not quite succeed in getting what we wanted. It is difficult to say when the proposals will be ready, but I can tell the Member that we are working on them and that they will be ready as soon as possible.

**Mr Poots:** It comes as no surprise that Mr Walsh TD is fully backing our case for low incidence BSE status. If I were sitting with one hundred times the cases of BSE that another country had, I would be backing its arguments for low incidence BSE status. It will help his case significantly.

Since devolution, has the Minister at any point questioned the Irish Republic's Minister about BSE cases? Does she recognise that it will impinge upon Northern Ireland's case because cattle imported from the Irish Republic may contaminate livestock in Northern Ireland with BSE?

Also, has she raised the problem of the higher levels of tuberculosis and brucellosis in the Irish livestock herd compared to those in Northern Ireland's? Finally, will she outline the proposals which she has been making to Brussels regarding the area payments?

**Ms Rodgers:** I cannot remember how many questions I have had on that, but I will take the last first and then work my way back. The last one was about what proposals we are making in relation to LFA. I would need to have had a secretary beside me to keep track of all those questions — was it four? I am not sure. In relation to the LFA we are looking at putting forward new proposals which we hope to finalise very soon. We are looking at various areas, for instance, the idea of capping payments, raising the minimal acreage or hectareage for eligibility and at various proposals which will help us to ensure that the redistribution does not have a negative impact which it might otherwise have on our farmers. We want the redistribution to be as fair as possible and to have the minimum number of winners and the minimum number of losers. That is what we are working on. We are also looking at the situation of phasing in the changes over three years. We have not finalised our proposals yet, but those are the kind of areas that we are looking at. My priority is to ensure that the redistribution will not have a negative impact on those who most need help in the less favoured areas.

With regard to the low-incidence status, the Northern Ireland case is separate from that of the Republic of Ireland. Its position will not affect ours. Therefore, it is not necessary for me to raise the points that the Member mentioned. What we are looking for is low-incidence



status for Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland will, in that situation, be treated as a region of the United Kingdom with separate status from the other regions of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Our main priority is to ensure that we get that low-incidence status; that it will be based on the strong case that we know we have because of the fact that last year we had only six cases. That is my main priority. It is not necessary to raise anything relating to the Republic's incidence.

**Mr Dallat:** I am sure the Minister will agree that it is not in the interests of farmers, North or South to have fluctuations in BSE promoted by elected representatives at a time when there is a real chance of putting the problem in its true perspective, which, I understand, is that the scourge is minimal compared to other European countries. In relation to cross-border rural development, what has the steering committee achieved to date?

**Ms Rodgers:** Since 1991, when the steering group was set up, it has acted as a useful forum for exchanging information, for example, on the evaluation of European Union programmes, such as LEADER II. It has also encouraged LEADER transnational co-operation and has reconciled policy and practice on both sides of the border to facilitate progress on rural development initiatives, for example, exchange of guidelines on LEADER II. Reports on progress were presented to the Intergovernmental Conference.

**Mr Kane:** It would seem that the Minister is putting more emphasis on cross-border institutions, rather than taking the initiative in promoting rural development to its full potential in this Province which is her responsibility. It seems ludicrous for the Minister to be in discussions with the Minister of the Irish Republic in connection with areas of common interest at a time when no clear indication of policy on rural development has been made to the Assembly's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. When will the Minister be able to give us a clear indication of policy on rural development in this Province?

**Ms Rodgers:** The Member will understand that in this report I am dealing with the North/South Ministerial Council in its sectoral meeting, which is specifically dealing with North/South issues, and for that reason the emphasis has been on North/South co-operation in rural development and other areas.

In relation to rural development in Northern Ireland, I can assure the Member that, for me, that issue is a high priority. It is an area that is close to my heart. I recognise the need to provide support and economic regeneration for deprived rural areas in Northern Ireland, which, given the changes in agriculture and world markets, are under severe pressure.

I am extremely interested and concerned that the rural development side of my portfolio should be

progressed. My Department is at present working on a rural development strategy, and I am taking a keen personal interest. I hope that that strategy will be completed by the autumn of this year, and I can assure Mr Kane that as soon as it is available, I will make it available to the Committee. I will consult with the Committee and shall be interested to hear its views and have its comments. Perhaps I will take advice on where, or how, changes might be made.

**Mr M Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's report, and especially the references to the reconstruction of the steering committee on cross-border and rural development, promoting co-operation and the implementation of rural development. Does the Minister agree that it is about time that we had an agreed agricultural policy on the island?

**Ms Rodgers:** The Member will realise that as we are presently part of the United Kingdom we have to work within its framework. The United Kingdom is the member state; that is how Europe works, and we must work within the context of being a region of the United Kingdom.

That is not to say that we are not able to find common cause with the Irish Government on many areas within Europe, and a perfect example is our search for low-incidence BSE status. We have been guaranteed the full support of the Irish Government and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in the Irish Government, Joe Walsh TD, when we come to put our case to the member states. We want to co-operate strongly with them on such issues.

I recognise the Member's point about common agricultural interest, North and South, but we have to live in the real world, and, at the moment, we are working through the United Kingdom Government as a region of the United Kingdom.

**Mr Morrow:** I noted in the Minister's statement that she acknowledges the severe contraction in the pig industry, but is she aware of just how severe it is? Something like 60% of the pig industry has now disappeared. What steps is the Minister going to take to stop this trend? If we have to wait for another long period before there is an announcement or a statement from the Minister, the pig industry will have retracted further.

At the moment pig prices are such that there is no profit in Northern Ireland pig production, and that situation cannot continue. Is the Minister aware of that crisis, and will she assure this House that she will not wait for action by her counterparts across the border, whose position is less severe, but will take all the necessary steps to rejuvenate this sector of the agriculture industry?



**Ms Rodgers:** I thank the Member for his question. It is not related to my report, but I will attempt to deal with it as best I can. The Member will note that that is one of the first issues that I discussed at my first informal meeting with the Minister in the Republic as soon as I became Minister. The crisis in the pig industry was the main issue of discussion, and the Member will be glad to learn that at that meeting we decided to set up a joint study of processing capacity on the island in recognition of the processing capacity problem experienced at that time, particularly in the North.

2.15 pm

That study has been put in place, and we will hopefully receive a report on how it has been going at the next meeting in October. The study will cost approximately £100,000, and Northern Ireland will contribute 25% of the cost, which will be shared equally between the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Industrial Development Board. The Republic of Ireland will pay the rest. That was one clear benefit which accrued from our first meeting and which is ongoing in relation to helping the pig producers.

The Member will also be aware that help for the pig sector was put in place at the Prime Minister's summit in March. The pig scheme, which is actually being processed at the moment, is to help outgoers and those who wish to remain in the pig business. The outgoers scheme will be retrospective and will help those who have already left. Ongoers will be helped as regards interest payments. The Member will also be aware that one of the problems in the pig industry is oversupply.

In relation to the Member's point about the pig crisis, I was speaking only two hours ago to two young farmers, and they were confirming the price of pigs. About 10 days ago the price was about 89p per kilo and then it went to 93p per kilo. The price of 89p per kilo was just about the break-even point. Now the industry is barely in profit. I am not suggesting that that is in any way satisfactory — it is not at all — but it is at least some improvement on the position where they were losing all the time. I welcomed that as a sign of movement. However, it is a little chink of light on the horizon. The other matters I have referred to will also be put in place. I am keenly aware of the very difficult situation pig farmers have been in. I have pig farmers in my constituency, and I well know the problems they have been facing. I am doing all that I can to help them, within the constraints of the European regulations.

**Mr Douglas:** Bearing in mind that the Departments seem to know that there is a need for their agencies to work together and collaborate regarding animal health and plant health, and also bearing in mind that this morning £8 million was transferred to pay for cattle

taken off farms because of tuberculosis and brucellosis, are there any plans to seriously deal with this matter on a North/South basis? We seem to be going downhill rather than gaining. Maybe, in future, the £8 million could be better spent in other ways. There is a big problem. Will the Minister be dealing with that in the future?

**Ms Rodgers:** I have had some difficulty in hearing the question. Perhaps it is the acoustics in the Chamber.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please repeat the question more clearly for the Minister's hearing?

**Mr Douglas:** Basically, the question concerns plant health and animal health. Is the Minister working on a cross-border basis to see if anything can be done to reduce the instances of tuberculosis and brucellosis?

**Ms Rodgers:** I am sorry I could not hear the first time.

In Northern Ireland, policy reviews will be beginning in the autumn. We will take the Republic of Ireland's views on board. As the Member is aware from my report, there is ongoing and continuing co-operation between the scientists in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and those in the Republic. We will continue that co-operation because it is in our mutual interest, as we share the same land mass, that we should do all in our power to work together and pool our resources at various stages in order to deal with the scourge of brucellosis.

**Mr Hussey:** This is really a follow-on from the last question. The Minister will be well aware that the United Kingdom Government are perhaps more stringent and timely in implementing EU policies on animal health and welfare, sometimes to the disadvantage of our farmers who can be forced into capital expenditure that others have not entered into. What efforts are being made at cross-border level to bring farming in the Republic of Ireland up to Northern Ireland standards?

**Ms Rodgers:** This was not one of the areas that we discussed. It is not part of my report, so it is not something that I can answer at the moment. I am aware of the concerns of our farmers about the stringent health and welfare regulations. However, I cannot at the moment answer the question because the matter is not part of my report since it was not discussed.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** That concludes questions to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Standing Orders require that Question Time begin at 2.30 pm.

*The sitting was suspended at 2.21 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —*

## ASSEMBLY AFFAIRS

2.30 pm

**Mr Speaker:** I have several points to raise before moving to questions. First, during Question Time on Monday 26 June, Mr Derek Hussey asked me to review Hansard of 12 June, at pages 84-85, to determine whether the Minister had provided an answer to his question. I have read Hansard again, as well as the ruling that I gave immediately before Mr Hussey raised his point of order on 26 June. As I said then, it is very difficult for the Chair to rule on whether or not a question has been answered as clearly and as fully as possible. However, if the House is dissatisfied with a ministerial response, there is opportunity within the time allotted for supplementary questions to be pressed. On the question to which the Member referred, a number of other Members took up the cudgels on behalf of the Member's question — metaphorically — and pressed the matter further. That is the proper way for the Assembly to hold Ministers to account.

Secondly, on this morning's question from Mr Jim Shannon, further to the advice that I gave at the time, I can inform the House that, just as the Hansard sub-editors make spelling, grammatical and other changes to the speeches made in English, using standard English rules, and to those in Irish, using Ulster Irish as the standard, the same process is undertaken by the Ulster-Scots sub-editor of Hansard, using the Scots Language Society's list of spellings. I understand that there is currently no agreed Ulster-Scots list of spellings or grammar. Therefore the use by Hansard of the Scots Language Society's list seems reasonable in the current climate.

Thirdly, earlier today a number of Members raised the issue of questions being put to Ministers by other Ministers. The Deputy Speaker pointed out, quite rightly, that current Standing Orders do not prohibit any Member from putting questions to Ministers. The arrangements for the Executive in this Assembly are unique. Conventions observed in another place operate in the context of collective Cabinet responsibility. To date in the Assembly, there is no evidence of Ministers putting down questions for written or oral answer, although that would not be prohibited by Standing Orders. It should be welcomed that Ministers have chosen to follow that approach, and I hope that they will continue to do so.

The issue of questions to Ministers following statements arose this morning. Once again, Standing Orders are not directive. However, it seems to me that although a Minister, as Minister, should not use the

Chamber to question another Minister, he or she may do so as a private Member. Accordingly, this morning when I called Mr Dodds to put a question to the First and Deputy First Ministers, Members will have observed that I called him as Mr Dodds, and deliberately not as the Minister for Social Development. To emphasise the difference, I suggest that when Ministers wish to speak in a private Member capacity, whether in debate or during questions or statements, they should show that distinction by speaking from other than the Front Benches. I am aware that a number of Ministers already observe that convention, and I commend the practice to the House.

I also commend Mr Hussey, who, when raising his point of order, identified the Standing Order to which he was referring. That is also a practice that I commend to the House.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

#### BSE

2. **Mr Kieran McCarthy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to clarify the position in regard to negotiations regarding low BSE incidence status for Northern Ireland within the European Union. (AQO 380/99)

6. **Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in advancing Northern Ireland's case for low-incidence BSE status within the European Union. (AQO 386/99)

11. **Mr Kane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in achieving low BSE incidence status within the European Union. (AQO 382/99)

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** Mr Speaker, may we group questions 2, 6 and 11 together as they are essentially the same question?

**Mr Speaker:** Indeed they relate to the same matter, and I am quite content for the Minister to group the replies. I will, of course, take that into account when calling the supplementary questions.

**Ms Rodgers:** Making the case for Northern Ireland to be accepted as a BSE low incidence region is my highest priority. One of the first things I did when I resumed my position as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development was to have an early meeting with Nick Brown to make sure that he understood my desire to keep this matter moving. I also changed my Assembly business commitments on 19 June to allow me to travel to Luxembourg to meet personally with Commissioner Byrne. I have also met Joe Walsh to ensure that I could count on his support for the case when it comes to the negotiating stages in Brussels. I also raised the issue in the North/South Ministerial Council to ensure that that body was fully aware of the priority that I attach to the matter.

In relation to the current position, I had a very positive meeting with Commissioner Byrne in Luxembourg. He accepted the economic importance of the measure to the whole of the beef industry in Northern Ireland and reaffirmed his support for the case. There are still some technical details to be worked out, and my officials are working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and with the

Commission officials to resolve them. I hope that as a result of these discussions it will be possible to issue a consultation document on the case within the next few weeks, perhaps even within the next number of days. The response to the consultation will be vital in helping to shape the subsequent negotiations with the Commission.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for her reply and very much welcome the work that her Department has been doing so far. Does she believe that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in London is doing everything possible to advance the case for Northern Ireland ahead of possible developments in Scotland?

**Ms Rodgers:** Yes, I have to say that Nick Brown is fully behind our attempts to get low-incidence status and has been extremely supportive. I suppose you could say that Scotland is not as happy as it might be about it. In fairness to Ross Finnie, the Scottish Minister, he has been supportive of my efforts and has assured me of his support. I am quite happy that Nick Brown is fully behind me. He has been extremely helpful in every possible way.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Will the Minister consider bringing with her to Europe a delegation from the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU), farmers who originally thought up this policy of low-incidence BSE status? They would be on hand to advise her, her departmental officials and the UK representative during these important negotiations. Further to that, can she explain to the House the timetable that the Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have and are working to in order to achieve low-incidence BSE status for Northern Ireland?

**Ms Rodgers:** In relation to bringing a delegation from the UFU with me to Brussels, I have to inform the Member that I am very happy with the work that is being done by my Department. Its officials are treating this with the priority that I wish them to. They are working extremely hard on all fronts with officials from the commission. I have and will continue to consult with both the UFU and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association (NIAPA), both of whom are extremely anxious — and they have made it clear to me — that this be a priority for the farming community which both those organisations represent. I have consulted with them, and I will continue to do so. Of course, I have also consulted with the rest of the industry that has an interest in this rather complex issue.

In relation to the timetable, the answer to Mr Paisley's question is that I would like low-incidence status tomorrow morning, but this is a complex issue, and it is impossible to put a timescale on it.

I had hoped that it would have been possible to achieve it by the end of the year. Because of some

difficulties, I now understand that it may be a few months later. These arose due to concerns the commission had with putting the right controls in place and ensuring there would not be a back-door passage for British beef products through Northern Ireland into Europe. I am pleased to say that those have now been ironed out, and we are back on course. However, we are committed to a consultation period of 8 weeks.

Once the proposals go to the commission, which I hope will be days rather than weeks, it will then go out for simultaneous consultation with industry and the general public. That will last for eight weeks, which will bring us into September. At that stage we should be able to bring it to the member states to look at it. The Standing Veterinary Committee will have to look at it, and there will be inspections in Northern Ireland to verify that all the controls are in place and working. That is a complex process and cannot be done overnight. I share the Ulster Farmers' Union, the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association and the Members' concerns that we should get low-incidence status as soon as possible.

**Mr Kane:** Since we are aware that contracts state that major supermarkets and retailers must sell beef from Northern Ireland, what safeguards can the Minister put in place to protect existing trade between mainland United Kingdom and the Province?

**Ms Rodgers:** That is, as I have already mentioned, one of the considerations that we have had to deal with. We did consult with the whole industry, and the meat processors would have difficulty if carcass meat could not come across from England or Scotland. We have looked at that.

My officials are working on proposals to ensure that trade will not be disrupted and that established trade links can continue with maximum economic benefit for the industry as a whole. Those are the proposals that are being worked on at the moment.

**The Chairman of the Agriculture Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley):** Does the Minister find it strange that countries with increasing incidences of BSE are sitting in condemnation of Northern Ireland's case? For instance, Portugal's BSE cases rose last year to 330, the Irish Republic's to 410, while here there were six cases last year and one this year. Surely it is unfair that countries with a rising BSE crisis are sitting on their hands and holding back when we, according to the Minister's statement in the House today, have to wait until next spring before we have an answer.

**Ms Rodgers:** I share the Member's frustration, as does the farming community in Northern Ireland, at the situation in which we find ourselves. However, the reason we find ourselves in this position is that we were treated as a part of the United Kingdom, which had a

high incidence of BSE, when we had a very low incidence.

In my view we should never have been in the situation we are now. The reason we are is that we were linked to the high incidence in the United Kingdom. I am responsible for Northern Ireland low-incidence status. I am doing my best. It is not my responsibility to look at other countries. I understand the frustrations, but it is in our interest to get the support of the member states in moving our case forward. I do not think it would help our case if I were to start criticising the other member states when, in fact, we will be looking for their strong support in the next part of the process.

**Mr Leslie:** Will the Minister advise the House whether the £500,000 to be given to the beef industry to help promote itself under the agenda for government will be contingent on achievement of low-incidence BSE status, or whether, in her view, the spending of that money should be held back until the outcome of the application has been decided?

2.45 pm

**Ms Rodgers:** The £500,000 which has been set aside will be ring-fenced to deal with the resource implications of getting low incidence BSE. This achievement of low incidence BSE will create the framework for our beef industry to commence exports on a meaningful scale. Much work has to be done with previous and potential customers by individual companies and the Livestock and Meat Commission, but additional costs will be inevitable if we are to build up exports quickly. These will include costs associated with additional testing to demonstrate our low level of BSE and the achievement of internationally recognised accreditation of our quality assurance scheme. We want the industry to suggest how the £500,000 can best be spent. The reason that I have applied for that in this round of funding is that I want us to be ready so that as soon as we get low incidence BSE the resources are there to enable us to start building up our exports immediately.

### Less-Favoured Areas

3. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why a specific environmental tier open to all farmers has not been included in the revised proposals for a new less-favoured area scheme in order to help to mitigate the disruptive effects of these proposals. (AQO 381/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** I am committed to consulting with all relevant parties from my Department on the proposals. When the Department consulted the industry and other interested bodies the weight of opinion was against introducing additional environmental conditions over and above those consistent with the operation of good



agricultural practice. There was concern that additional conditions would create additional costs which would not be recouped by the farmers. The Department is still considering the detail of a revised less-favoured area support scheme to resubmit to the commission.

**Mr Neeson:** I thank the Minister for her answer, but I find it somewhat disappointing. Will she accept that there is great concern over the protection of the natural environment in rural areas and that increasing grants to farmers for environmental purposes can help to maintain the viability of family farms, protect the environment and promote economic development through green tourism?

**Ms Rodgers:** I agree with the Member that increasing funds to farmers for environmental purposes will help the farmers and will help bring resources into the farming community. I will have funds available for modulation and, I hope, environmental schemes. The LFA scheme does have an environmental aspect to it, although it is not an environmental scheme per se, but it will have environmental conditions attached. It will not be permissible to remove hedgerows without consent, and there will be penalties if they are removed, and so on. I will be looking for further funding for environmentally sensitive areas (ESA) schemes and the country management scheme.

**Mr Fee:** May I ask the Minister if she is aware of the serious problems being faced by many of the organisations involved in protecting the community under the various area-based strategy and leader projects funded by European moneys? They are deeply concerned that their financial streams are due to end by the end of this year and that there has been no agreement on any funding under the next round. What steps can the Minister take to ensure that the enormous amount of good work going on in terms of job creation, farm diversification and environmental protection will continue until we get the new streams of funding in place?

**Ms Rodgers:** I am very much aware of the difficulties being created by the hiatus between one tranche of funding and the next. I have similar problems in my constituency, and I am not aware that there are any resources available which I can use to ease the passage for people who are finding it difficult at the moment. I will look at this to see if there is any possibility of achieving some funding, but I cannot make any promises when I do not know whether funds are available. I do fully understand the problems, and when the next schemes come I hope that we will be able to move as quickly as possible to alleviate the situation.

## Greenmount College of Agriculture

4. **Mr McClelland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm the number of student entrants and graduates at Greenmount College for 1998 and 1999. (AQO 365/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** In 1998 and 1999 there were the following numbers of graduates and new entrants at Greenmount College of Agriculture and Horticulture. There were 350 graduates in June 1998. In September 1998 there were 346 new entrants. There were 318 graduates in June 1999. In September 1999 there were 428 new entrants.

**Mr Kane:** Will the Minister consider financial assistance for existing and new auction marts as part of rural development, taking into account the possibility of low incidence BSE status and the subsequent export of live cattle?

**Mr Speaker:** I am puzzled by the connection between that and the question. Unless the Member can clarify the link, I will have to rule him out of order and proceed to the next question. The Minister thinks it was a good try, but not quite relevant.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** Does the Minister accept that there is a lack of confidence in the farming community as a result of the constant crises that have been endured by many farmers, whether they be pig farmers, beef farmers, sheep farmers or milk farmers? Do the numbers entering Greenmount College not show that there is great concern in the farming community? It is vital that we ensure that the numbers of students and graduates from that college increase. That can only happen with the impetus of financial assistance from the Minister's Department.

**Ms Rodgers:** I am aware of the concern in the farming community. Even people who are not involved in agriculture are aware of the difficulties that farmers face, although I am hoping that there will now be an upturn.

There has been an increase in enrolments in 1998-99. That was due to the introduction of new courses to meet industry demand and the addition of flexible courses. Again, that was an attempt to meet the needs of the farming community. If there is more flexibility that allows students to study at a rate that suits their requirements, clearly that will help them.

The new programme with the biggest impact on enrolments was the pilot multiskilling programme, through which young people can achieve an NVQ level 3 qualification in agriculture in parallel with an NVQ level 3 qualification in another discipline. This prepares them to seek employment at the farm at home and also on a part-time basis. We are trying to be flexible, to look

at the needs of the farming community and to provide the courses which suit them in a situation where there will have to be off-farm work and diversification. We need times that suit them.

### Beef: EU Labelling

5. **Dr Birnie** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the current position in regard to the implementation of European Union beef labelling requirements; and if she will make a statement. (AQO 389/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** Agreement on general rules on beef labelling was reached at the April meeting of the EU Council of Agriculture Ministers. From September 2000, all cuts of beef will have to be labelled with the country of slaughter, the country of cutting, the category of animal and a reference code that will allow the beef to be traced back to the animal or group of animals from which it is derived. In the case of mince, the country of processing will also have to be shown.

From 1 January 2002, additional details will have to be included covering the country of birth and the country of rearing. These general rules now have to be considered by the European Parliament. The environment committee of that Parliament is to vote on the labelling rules this week. The European Commission has also brought forward to the beef management committee draft detailed rules to give effect to the agreement reached by the Council of Ministers.

I am fully aware of the industry's concerns on this issue, particularly on the category of animal requirement. I have discussed the issue with Mr Brown and other regional agriculture ministers. We are agreed on the need to ensure that the final labelling system does not present significant practical or cost problems.

The MEPs have been briefed, and the industry's concerns have been raised in discussions with the beef management committee. I have personally raised this issue with John Hume. He is fully aware of the difficulties created by the current beef-labelling proposals, and he has assured me that he will do what he can to gain whatever easement possible through the European Parliament. Dr Ian Paisley and Mr Jim Nicholson are also aware of the difficulties and will do what they can to help in the European Parliament. I have also raised this issue with both Nick Brown and Commissioner Byrne.

**Dr Birnie:** Does the Minister agree that it would be advantageous to the local beef farming industry to have a strong system of labelling for Northern Ireland produce? I appreciate that as a regional Minister in the European Union, she may be operating under certain constraints, but I stress that — if Members will pardon

the pun — she should not be cowed by the heavy weight of EU regulation.

**Ms Rodgers:** Accepting the pun, I have no intention of being cowed. The reality is that I have to work within the regulations agreed by the European Council. In relation to beef labelling, what I am doing, with the help of my other ministerial colleagues is trying to ensure that the implementation will provide easement in the labelling problem. Incidentally my colleague Joe Walsh in the South has had similar problems to us. I fully agree that the current situation will have cost implications for our processors and for our industry.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** Does the Minister accept that there is tremendous anger and frustration in the farming community? A great deal of foreign meat is flooding into Northern Ireland, and it is not up to the welfare standard that we have in the Province. However, because of a labelling difficulty, many believe that — with a sleight of hand — this meat has been produced in Northern Ireland. We have to make the system very clear and very definite. We produce the best meat in the world.

**Ms Rodgers:** I understand the frustrations. I fully agree that our pig meat, in particular, is ahead of pig meats in other countries, although I have to be careful about what I say. Within the European Union we cannot prevent pig meat from member countries from coming in to Northern Ireland. What we can do — and we have put £400,000 into this — is to assist our farmers in marketing Northern Ireland pig meat and hope that people will recognise the point the Member made; that our pig meat and our other meats are better. The pig farmers are assisted by the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) and money has also been provided through Red Meat Marketing. We are doing all we can within the regulations to assist our farmers in the marketing of their beef and meat products.

**Mr Speaker:** Given the time that was taken up in responding to points of order at the beginning, we will take more time to complete a full 30 minutes on questions to the Minister.

### Cereal Growers

7. **Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to assist Northern Ireland cereal growers by seeking to obtain a single United Kingdom yield region for all crops excluding maize.

(AQO 392/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** Agriculture Ministers are currently reviewing these arrangements. The existing approach seems unfair to specialist cereal growers who consider that, on an individual crop basis, their yields are on a par with similar producers in England. However, due to the current method of calculating payments, they

receive lower direct subsidies. Scottish producers have also felt aggrieved by the regime. Ross Finnie, the Scottish Minister, and I have both written to Nick Brown seeking his co-operation in securing change.

If our plans are successful the Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh producers would receive higher payments than they do at present. This can be achieved only at the expense of producers in England. However, given that English producers would receive only a small percentage reduction, while those in Scotland and Northern Ireland would achieve a large percentage increase if the system were changed, I will continue to press the case.

It must be recognised, however, that there is nothing in this proposition for English producers, and resolution of the problem will be difficult unless, and until, farming organisations across the United Kingdom can agree a solution acceptable to them.

3.00 pm

**Mrs Carson:** I thank the Minister for her reply. With the exceptionally wet weather over the past two years and the poor growing season at the beginning of this year, the current growing season has been particularly poor. Does Minister agree that cereal growing in Northern Ireland needs some form of additional revenue as a boost for the farmers?

**Ms Rodgers:** I agree, but I have to work within budgetary constraints and the constraints of EU regulations. That is the reality. I realise that I am beginning to sound like a parrot. Unfortunately, when one is in politics one has to deal with the reality and not just the aspiration. I agree with the Member, I am pressing the case very hard, and I have the support of Ross Finnie. The National Farmers' Union in England has set its face against any change in the system that would give higher payments to our cereal growers. I think that the increase would be 10% to 14%. That is the reality, and I will continue to press the case.

**Mr McMennamin:** What would the effect be on payments if there were a single UK yield region for all crops, excluding maize?

**Ms Rodgers:** I thank the Member for his question. It would be next year before any changes to the regionalisation plan could take effect. However, if the current proposals for a change to the plan were to be agreed at both UK and EU levels then, on the assumption of the average areas claim for 1997 to 1999, and the 1999 Euro to sterling exchange rate, all UK producers growing crops other than maize would receive a payment of £236.52 per hectare. This would mean an increase of some 14% and 10% in Northern Ireland less favoured area and non-less favoured area payments respectively. English payments would be

reduced by around £3 per hectare, which would represent a 1% reduction.

**Mr Speaker:** Question 8, in the name of Mr McHugh, has been withdrawn.

## Agri-Environment Schemes

9. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps have been taken to increase grants to farmers under existing or new agri-environment schemes. (AQO 374/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The agri-environment schemes will be supported from existing baselines plus funds raised from modulation. While existing budget baselines are sufficient to support the continuation of the environmentally sensitive areas schemes, meaningful development of the organic farming scheme and the countryside management scheme depends in large measure on the additional funds delivered by modulation. It is anticipated in the rural development regulation plan, submitted to Brussels on 1 February 2000, that, by 2006, the organic farming scheme will grow from its present level of 20 farmers with 1000 hectares under agreement, to 1000 farmers with 30,000 hectares.

The countryside management scheme, which will have its first entrants accepted later this year, will have 4,000 participant farmers with 150,000 hectares under agreement. I will also be seeking additional funds for the agri-environment schemes in the 2000 spending review.

**Mrs E Bell:** I thank the Minister for her very encouraging answer. However, I am concerned about farmers who are in financial crisis. Does the Minister accept that a major expansion of the countryside management scheme, when it comes in, is needed to help such farmers to enhance the rural environment while improving their own financial situation? Does she also accept the need for an improvement to the organic farming scheme to help local farmers supply this growing market?

**Ms Rodgers:** The Member will recognise that I outlined my views on the organic farming scheme and the countryside management scheme in my response. I will be seeking additional funds for agri-environmental schemes in the 2000 spending review. I accept the need for further resources to go into those schemes and I will be pressing for funding.

I will be depending on my Colleague Mr Durkan and on the British Treasury. I will be doing my best, and I understand the Member's concerns.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** Does the Minister not accept that there is concern that the new agri-environmental schemes may be funnelled through community groups and not actually get to the farmers?



The farmers need assistance. They need to be brought fully on board, and the money must go directly into their hands.

**Ms Rodgers:** The agri-environmental schemes are aimed at helping farmers to improve the environment and to improve their farm management. In that sense many of the environmental schemes do benefit farmers directly. They help the rural community. It is not helpful to try to set one section of the rural community against the other, because some in the farming communities will find that they cannot make a full-time living from farming and will go into diversification schemes. That will help farming families. The environmental schemes are designed to support those who are active farmers, full-time farmers and those who can no longer earn an adequate income from farming and want to diversify. They will also help families who find that their farm can no longer support more than one person.

**Mr Speaker:** The time for these questions is up.

## CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

**Mr Speaker:** Question 2, in the name of Mr Eddie McGrady, and Question 10, in the name of Mrs Mary Nelis, have been withdrawn.

### Ulster-Scots Language

1. **Dr Adamson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what strategy he has to implement Part II status for the Ulster-Scots language under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages; when this strategy will be implemented; and what consultation is planned. (AQO 373/99)

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey):** The strategy for implementing Part II for Ulster-Scots will be developed in the light of research and consultation and will take into account available resources. I am currently awaiting a corporate strategy and business plan which the Ulster-Scots Agency of the North/South Language Body is preparing and which the North/South Ministerial Council will consider in the autumn. The Ulster-Scots Agency's plans should cover the general principles and objectives of promoting Ullans and will form part of the Department's strategy for promoting Part II.

We also look forward to the findings of the research which the Department has commissioned and will be complete by April 2001. We are seeking expert advice from sociolinguists and other relevant academics, and we will listen to the views of the North/South Language Body, the Ulster-Scots Agency, Ulster-Scots activists, representative organisations and the general public.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair)*

**Dr Adamson:** Considering the recent joint statement by the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland at Hillsborough, and its commitment to produce an action plan for implementing Part III status for the Irish language under the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages, can the Minister define what is meant by the term "Irish language"? Is he aware that the term "Irish language" can be used to refer to several forms of Gaelic and that the language used by some Members of the Assembly, defined as the Munster-Connaught variety, is actually being used for nationalistic purposes?

Does he not agree that the definitive variety of Ulster Gaelic, as spoken by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, should be promoted? It is that variety of the Irish language that is of most immediate concern to the people of Northern Ireland and Donegal, having characteristics as closely affiliated to the Gaelic of the Island of Islay in the Western Isles as to that of Munster and Connaught.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I am sure that Dr Adamson is better informed about this than I am. One of the things I made a point of informing myself about when I became Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure was the different Irish dialects. I am aware that the Gaelic languages were brought to the British Isles by Celtic peoples.

My understanding is that Irish is the form of the Gaelic language that has traditionally been spoken throughout the island of Ireland for several thousand years. It has gone through a series of developments and changes as you would expect.

A form of Gaelic is also found in the Isle of Man, and the language was also taken across from Ireland to Scotland. The language in Ireland was given a standardised updated format in the 1940s and the 1950s. I think that is what the Member was referring to as de Valéra Gaelic in one of his other comments. Any regional variations found in Ulster and the other Provinces relate largely to syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation.

All forms of Irish, as I understand it, are mutually intelligible. Not all forms of Gaelic are mutually intelligible. Gaelic is divided into Manx, Scots Gallic and Irish. Irish is divided into four dialects, rather than any other Celtic language, such as Welsh, Breton or Cornish. So the forms of Irish spoken and taught in Northern Ireland are usually based on the Ulster dialect. The Good Friday Agreement calls for tolerance, respect and understanding for linguistic diversity. This should extend to an appreciation of the richness of local forms of Irish and an awareness of the close links with the various forms of Gaelic spoken elsewhere.



### Museums: Maritime Heritage

3. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps will be taken to ensure that the development and promotion of Northern Ireland's maritime heritage will form an important element of the future development of museums. (AQO 376/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** The first corporate plan of the Museums and Art Galleries for Northern Ireland (MAGNI) fully recognises the importance of maritime history and heritage in Northern Ireland and identifies this as a major theme for future development. I am fully behind MAGNI's proposal to provide a maritime museum to tell the story of our long and rich maritime history. Northern Ireland is famous worldwide for its historic role in the development of iron and steel shipbuilding technology. The mere mention of the Titanic, the world's most famous ship, evokes strong images of the shipbuilding industry from days gone by. It would be inexcusable not to capitalise on the economic and educational potential of this country's maritime heritage and invest in the development of cultural tourism.

**Mr Ford:** I welcome that very positive and helpful response from the Minister. It was, however, somewhat unspecific. The need for a maritime museum was identified as far back as the Wilson review. While I welcome his statement in principle, I wonder if it would be possible for his Department to give us a timescale for the recognition of the maritime heritage of which he spoke. Our maritime heritage is, of course, about more than shipbuilding in Belfast. The role of Northern Ireland's ports in Atlantic crossings to the United States and Canada is also a part of it. Can the Minister perhaps be a little more specific and give us a timescale for progress?

**Mr McGimpsey:** In terms of specifics, because of the costs of a maritime museum we would also expect to incorporate aviation and industry into it. We have to remember that Belfast, in the early years of this century, was at the absolute technological cutting edge of shipbuilding and aviation. So there are two stories. In fact there is also a third story and that is of the industry that was in Belfast, and I am thinking of the Ropeworks, for example — the largest ropeworks in the world. Of the people who worked there and understand the old traditional methods very few are left. This is a story that needs to be told, and there is an urgency here. We also had a very important ceramic and glass industry around that time.

The idea is to incorporate them all together into that type of museum. Mr Ford rightly referred also to the immigrants, and it will tell that story as well. We estimate that it will cost around £30 million. I cannot be definite until I have worked out how we will address

that funding need, and clearly we will have to be imaginative and creative in that. I cannot simply walk in here and say "Please may I have £30 million?" — I know what the answer will be.

We have to work out the concept and the feasibility before we can address the revenue consequences. How we will find the money is something that we are working on urgently, not least because of the important rich resources which are our industrial, shipbuilding and aviation heritage. There is added urgency because the workforces from these industries who applied the traditional methods have largely, through the fullness of time, passed away, and it is important that their experiences are incorporated in the development.

3.15 pm

**Mr McFarland:** The Minister will be aware that there are outstanding maritime exhibits at the Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra, Bangor Heritage Centre, and at the Sir Samuel Kelly lifeboat at Donaghadee. The area, together with Cork and New York, is part of the Titanic trail. Will the Minister confirm that North Down must be a serious contender for any future maritime museum?

**Mr McGimpsey:** Without being flippant, I would say that I am not aware of the history of the Bangor shipyards. However, I can say that no definitive location has been agreed yet, although it seems that the obvious, logical location for a maritime museum would be the Abercorn basin in the Queens Island area of Belfast. That is where shipbuilding essentially began.

Workman and Clark, on one side of Clarendon Dock, and Harland and Wolff, began at the Abercorn basin. The Odyssey complex is next door, and one will feed off the other. As part of the Odyssey complex there will be a W5 science centre, which is coming forward and being developed at the moment. I see a symbiotic relationship developing there.

It is also a fact that we not only have simply a shipbuilding story. One of the features of Harland and Wolff's working practices was that when the ships got bigger, they abandoned the old dry docks and slipways and built new ones. What we now have is probably the best example anywhere in the world of how graving docks, dry docks and slipways developed. So we have a big story in terms of the physical features extant there, never mind the development that we would be looking at in terms of a maritime museum.

### Motorcycle Road Racing

4. **Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what resources will be committed to

the development and promotion of motorcycle road racing in each of the years 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03.

(AQO 370/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** The Sports Council for Northern Ireland has statutory responsibility for the distribution of grants including lottery grants to sports bodies in the Province. The Motorcycle Union of Ireland (MCUI) is the governing body for the sport of road and short circuit motor cycling racing. To date, the following sums have been allocated for road/short circuit racing. The MCUI has received a grant of £1,250 this year for ongoing running costs. Under the Sports Lottery "Talented Athlete Scheme" an award of £27,000 has been agreed for Adrian Coates for the period from January 2000 to December 2001. A bid of £5,000 for the Sunflower Trophy was unsuccessful on the grounds that that particular event received funding for each of the three previous years.

I am not aware of other funding bids for the MCUI for the years in question. The Sports Council is currently developing a new challenge-based development plan scheme. From 2001, each governing body will be competing with each other for funding in line with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland priorities. Therefore it is not possible to confirm resource commitment for motorcycling for the period 2001 to 2003 at this stage.

Motorcycle racing is one of the most exciting and popular sports in Northern Ireland with a worldwide reputation. It is somewhat poignant that we are talking about this particular topic today of all days. I would encourage the MCUI to avail of every opportunity to secure funding for its sport.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Given the tragic loss to motorcycle sport, and indeed to the world of motorcycle racing at the weekend, I am sure the Minister will agree that road racing in Northern Ireland will possibly never be the same again. Can he confirm that road racing brings thousands of tourists and indeed millions of pounds of revenue to Northern Ireland? Those millions of pounds are largely lost in the promotion of the sport and in enhancing the safety of the sport. Can he tell us what he is going to do, or what his Department will be able to do, in order to rectify that balance? Would he be prepared to seriously consider the development of an international motorcycle circuit, or indeed, a formula one Grand Prix racing circuit, which would bring more tourists and more revenue to Northern Ireland. That would enable people to perform these exhilarating yet dangerous sports under safe conditions and in a way in which Government revenue could be used directly for the promotion of these exciting sports?

**Mr McGimpsey:** The question of a national racing circuit for the Province is one that has been under consideration for the last 18 months, and it is Ballymena

District Council's original motion for the establishment of a company or trust to undertake a feasibility study into the development of a national racing circuit. I know that that was circulated among Members of the Assembly as well as other local councils, and many Members, including myself, have signed in support of the concept of the motion.

Any proposal for the development of the sport rests with the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland, the governing body, and the matter would then be considered by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, which has the statutory responsibility for the development of sport in the Province, including assistance to bodies involved in providing facilities. To date no development proposals have been placed before the sports council or my Department. I am not aware of where the proposal sits with the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland or how far it has taken the concept articulated by Ballymena District Council. I concur with Mr Paisley Jnr in saying that we share the concerns over the fatalities that occur in road racing, and, given the nature of the sport, there is always the underlying risk of serious injury. Whilst I cannot pre-empt what the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland is going to say or propose, I will certainly be listening to its views and proposals very sympathetically, and I know that any applications that it takes forward to the sports council will be similarly viewed. It is a fact that there are fewer fatalities in short-circuit racing. Motorcycle road racing is an extremely dangerous sport. It is also a completely different type of motorcycle racing, and that is where the argument and the debate has been — how closely allied they are, and would road-racers be prepared to go on the short circuits. That, again, is a matter for the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland.

**Mr McClarty:** Does the Minister agree that the one sporting event which takes place in Northern Ireland every year that attracts the largest number of spectators is the North-West 200? On the day of the race over 100,000 people from all over, not only the United Kingdom but much further afield, attend. Does the Minister agree that the sport is very much underfunded and dependent on a large body of volunteer workers to make it possible?

**Mr McGimpsey:** I agree with Mr McClarty. Having gone to the North-West 200 for a number of years, I know from personal experience that it is truly an amazing spectacle. The excitement and the skill employed, not least, of course, by Joey Dunlop is something that everyone should see, at least once. The North-West 200 is seriously underfunded and relies almost entirely on volunteers to make it work, and if it were not for their working free of charge, it would not work. I would encourage the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland to take applications forward to the sports council. The sports council can provide funding under a development scheme, under a talented athlete scheme

and under a major home-events funding. Up until now £1,250 a year was made available which was recurrent funding, paid automatically without application, but the situation is changing, and in future, applications will have to be made under a development scheme. That would be a good discipline for all the organisations. The talented athlete lottery funding is also available, and I have referred to funding for Adrian Coates. There is also the major home-events funding, and the North-West 200 is as major a home event as you can get. I am not aware, certainly in the recent past, of any applications that have come from the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland. I am not saying that these things will be automatic, but I would have thought that the North-West 200 meets a number of criteria.

We must remember that it is a road race. An effort must be made to make the circuit safer, something which to a large extent can be done at no great cost — changing upright kerbs to drop kerbs, moving concrete lamp standards away from the circuit, taking away walls and fences or changing them so that when a rider comes off a bike and slides, he does not impact into an object and get severely hurt. That is the way forward for the North-West 200, which, if it can be made safe, will be the greatest motorcycling race anyone will see in Europe.

### Football: Sectarianism

5. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans there are to introduce legislation to combat sectarianism in association football.

(AQO 375/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** As I informed the Assembly in February in response to a similar question from the Member, proposals for the introduction of legislation bringing safety at sports grounds in Northern Ireland into line with Great Britain are under consideration. Such legislation would include the creation of offences relating to unruly, indecent or sectarian behaviour and would seek to deter unacceptable and disruptive behaviour among those attending sporting events. I am aware that the introduction of legislation will take some time. I have therefore arranged to meet the Sports Council and the Irish Football Association (IFA) on 7 July 2000 to take stock of measures which might be taken in advance of any legislation. Discussions have been ongoing since February, and I shall be happy to write to the Member regarding the outcome of that meeting.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for his response. The question was indeed raised earlier in the year, but the efforts already being made by many football clubs in Northern Ireland and officials to combat sectarianism and racism in all their forms must be welcomed. I was delighted to hear a radio programme this morning where

a Member of the Scottish Parliament paid tribute to the good behaviour of both Irish and Scottish soccer fans. That is the good image and reputation about which we wish to hear. Does the Minister agree that the plight in which probably all our football clubs find themselves regarding viability stems from a long period of sectarian chanting and an unwelcome atmosphere in grounds which kept genuine fans from supporting their clubs? The sooner the legislation is in place, the better for both clubs and supporters.

**Mr McGimpsey:** The Member's comment and question were wide-ranging. The Department and I recognise the plight soccer is in and that most of Northern Ireland's stadia have seen no investment for decades, with the result that they lack basic health-and-safety measures. That was why, in January, I announced an initial scheme drawing on £800,000 from the Football Trust, plus a further £300,000 per annum from the Sports Council for two, or, it is to be hoped, three years. Last week we were able to announce a further increase of £2 million to that interim scheme. The £2 million will go forward and, whilst football will be a beneficiary, I should emphasise that Gaelic games and rugby will also be entitled to apply and benefit.

The moneys will go forward divided into roughly £750,000 for major works, £1 million for urgent first-aid work and £250,000 for safety management, which includes stewarding and training for those involved in crowd control.

As a condition for the grant under the interim scheme, clubs will be required to put in place a child protection policy approved by the Sports Council and formulate an equity statement. The equity statement will highlight practical measures to address family, disability and sectarian issues. As I have said, part of the moneys will be available for stewarding and training and for safety management, and this will also help address sectarian behaviour among spectators.

3.30 pm

The Taylor Report, which came in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster, initiated these measures. Taylor said that, if people were treated like animals, they would behave like animals. Football crowds are fenced in behind cages, and some of the grounds look like a throwback to Bellevue zoo before it was redeveloped. Work needs to be done on the development of football generally, not just senior football, but junior and schoolboy soccer. It must all come together as a package. I shall be aiming at a holistic view in the future. When the money on football grounds was spent in England, Scotland and Wales there was a 60% to 70% increase at the gate, and an increase of 26% in the number of women attending football matches. If there were such a response in Northern Ireland, it would be wonderful, not only for the game, but for all of us.



**Mr B Hutchinson:** First, will the Minister say how many times the RUC has been involved in taking football hooligans out of Irish league grounds this season in reaction to sectarian violence?. I do not know of any, but perhaps the Minister can answer that question. Secondly, is the Minister aware that, clubs such as Linfield and Glentoran have introduced schemes to try to deal with the problem? Linfield Football Club has introduced a scheme, based at Dundalk, aimed at tackling the issue. Does the Minister also agree that all the media attention on sectarianism is not at Irish league matches but at international matches played at Windsor Park? One of the problems is that the media objects to people singing 'God Save the Queen'. During Euro 2000, we heard it more than once from England fans, and no one in the media said then that it was sectarian.

**Mr McGimpsey:** My response to the problem is a scheme to highlight family, disability and sectarian issues. That is for all sports — not just for football or local sports, but for international events as well. I am aware that there are schemes run by football clubs such as Glentoran and Linfield. I understand that Crusaders Football Club is attempting to address the issue as well.

I do not know how many people have been thrown out of football grounds by the RUC because of sectarian issues. Indeed, I do not know how many people have been thrown out of football grounds for any reason, but judging from the size of the gate of some clubs, it would surprise me if the number was large. Football is not drawing large numbers. That is the problem that it must address. Whether it is a real problem or one of perception, it must be addressed for the health of the game. As for singing 'God Save the Queen', at international games, Mr Hutchinson will be aware that there is more than 'God Save the Queen' sung at Windsor Park. The Irish Football Association (IFA) and the Sports Council are considering that issue seriously, and I shall know more about their views when I meet them on 7 July. We want football grounds where everyone feels comfortable.

**Mr Hussey:** I was rather concerned at the wording of the original question, which refers to sectarianism in association with football. The matter needs to be clarified, as Mr Hutchinson has tried to do. Clubs are working very hard on this issue, and we may be talking about something that is perhaps peripheral. Will the Minister say whether legislation could be introduced to cover the sport of Gaelic association football? It is guilty of sectarianism with its exclusion clause, disallowing certain people from participating in the sport.

**Mr McElduff:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is not relevant to the subject that we are discussing.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry, Mr McElduff. You cannot have a point of order during Question Time.

**Mr McGimpsey:** On Mr Hussey's question, I shall take the first part referring to measures to be taken. I repeat that the matter is not simply about association football. Legislation currently operates in the rest of the kingdom which creates three offences of disorderly behaviour: throwing an object either at the pitch or a spectator without lawful authority; taking part in indecent or racist chanting; and going on to the pitch without lawful authority. There is a recognition here that it is much more than just singing. Also it amends it so that taking part in racist or indecent chanting, whether alone or in concert with others, is an offence. That is the type of legislation in the rest of the kingdom, and the type of legislation that the IFA and the Sports Council are considering.

Rule 21 in Gaelic bans members of the security forces from the GAA. It dates back to 1887 and, apart from a 10-year lapse from 1893 to 1902, has been there ever since. I would welcome the ending of Rule 21 — it is wrong that it exists. Again that is not a matter for me; it is for the Gaelic authorities. Their position has been softening in recent times, and they are reviewing the ban. Certainly the general belief is that Rule 21 will go sooner rather than later, and I would welcome that.

**Mr McMenamin:** I have been a supporter of Derry City Football Club for the last 30 to 40 years. The RUC do not patrol within the football ground. The club's own stewards do it. Both sets of supporters mix together, and there is no segregation at any time, regardless of who is playing. That may be the way forward.

My question is in relation to the Minister's recent announcement of £2 million for upgrading sports grounds. Will this grant apply to smaller grounds? If so, when will the grant become available?

**Mr McGimpsey:** We would expect the £2 million to be released and spent over the next 12 months. I am very anxious that spectators will see an appreciative difference sooner rather than later. And it is not just a promise; they will be able to see it in the grounds quickly. With regard to targeting of football clubs, 10 premier and 10 first division clubs will be targeted as well as six county and six designated secondary Gaelic grounds, rugby clubs and Derry City. It is in Northern Ireland and is entitled to apply. It will be treated the same as everybody else.

On the matter of crowd control and behaviour, stewarding and safety measures to control crowds will be under consideration as part of this scheme. Mr McMenamin mentioned that the RUC are never in Brandywell for Derry City matches because there is no need. They are needed in other grounds. The reality is that no club in Northern Ireland, as I understand it, pays



the RUC for that level of support. However, in England clubs have to pay, and it is inevitable that clubs here will have that bill to face. Therefore it is better that they look after it themselves and do it properly, rather than having to bring in and pay the RUC. Clubs have enough financial difficulties without having that as an extra burden.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The time is up.

## ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

### Assembly: Gift/Souvenir Shop

1. **Mr Ford** asked the Assembly Commission what is the current position in regard to plans for a new gift/souvenir shop in Parliament Buildings.

(AQO 387/99)

**Mr Campbell (Assembly Commission):** On 29 March 1999 the Commission received a report from the Gift Shop Committee, chaired by Mrs Iris Robinson, which recommended the establishment of an Assembly gift shop in the South Division Lobby and, as an interim arrangement, the expansion of the product range in the basement shop and the establishment of the display facility in the Senate Rotunda. The Commission endorsed the Gift Shop Committee's recommendations but decided not to press ahead immediately with the proposal to establish a gift shop beside the Senate Chamber until there was a better understanding of the requirement to use the Senate Chamber for Committee meetings.

Members will know that there is significant pressure on accommodation in Parliament Buildings and that the Senate Chamber is in regular use. This would require the gift shop, if operating from the Division Lobby, to relocate to the Senate Rotunda area during Committee meetings.

Subsequently, the Catering and Functions Committee, chaired by Sir John Gorman, commissioned a study on the future delivery of catering in Parliament Buildings. The Committee will bring the study's findings to the Commission in the near future. I believe that one of the recommendations is to relocate the basement shop to the post office. That may offer another way of implementing the Committee's recommendation.

In summary, the Commission will consider, at the earliest opportunity, the establishment of an Assembly gift shop to replace the interim arrangements which currently operate from the basement shop.

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr Campbell for the Commission's reply, but I note that he mentioned a report dated 29 March 1999. Does the Commission accept that there have been serious problems since then, especially for school parties seeking to buy souvenirs in this building? Is not it time that the Commission expedited the report from the Catering and Functions Committee to ensure that something better is done before the school tourist season starts again in September? Purchases could then be made from a more convenient place than the existing basement shop with all its inadequacies.

**Mr Campbell:** The Commission accepts the inadequacy of the present arrangements and will be considering alternative measures in the immediate future.

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member assure us that there will still be the opportunity to buy Assembly fudge and humbug?

**Mr Campbell:** I know that reference has been made to fudge and humbug, and I am sure that both Members and public alike will be able to avail themselves of the nice things in the shop.

## **DOGS (AMENDMENT) BILL**

### **Second Stage**

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Dogs (Amendment) Bill [NIA 7/99] be agreed.

This is a short Bill to amend the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 by providing limited discretionary powers to courts and resident magistrates when dealing with a dog that has attacked a person or which has worried livestock. Under existing legislation, courts and resident magistrates have no discretion in this matter and must order the destruction of a dog that has attacked a person or worried livestock, no matter what the circumstances.

The term “attack”, as used in the existing legislation, is very wide and relates not only to physical assault. It includes situations when a person is terrified by a dog, even if he or she is not actually bitten. Although there are relatively few cases each year of destruction orders being made, it is appropriate that there should be a measure of discretion for courts and resident magistrates in determining the fate of a dog.

The Bill will provide the courts and resident magistrates with limited discretion. A number of changes are proposed. First, as well as being able to order the destruction of a dog, the court can instead opt not to have the dog destroyed, but to make an order requiring certain specific measures to be taken to prevent the dog from being a danger to the public or livestock. These measures may include fitting a muzzle, keeping the dog confined in such a way that it cannot escape, excluding it from places specified in the order or having it neutered if it is a male dog.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair)*

Secondly, the Bill will change the law when a person has been convicted of an offence relating to a dangerous dog. At present, the court has no discretion other than to make an order for the destruction of a dangerous dog. Under the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, as amended by the Dangerous Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, these include pitbull terriers and Japanese tosas. Under the provisions of the Bill the court will have discretion to decide not to order the destruction of a dog if it is satisfied that the dog will not be a danger to the public. The Bill proposes the same limited discretion in the matter of the destruction of any other dangerous dog that the Department may prescribe. It has not prescribed any other type of dog so far.

The third change relates to the powers of resident magistrates in connection with the seizure of dogs. Under the present law, when a district council seizes a

dangerous dog, a resident magistrate must order its destruction. The Bill proposes that the resident magistrate must still order the destruction of the dog, but it will allow a person to apply for a certificate of exemption from the requirement to have the dog destroyed, the conditions of which must be complied with within two months of the date of the order.

3.45 pm

In relation to all other seized dogs, the Bill now proposes that the resident magistrate would have discretion not to order the destruction of such a dog where he is satisfied that it is not a danger to the public.

Finally, the Bill would also allow cases where a court or resident magistrate has ordered the destruction of a dog under the existing legislation but the dog has not yet been destroyed to be reconsidered by a court or resident magistrate. The destruction of dogs is an emotive issue for pet owners and pet lovers, one that is highlighted in the press from time to time with heart-rending stories. I believe that it would be appropriate for a court or a resident magistrate to have a degree of discretion in this matter so that, where circumstances dictate, a lesser penalty than destruction could be imposed. I hope that Members will agree with me that the measures I have proposed, which are supported by animal welfare interests and district councils, are sensible and should be carried through. I ask the Assembly to approve this Second Stage of the Bill and to support the motion that will allow the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Committee to take the Committee Stage.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Most Members would generally welcome a Bill that gives the magistrate a discretionary power to make decisions in areas that are sometimes grey, as opposed to black and white, and this Bill does exactly that. However, it requires some clarification, and I hope that the Minister can give that.

This Bill gives discretion to the magistrate. Most people, especially farmers, would be worried about having their animals disturbed by dangerous animals, or animals that are not properly under the control of their master. They would be concerned that the discretionary power, instead of being a discretionary power that allows the magistrate to rule that a dog should not be destroyed if it damages or causes concern to flocks of sheep, becomes the norm.

It would be a sad reflection if this House were to pass a Bill that, instead of acknowledging that from time to time there are grey areas, makes more of them. I hope that the discretion posed in the Bill does not become the norm but is used for those few select cases where an animal should not be put down. The judge should have the opportunity to take a different course of action and show some leniency. I hope that the Bill does lead

towards sensible acts. Of course, if passed, it will largely be in the hands of the magistrate and not in the hands of the Minister. This House should at least make that point of view known to the magistrate.

One other point concerns me about the drawing up of this Bill. It has been largely non-controversial. However, I noticed in the explanatory and financial memorandum that accompanied the Bill that there was no consultation — or should I say that it had not been subject to public consultation. People have asked me why has that been the case, and the Department should provide us with answers on that point. If this Bill is largely noncontroversial, there should have been wide consultation, providing us with a great deal of opinion across the board, and we could then have gone forward today in the full knowledge that we had widespread support. Most people want to see this Bill, if it becomes an Act, administered fairly. They do not want to see dogs put down because they might scare a passer-by.

I noticed recently that one particular passer-by in Ballymena got a little bit of a fright from a dog — a police dog named Sky from Ballymena RUC station. One would hate to think of a dog that was doing its duty being put down for growling at the Secretary of State. A lot of people in Ballymena would like that dog to get a medal.

**A Member:** The George Cross.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** Yes, the George Cross.

Most people want to see this Bill, and the discretion that will come as a result of it, administered fairly. I also noticed from a written answer to Mr Ivan Davis that there are some areas where legislation appears to be administered more forcefully. I am referring, in particular, to his question (AQW 686/99) on dog fouling prosecutions. If you take your dog to Ballymena you are more likely to be prosecuted if it fouls in a street than you are if you take it to Antrim, Belfast, Ards or, indeed, North Down. The lesson there is: “Do not let your dog crap in Ballymena, or else”.

I hope that the Minister will be able to give us the clarification that we seek so that we can push it through the House as quickly as possible. Let us make sure that our legislation has wide support, in the understanding that discretion is not the norm but is for the special circumstances that arise from time to time where a magistrate should have the choice not to put down a dog.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Minister will deal with your questions when she winds up.

**Mr McMenamin:** I am a dog lover and the owner of two dogs, Jack and Buster. What will happen to owners whose dogs are already on death row?

**Mr Molloy:** A LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Bill. It is important to have legislation to clearly define the roles of district councils and dog wardens. There is a need for legislation and for some means of having discretion over whether dogs are put down or not. If this is a means of doing that, it is welcome. The main thing is to protect the public. There are a number of owners who train dogs in a vicious way, which means that when the dogs wander the public streets they are dangerous. I noted in the discussion this morning that there may be some means of controlling that other than putting them down. It is worthwhile for the court to have discretion, so that it is not automatic —

**Mr Maskey:** The Member was talking about discretion. Does he agree that there is a need for discretion, since some of the more infamous Rottweilers have turned out to be more like pet poodles?

**Mr Molloy:** I thank the Member for that. It certainly flags up the issue that a dog cannot be judged by its looks alone, or even by some of its statements. It is important to flag up the cases where court orders are not adhered to. If dog owners are given leeway, we need to monitor that and ensure that the dogs are then kept under control and are not a danger to the public. That is the main thing. We also need legislation to deal with the number of dogs on housing estates and in built-up areas that are under no control. There is a great danger to children and to others there. I hope that this legislation will be a first step in legislating, monitoring and controlling the whole issue of dogs running about estates.

**Mr Ford:** I too welcome the general provisions of the Bill. I have a few questions which, unfortunately, as a member of the appropriate Committee, I am going to end up having to discuss in detail at the later stages of this Bill. The Minister herself highlighted the fact that, while the present legislation refers to dogs “attacking”, the Bill refers to “worrying”. I worry that we do not have a firm enough definition of “worrying” to ensure that this Bill can go through in the way that the main provisions are intended.

Clearly there are problems with mandatory sentences. I should be cautious in case I say too much about mandatory sentences with regard to other crimes. Clearly there is a need for the discretion which is missing at the moment and which has been highlighted in the few cases — only a few, but enough to reach the press — that have created difficulties. There will always be cases where discretion is needed. Discretion should be introduced into the primary legislation to ensure it goes through.

I am concerned about some of the implications, particularly for district councils. The statement accompanying the Bill says that there are no financial implications for the exchequer. That is indeed a happy position for the exchequer to be in. However, there are

likely to be significant financial considerations for district councils. One of the reasons so few cases are prosecuted at the moment is that there is a natural reluctance to prosecute where a dog has had perhaps one bite, and people feel that if it is kept under control there will be no further problems, and they do not wish to proceed with an action that could lead to a destruction order.

If people see a careless owner being fined, or an order to keep a dog under control, then there may be greater incentive to proceed down the legislative route. That route may result in significant costs for district councils — and I say that as someone whose council took the first test case under the dangerous dogs legislation some years ago. The decision to take a test case on behalf of the Department and every other council in Northern Ireland resulted in an increase of 0·5p to the ratepayers of the borough of Antrim.

There are clear issues for us all if we do not deal with the problem of dangerous dogs; of pit bull terriers that put children at risk. I think Antrim Borough Council took the correct decision. Unlike the Members on my left, we were not fools. We did our duty by the people of Northern Ireland, but, unfortunately, our ratepayers paid for it. I hope that those events do not happen in Lisburn or North Down or Mr Poots and Mr Weir will not be smiling in the future. Mr Weir is still smiling.

We need to look at the financial effects of prosecution and the issue about the conditions that may be applied. The Bill is a little unclear about how we will ensure those conditions are to be applied. I suspect that the issue of having a dog neutered would be easily assessed on a one-off basis. However, I am not sure that preventing dogs going into particular public places, having them confined in yards or houses, or having them muzzled will be assessable on a one-off basis. If it means district council dog wardens having to ensure that the conditions are complied with then there will be greater difficulties, and the suggestion that there are no financial implications will be a little unfair. Perhaps the Minister could address some of those matters in her response.

**Mr Shannon:** I have a few concerns about the Bill. As councillors, we have been consulted about the Bill — and I know that Ards councillors have commented on it. Some of the changes are those we would wish to see. The present legislation, as we all know — some to our cost — exists to address the issue of the destruction of dogs. However, it lacks flexibility, and that is why we need the proposed changes.

We have got to look at the matter from the perspective of the dog and the dog owner. Under the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, a dog that has attacked a person or livestock shall be subject to a destruction order, and there is no reprieve or second



chance. If a dog falls into that category, it is finished, and the courts have absolutely no power or discretion. That clearly illustrates where the problems lie. There is no room for movement or discussion on the circumstances of any particular reported attack. There are no provisions for extenuating circumstances.

In some cases there were extenuating circumstances in which we believed the dog should not have been put down. As a result of the nature and implementation of this legislation there exists the real possibility that animals could be destroyed without good reason, as did happen, and there is no opportunity for action to be taken by the owner to ensure that such attacks would not be repeated.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask you to keep your head up, Mr Shannon. I am finding it rather difficult to hear you.

**Mr Shannon:** In relation to the whole subject, I am saying that there have been occasions when dogs have been destroyed when they did not draw blood. That is an issue which should be looked at. That is also why this amendment is very important. Nobody would agree, or accept, that any dog that has injured or viciously attacked a child or livestock should live. If a dog has done that, it should be put down, and we are in no doubt about that. However, we have to look at cases in which that has not happened, and the Bill makes provision for the cases that fall into that category. Every incident will be dealt with on its own merit. One such incident occurred in my constituency not long ago when it was alleged that a dog had attacked a young child. It turned out that the dog had not drawn blood.

4.00 pm

It was a playful and amiable dog, with no history of aggressive behaviour. That is an example of why this legislation is being brought in. Under the old law, it would have had no chance of a reprieve. The existing legislation, prior to this amendment, would have meant that that dog's fate would have been sealed. That would have been unfair to the owner, who had a love for his dog, and for the dog, which had no reported past cases or history of harming anyone.

There must be differentiation to take account of minor attacks by dogs that are not classed as dangerous and where violent and aggressive behaviour is not a genetic characteristic. In these cases, measures could be taken like fitting a muzzle, ensuring that the dog is securely confined, excluding it from places specified in an Order, or having it neutered. As stated in the explanatory and financial memorandum, there are no exchequer costs or staffing implications related to this Bill and, in the name of fairness for both dogs and owners, it should be supported.

There is another well-known example in the sad tale of a dog called Kaiser — a dog who lived in Ballygowan

some years ago. Kaiser was unfortunately involved in a violent act of unprovoked terror on an individual in the district. He was apprehended and charged accordingly. Just one day before his execution, however, Kaiser went missing. Kaiser has been on the run since that time. Some say that he lives in a number of safe kennels in South Armagh, while others say that he got a boat to the United States. Sightings have also been reported elsewhere. Kaiser has been in contact, dare I say it, with the President of the USA, with the FBI, and with the British Prime Minister. We are being a bit facetious —

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member comment on rumours that Kaiser went back to his old kennels in Londonderry and talked about his days on the run?

**Mr Shannon:** I thank the Member for his interjection. It obviously fits into the category of this story. The point we are trying to make is that Kaiser had not done any irreparable damage or hurt to the person. The dog had no record of causing injury to any person. Had the law been in at that time, Kaiser would be a “free dog”, and he could return from wherever he may be. I am not sure where he is, but we want to illustrate the case, and the case is quite simple. If a dog attacks and injures someone very seriously, or attacks livestock, or does something that is wrong, then it deserves to be put down. However, if a dog is playful and has not injured anyone, but just knocks someone over and does not draw blood, then there must be a differentiation in the policy to reflect that.

Under the Dogs (Amendment) Bill we have that opportunity. I say to the Minister that what we need, and what we now have, is that opportunity. That will be welcomed by people whose dogs have perhaps done something but deserve to live on as the incidents were not too bad.

**Ms Rodgers:** I welcome Members' comments, which have been both helpful and balanced. In response to Mr Paisley Jnr, the discretionary power is limited, and it will apply only in a small number of cases. The Member is no longer here, but I will reply to his points anyway. I would like to think he was interested in hearing my views.

The points he made seemed to imply that the courts might not be able to deal with this issue. I take the view that the courts will be able to deal with the issue in a sensible and balanced way. It will only apply in a small number of cases. I appreciate that the Bill has not gone out to public consultation, but, given its nature, it was felt that it should be put to the Assembly as quickly as possible. On the whole it is uncontroversial.

In relation to Mr McMenamin's question, dogs already on death row may, under this Bill, have their cases reconsidered. That is the good news.

With regard to Mr Molloy's remarks, I am looking at the wider aspects of dog control and am currently taking the views of district councils who will be responsible for enforcing any changes in the legislation. I know that there are many issues surrounding dog control which might be slightly more controversial than what is in the present Bill.

Mr Ford's initial remarks about the interpretation of words would be better dealt with in detail at Committee stage. In relation to district councils, the position will not change significantly — only a very small number of dogs will be affected, and it will be up to the council as to the numbers and types of cases taken to court. For instance, in the last year approximately 50 dogs were destroyed throughout the whole of Northern Ireland. It will not have any major implications for district councils.

I am pleased to say that I can agree with everything that Mr Shannon said, and the Bill clearly deals with the concerns he expressed. He has taken a balanced view which takes account of the need to protect the public from dangerous and vicious dogs and the need to provide flexibility in situations where perhaps the dog is provoked and then subsequently put down. This Bill allows for flexibility. A court will be able to decide that a dog should not be put down if it can assure itself that the dog is not a danger to the public through the use of means such as muzzling or whatever is considered necessary. I thank all the Members for their comments, and I believe I have dealt with everything that was raised.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Second Stage of the Dogs (Amendment) Bill [NIA 7/99] be agreed.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

## **GROUND RENTS BILL**

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly grants leave to carry forth the Ground Rents Bill [NIA 6/99] to allow its passage to continue in the next session. — *[The Minister of Finance and Personnel]*

## **DOGS (AMENDMENT) BILL**

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly grants leave to carry forth the Dogs (Amendment) Bill [NIA 7/99] to allow its passage to continue in the next session. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development]*

## **WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (AMENDMENT) BILL**

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly grants leave to carry forth the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill [NIA 8/99] to allow its passage to continue in the next session. — *[The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment]*

## **FISHERIES BILL**

*Resolved:*

That this Assembly grants leave to carry forth the Fisheries Bill [NIA 9/99] to allow its passage to continue in the next session. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development]*

*The sitting was suspended at 4.10 pm*

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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 4 July 2000

*The sitting begun and suspended on Monday 3 July 2000 was resumed at 10.30 am (Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair).*

## FAIR EMPLOYMENT REGULATIONS

**Junior Minister (Office of First and Deputy First Ministers) (Mr Haughey):** I beg to move

That the draft Fair Employment (Monitoring) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 be approved.

These regulations are detailed and technical, and for the benefit of Members, I shall give brief details of the background that has led to them.

The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 made several changes to the monitoring requirements laid down by the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. The detail of those changes is included in the Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999, which affect monitoring returns from 1 January 2001 onwards.

Under the 1999 regulations all employers who are registered with the Equality Commission are, for the first time, required to provide information on the religious affiliation of part-time employees and those applying for employment. Previously only large private-sector employers and the public sector provided information on applicants and appointees, and information on part-time employees was excluded. In addition, the public sector and the larger private-sector firms must now provide information about leavers and promotees.

It was this latter group that caused problems for employers and led to these amending regulations. The definition of a “promotee” in the 1999 regulations would have required an employer to record as “a promotion” a period of temporary promotion, such as acting up, regardless of how long that lasted. Therefore an employee who was deputised to a higher grade for even one day to cover the absence of a colleague would have to be recorded. The effect would be to distort the overall picture, and clearly that was not the intention.

These regulations amend the definition of “promotee” in the 1999 regulations to ensure that only those

promotions that have lasted or are, by notice in writing, intended to last for at least six months are counted. In drafting these regulations we have also taken the opportunity to remove from the 1999 regulations the obligation on employers to provide detailed information about apprentices as appointees or leavers. Less than 5% of those registered with the Equality Commission employ five or more apprentices, and therefore, given the small number who are employed by individual employers, the commission has suggested that a religious breakdown of the total number of apprentice employees would suffice. That means employers would continue to provide the same information on apprentices as they do at present under the 1989 regulations.

The Equality Commission brought the difficulties with the 1999 regulations to the attention of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister following a series of seminars they had arranged with employers to raise awareness of the regulations. Employers will welcome this clarification and the lessening of the monitoring requirements in respect of apprentices.

The draft regulations have been scrutinised by the Examiner of Statutory Rules, and there are no points that he would wish to bring to the attention of Members.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the draft Fair Employment (Monitoring) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 be approved.

## ALLOWANCES TO MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY BILL

### Final Stage

*Resolved:*

That the Allowances to Members of the Assembly Bill [NIA 2/99] do now pass. — *[Mr Fee]*

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

## ASSEMBLY STANDING ORDERS

### The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures

**(Mr C Murphy):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Chomhairle. I beg to move

That the Committee on Procedures be authorised to update Standing Orders of the Assembly for punctuation and grammar and annually to republish Standing Orders.

At the outset I would like to place on record my thanks to the members of the Committee on Procedures for their work over the last number of weeks. In January and February 2000 we were presented with the fact that there were a large number of adjustments needed to the Standing Orders as published. There were a large number of typographical and punctuation changes required.

There were also, as you and many other Members are aware, a large number of matters that needed to be addressed, and we approached this business on the basis of prioritising the work that needed to be done so as to bring together a package for the last sitting before recess. We will address some of those matters today and we will continue to address others as we go on.

The work was very business-like. There was a corps of people I would like to particularly thank. They attended all the meetings and assisted us in getting as much work done as possible.

Members should be aware that the latest version of Standing Orders is available on the Internet as of 3 February 2000. The latest printed version is available from the Printed Paper Office and is dated 9 March 1999.

There are approximately 83 typographical and punctuation errors in Standing Orders. In correcting the errors, the Committee examined them and accepted that corrections would not alter the substance of the Orders. The purpose of this motion is to avoid Members having to vote on corrections of punctuation and grammar which may occur in the text of Standing Orders. The motion also authorises the Committee to issue a revised updated version of Standing Orders annually to take

account of substantive changes made during the year. Republishing Standing Orders annually means that any paragraphs renumbered due to new sections being inserted can be numbered sequentially and Members will work from a new edition after the Summer recess.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Committee on Procedures be authorised to update Standing Orders of the Assembly for punctuation and grammar and annually to republish Standing Orders.

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I beg to move the following motion:

In Standing Order 8, line 2, delete “two minutes” and insert “one minute”.

During a broad discussion between the parties here we have found that people would prefer to have one minute for prayers or silence at the start of business. This is simply a proposal to amend Standing Orders to reflect that broad consensus.

**Mr Weir:** Far be it for me to stand against the consensus but I wonder at the purpose of this amendment.

Up to now we have devoted two minutes for prayers to God at the start of the day, and there has been no overwhelming argument that this is too long a period. I do not see the case for cutting it to one minute. There is perhaps little enough time given to an element of spiritual contemplation in the Assembly.

What is the real purpose of this motion? I would prefer the Standing Order to remain as it is and will be voting accordingly.

**Dr Birnie:** I would like to echo the comments of my Colleague, Mr Weir. That is a rather novel experience, but for once we will be voting in the same way. I agree with him and cannot see any benefit to the Assembly of an extra minute for business at the start of each sitting. More significantly, if we make this amendment, it will signal to the public that the Assembly is downgrading the importance of a period for reflection or prayer. That would be a negative thing, and for that reason we should not support this proposed change.

**Mr Speaker:** Does the Committee Chairman wish to wind up?

**Mr C Murphy:** A Cheann Comhairle. Views were forwarded to the Procedures Committee by various Assembly members and Committees. Some Members felt that the two minutes at the start of the sitting was too long and they wanted the Standing Order amended. There was also debate on whether Members should say prayers or have a period for reflection at the start of a plenary sitting.



This matter is not something that taxed us greatly. It did not cause any great arguments and was not something that Committee Members felt very strongly about. The views brought forward to us suggested that the simplest way to deal with the issue was to put an amendment to Standing Order 8 to reduce the time spent at the start of the session from two minutes to one to the vote, and that is what we are doing today.

**Mr Speaker:** I remind the House that changes to Standing Orders require cross-community support, as defined in the two formulae in the Act. I have established a precedent whereby if I sense that there is support from all sides, the House is not required to divide. However, if there are any voices against, the House must divide.

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 31; Noes 29.*

#### AYES

##### *Nationalists*

Gerry Adams, Arthur Doherty, Pat Doherty, John Fee, Michelle Gildernew, Denis Haughey, John Hume, Gerry Kelly, John Kelly, Patricia Lewsley, Alban Maginness, Alex Maskey, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Gerry McHugh, Eugene McMenamin, Pat McNamee, Francie Molloy, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Mary Nelis, Eamonn O'Neill, Sue Ramsey, John Tierney.

##### *Unionist*

Billy Bell, Ivan Davis, James Leslie, Alan McFarland, David Trimble, Jim Wilson.

##### *Other*

Monica McWilliams.

#### NOES

##### *Unionist*

Ian Adamson, Roy Beggs, Tom Benson, Paul Berry, Esmond Birnie, Mervyn Carrick, Joan Carson, Wilson Clyde, Robert Coulter, Nigel Dodds, Reg Empey, Sam Foster, Oliver Gibson, John Gorman, William Hay, Derek Hussey, Gardiner Kane, Danny Kennedy, David McClarty, William McCrea, Ken Robinson, George Savage, Jim Shannon, Denis Watson, Peter Weir, Jim Wells.

##### *Other*

Eileen Bell, Seamus Close, Sean Neeson.

Total Votes 60	Total Ayes 31 ( 51.7%)
Nationalist Votes 24	Nationalist Ayes 24 ( 100%)
Unionist Votes 32	Unionist Ayes 6 ( 18.8%)

*Question accordingly negatived.*

10.45 am

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I beg to move the following motion:

In Standing Order 10(2)(b) delete all and insert "at the end of each sitting one hour shall be set aside for an Adjournment debate;".

I am somewhat bemused at the vote on the previous motion. There was consensus in the Committee, and we received wide representation to change the period. The length of time does not tax us greatly. I do not know whether the good Lord will appreciate being lambasted for two minutes instead of one, but that is a matter for himself.

This motion is about Adjournment debates. The Committee on Procedures recognises that Adjournment debates are important, especially for Back-Benchers. However, the three-hour period currently set out in Standing Orders is too long, given the time pressures on Assembly Members. Several motions to suspend Standing Orders, to circumvent this Standing Order have already been accepted, even in the short time that the Assembly has been sitting.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it correct for the Lobby doors to be open when the Assembly is sitting?

**Mr Speaker:** It is not appropriate for the doors to be open. It is perfectly acceptable for Members to move in and out the Lobby, but the doors should not be open. I thank the Member, and ask Mr Murphy to continue.

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat. On occasions, business has finished before 3.00 pm on Tuesdays, and Members have had to return later for the Adjournment debate. At other times, business has continued after the Adjournment debate has concluded. Against that background, the Committee proposes to regularise arrangements to provide one hour for an Adjournment debate at the end of the sitting, whenever it occurs. I am grateful to Mr Morrow for tabling his amendments. In our urgency to deal with some of these matters, one or two consequential amendments were overlooked. I am grateful to the Member for bringing omissions to our attention and for tidying-up the matter.

**Mr Speaker:** The first amendment on the Marshalled List will be discussed in the context of the debate on the next motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

In Standing Order 10 (2)(b) delete all and insert "at the end of each sitting one hour shall be set aside for an Adjournment debate;".

**Mr Speaker:** I remind Members again that the Act provides that changes to Standing Orders require

cross-community support. If there is *nem con*, with an indication of support from all sides, I shall take that without a Division.

**Mr C Murphy:** A Cheann Comhairle, I beg to move the following motion:

In Standing Order 10(2)(c) delete “on each Tuesday on which there is a sitting.”

This is consequential amendment to the previous motion.

**Mr Speaker:** Amendment 1 on the Marshalled List stands in the name of Mr Morrow.

Mr Wells, do you wish to speak on this matter?

**Mr Wells:** I understood that the debate on this issue would be in tandem with the discussion on the previous motion, but the vote has already been taken on the curtailment of the Adjournment debate to one hour. I thought that you had ruled that these two motions would be taken together.

**Mr Speaker:** No, I said that the amendment would be taken with this motion because it related to this motion. We cannot take two motions together. The amendment is an amendment to the motion currently before the Assembly — not the motion on the Adjournment debate, which was agreed. We are now discussing the motion on Tuesday sittings. It is really a technical, consequential and tidying-up amendment.

11.00 am

**Mr Wells:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I will check Hansard, but I took a clear inference from what you said that these two motions would be taken together, and that if someone wished to oppose the curtailment of the Adjournment debate to one hour, the matter could be debated at that point. You are ruling that that point has now passed.

**Mr Speaker:** You have misunderstood my ruling. When Mr Murphy spoke to the Adjournment debate motion, he mentioned the amendment which was standing in the name of Mr Morrow, and he welcomed it. I indicated at that stage that that amendment would be taken along with the next motion, because it related to it.

*Amendment made:* At end add

“, and in paragraph (9)(b) delete ‘or, in the case of a Tuesday, after three o’clock.’ ” — [Mr Morrow]

*Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

In Standing Order 10(2)(c) delete “on each Tuesday on which there is a sitting”, and in paragraph (9)(b) delete “or, in the case of a Tuesday, after three o’clock”.

*Resolved:*

In Standing Order 10(6) delete “on Monday sittings and at 3.00 pm on Tuesday sittings” and insert “on each day on which there is a sitting”. — [Mr C Murphy]

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, I beg to move the following motion:

After Standing Order 10(11) add “(12) A session of the Assembly shall be that period from the commencement of business following the summer recess until the end of the subsequent summer recess”.

Standing Orders already refer to sessions, and this new Standing Order provides a definition of the span of a session. The reason that it includes the summer recess is that if for any particular reason the House is recalled during the summer, it will be recalled within a defined session.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

After Standing Order 10(11) add “(12) A session of the Assembly shall be that period from the commencement of business following the summer recess until the end of the subsequent summer recess”.

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, I beg to move the following motion:

In Standing Order 20(1) delete “on Tuesdays”.

This is a consequential amendment to Standing Order (10). Given the role that has just been passed, the Adjournment debate may not now always take place on a Tuesday. This change provides the necessary adjustment to allow Private Notice Questions to be taken at the appropriate juncture.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

In Standing Order 20(1) delete “on Tuesdays”.

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I beg to move the following motion:

After Standing Order 29(c) insert: “(d) Further Consideration Stage: consideration of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill, including amendments to the Bill.”

The Committee had a long and detailed discussion on the issue, and, following advice from experts in other legislatures and the views expressed locally, a further stage to provide time for amendments to be made to legislation has been recommended. The Committee supports the recommendation.

There are several reasons for allowing a further stage for amendments to be made to a Bill. Currently, there is only one opportunity to table amendments, which limits detailed scrutiny and the ability to modify the Bill’s provisions. That can result in bad law. It prohibits the Member in charge of the Bill from introducing technical

or consequential amendments, and invites amendments that effectively render the legislation unworkable or contradictory.

There was some debate about whether the further consideration stage should allow Members, other than the Member moving the Bill, to table consequential amendments or amendments for which notice has been given at an earlier stage. The Committee felt that other Members should be allowed to table amendments at the further consideration stage. All amendments will have to be cleared with the Bill Office, which will effectively rule out previously debated amendments. The Speaker can rule on the admissibility of any amendment. Conventions elsewhere suggest that amendments that have already been considered cannot be retabled at the further consideration stage. At this later stage, there will be greater onus on Members to table necessary consequential amendments.

**Mr Fee:** I support the amendment to Standing Orders, with some reservations. Members will know that I have experience of bringing small and simple, though somewhat contentious, Bills through all legislative stages. In a small Bill, consisting of only five clauses and the title, we found that amendments to amendments sometimes need to be made. If there is only one chance to get a Bill right, the chances are that complicated legislation will not be right first time round.

My reservations about introducing a further consideration stage is that it will eat into Assembly time. It means that all the work involving detailed consideration, debate and analysis will take place on the Floor of the Assembly. I ask the Committee on Procedures to consider a mechanism whereby we can be more efficient with our time and more effective in our legislative procedures. However, in the absence of such a mechanism, I recommend that the further consideration stage should be included in Standing Orders.

**Mr Weir:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Are we legally competent to put this amendment through? The Northern Ireland Act 1998, which established the Assembly, lays down certain provisions regarding procedures for passing legislation. Can we add an additional stage? I am happy with the spirit of the proposal but, from a legal point of view, do we have the power to add an additional stage in the passage of legislation when such procedures have already been decided by the Act?

**Mr Speaker:** We sought advice on this matter. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 sets out minimum requirements of consideration. It is hard to believe that Parliament would set down a maximum level of consideration that is substantially less than the consideration that it believes necessary for legislation. It seems to me that the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides

the absolute minimum requirement for consideration, not a maximum permitted level of consideration. In that context, the Committee on Procedures can put this motion before the House.

**Mr Weir:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am suitably reassured.

**Mr Leslie:** Some of my remarks will relate to Mr Weir's point. Like Mr Fee, I support the concept of a Further Consideration Stage. I am not confident that we have the methodology right yet. We should take this step, and it may then emerge over time that we have to look further at our procedure for putting Bills through. That feeling is widely held among those of us who have had the opportunity to consider Bills at Committee Stage.

I will take this opportunity to comment on the procedure whereby the Statutory Committee for the subject matter always takes the Committee Stage of a Bill. This refers to Mr Weir's point. It was in the agreement and therefore it is in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. We may find in time that we get a queue of Bills at one Statutory Committee, while through no fault of another Department — it is not in the nature of some Departments to pass very much legislation — other Committees are not dealing with Bills at all. The House as a whole may wish to consider whether that convention gives us the most sensible set of procedures for considering legislation. We will probably want to return to that matter in the future.

We need to reconsider the procedure, which again is a consequence of the agreement and the legislation, whereby all amendments have to be brought to the House, rather than being voted through in Committee and placed on the face of the Bill, which would then come to the House as an amended Bill. There are good reasons why that is the case, but we might be able to find another procedure for dealing with that.

For the time being, it is prudent for us to allow ourselves a Further Consideration Stage. There is a risk that, particularly with a complicated set of interlocking amendments, and despite the best efforts of everyone involved, we may end up with a contradictory set of clauses. Therefore, we must have another stage at which we can amend them.

A Bill that completes its stages here then goes to the Attorney-General for consideration on *vires* grounds. What happens if he sends it back as *ultra vires*? I believe the whole Bill gets thrown out. It might be more helpful if it came back to the House for further consideration. That is probably something else that we will establish over time. For the time being, I support the motion.

**Mr Speaker:** On a point of order that was contained in the Member's last paragraph, if the Attorney-General

were to rule a piece of legislation *ultra vires*, it would come back to the House for a Reconsideration Stage, not for a Further Consideration Stage.

**Mr C Murphy:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am grateful for that clarification. I appreciate the concerns expressed by the three Members who spoke. The Committee considered this in great detail. We were clear that there is not enough opportunity for amendments to be put to Bills. We got that advice from practically everyone we discussed this with. There is not enough opportunity for Members to table amendments to Bills to constitute proper scrutiny of legislation going through the House.

We have proposed a Further Consideration Stage. The safeguards are that at the Further Consideration Stage, Members proposing amendments will have to have regard to consequential amendments and clear them with the Bills Office. Also, the Speaker has discretion in considering amendments that would reopen debates held at the Consideration Stage. Therefore there are some safeguards in it. I appreciate that we are, to an extent, taking a leap in the dark. The Committee on Procedures was very much aware of that.

11.15 am

As with all Standing Orders, there may well be a case, as Members have seen already, for revisiting them at any time. That may well be the case with this Standing Order that we are introducing. Experience might tell us that it is not the correct procedure to adopt, and we will revisit it if necessary.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

After Standing Order 29(c) insert “(d) Further Consideration Stage: consideration of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill, including amendments to the Bill.”

**Mr C Murphy:** I beg to move the following motion:

In Standing Order 31(2) after “three” insert “working”.

This Standing Order deals with the Committee Stage, and we have proposed to amend it. Standing Orders allow Committees 30 calendar days for the consideration of Bills referred to them. As such a period excludes adjournments of longer than three days, the referral period could take 15 weeks to elapse, as Standing Order 31(2) takes no account of weekends. This was surely not the intention of the original Standing Orders Committee, and the proposed amendment would address this matter.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

In Standing Order 31(2) after “three” insert “working”.

*Resolved:*

After Standing Order 34 insert the following new Standing Order:

**“34(A) PUBLIC BILLS: FURTHER CONSIDERATION STAGE**

- (1) When a Bill has passed Consideration Stage and stands referred to the Speaker, the terms of Standing Order 34 shall be applied to the Further Consideration Stage as they would to a Consideration Stage as described in Standing Order 34.
- (2) Members may speak more than once in debate during the Further Consideration Stage.
- (3) At the completion of the Further Consideration Stage the Bill shall stand referred to the Speaker.”

As a consequence, amend Standing Orders 33(14), (15) and (16) and 36(1): in each case, before “Consideration” insert “Further”. —  
[Mr C Murphy]

**Mr C Murphy:** I beg to move the following motion:

In Standing Order 39(1) delete “seven” and insert “five working”, and delete “(excluding Saturdays and Sundays)”.

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. This deals with the stages between Bills, and the current wording of the Standing Order has the effect of necessitating effectively two weeks between stages in the passage of a Bill. This reworded version will allow stages to pass with an interval of one week between each. However, Members should be aware that this is not prescriptive. It is possible to have a longer interval if that is required.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

In Standing Order 39(1) delete “seven” and insert “five working”, and delete “(excluding Saturdays and Sundays)”.

**Mr C Murphy:** I beg to move the following motion:

In Standing Order 46(9) delete “a majority of the Members present and voting” and insert “simple majority. Voting”.

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. This deals with voting in Committees. The present wording in the Standing Orders is ambiguous. In some circumstances, Members who are present and abstain would have the effect of voting against any motion. For example, with nine Members present and four voting “Yes”, three “No” and two abstaining, the motion would fall, as the “Yes” votes would not represent the majority of those present.

This motion corrects the text to reflect the Committee’s understanding of the original intention of the Committee on Standing Orders.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

In Standing Order 46(9) delete “a majority of the Members present and voting” and insert “simple majority. Voting”.

**Mr C Murphy:** I beg to move the following motion:

After Standing Order 53(6) add “(7) The Business Committee shall determine the dates of recess”.



Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Recess is mentioned throughout Standing Orders, and the convention until now has been that the Business Committee determines the dates of the recess. This is merely to provide a formal mechanism to determine those dates.

**Mr Leslie:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The copy of the Standing Orders to which I am referring — I have just obtained it from the Printed Paper Office — goes only as far as 53(4).

**Mr Speaker:** The reason for that is that there has been no reprint since the last amendments were made to Standing Orders. The printed copy that the Member has is out of date. If he wants an up-to-date copy with the correct numbers, he should download it from the Internet and print it out. I must also point out to the House that at the start of this process it was agreed that it would be appropriate for the Procedures Committee to make necessary grammatical, punctuation and other corrections — numbering, of course, is one of the corrections that can be made. For this and for other matters I remind Members that the most up-to-date documents, including Hansard, can be found and downloaded from the Internet site.

**Mr Dodds:** With regard to this proposal, as I understand it there is no provision at the moment in Standing Orders giving powers to the Business Committee, or indeed anybody else, to determine the recess. What basis are we operating on if the recess begins on 7 July 2000?

**Mr Speaker:** Under convention.

**Mr Dodds:** Is that legally watertight?

**Mr Speaker:** It does not take long for matters to become traditional and conventional in this setting.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

After Standing Order 53(6) add “(7) The Business Committee shall determine the dates of recess”.

**Mr C Murphy:** I beg to move the following motion:

In the Interpretation delete line 4 and insert “*Sitting days* are all days Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays and recess”.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. There was some confusion among Members as to when the Assembly was actually sitting; was it sitting only during plenary or was it also sitting during Committee? The Procedures Committee felt that the simplest approach was to define all days from Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays and recess, as sitting days of the Assembly. We propose to put this into the Interpretation at the back of the Standing Orders. I am also grateful to the Member for the amendment to this motion which tidies it up. I support the amendment.

*Amendment made:* After “line 4” insert “and line 5”. — [Mr Morrow]

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

In the Interpretation delete line 4 and line 5 and insert “*Sitting Days* are all days Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays and recess”.

**Mr Speaker:** Before we leave Standing Orders, may I remind the House that it is out of order for anyone to have mobile telephones in ringing mode, as is the carrying in of packages, briefcases or other items of that kind.

**Mr Fee:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When will the amended Standing Orders be printed and available?

**Mr Speaker:** They will be printed over the recess and will be available to Members on the commencement of the new session in September. Given the motion that the House passed earlier, the intention is to reprint Standing Orders each year during the summer recess.

The hard working Business Committee thought that you might take longer to get through this business and allocated more time to it.

**Mr J Kelly:** On a point of order, A Cheann Comhairle. Can you define “package” for us?

**Mr Speaker:** The only packages that I am in a position to preside over are pension packages, which you voted on some time ago.

*The sitting was suspended at 11.28 am.*

*On resuming —*

## EXCLUSION OF SINN FÉIN

2.00 pm

**Mr Speaker:** I want to remind Members of the timings allowed for this debate. Dr Paisley will be entitled to up to one hour to move the motion, and a Member of Sinn Féin will be permitted up to one hour to respond. Following this, the Floor will be opened up to any Member who will be allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes. When all Members who wish to speak have done so, or the arguments have been exhaustively presented, I will allow a Member of Sinn Féin up to 30 minutes to respond, and either of the proposers —Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson —30 minutes to wind up.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I beg to move

That, in consequence of the failure of the Provisional IRA to offer up its illegal weaponry for destruction, its continuing threat, and pursuit, of terrorist outrages to secure its aims, its maintenance of an active terrorist organisation, its continuing engagement in murder and other acts of violence, and the fact that it is inextricably linked to Sinn Féin, this Assembly resolves that Sinn Féin does not enjoy its confidence because it is not committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful means, and further, in accordance with section 30 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, determines that members of Sinn Féin shall be excluded from holding office as Ministers for a period of 12 months from the date of this resolution.

Last Friday evening I attended the Lord Mayor's installation dinner in the city hall. A speech was made by Mrs Pearl Marshall, the mother of a police officer who was brutally gunned down and murdered by the IRA. During her speech Mrs Marshall asked a question that is central to this debate: "How can those who did these evil deeds be in Government without saying 'Sorry' and without bringing forth the fruits of repentance?". This is a question that is upon the lips of every decent person in this Province. How can the front leaders of armed terrorists have a place in democratic Government? Who would have thought that the day would ever come when this House would have to debate whether there is a place for armed terrorists in the Government of Northern Ireland?

It is a sad indictment of this institution that after two years, today is the first opportunity we have had to debate this crucial issue. This is a matter that goes to the heart of the establishment of Government in Northern Ireland, and yet it is being debated only now. Every trick in the book has been used to prevent this debate, but those attempts have failed, and we are having a debate that the enemies of democracy attempted to prevent.

Today we are told that many will boycott this debate. This Assembly meets against the background of

disturbances over the denial of the right of Orangemen to return from their church service to their homes.

The root cause of these disturbances goes to the very heart of the question that we are discussing today. Who planned these disturbances? Who organised them, and who is responsible for the violence that initiated them? The answer is IRA/Sinn Féin. It was Mr Gerry Adams who declared on RTE

"Ask any activist in the North, did Drumcree happen by accident, and they will tell you no. Three years of work on the lower Ormeau Road, Portadown, in parts of Fermanagh and Newry, Armagh and in Bellaghy and up in Derry. These three years work went into creating that situation. Fair play to those people who have put the work in. These are the types of scene changes that we have to focus in on and develop and exploit."

Sinn Féin/IRA has deliberately orchestrated communal tension in Northern Ireland. They have used violence, and the threat of violence, to stir up violence around the issue of parades. This violence in the communities across our Province has held the people to ransom for the last five years. Northern Ireland has been changed, brutalised and defaced by this orchestrated violence and all the threats associated with it. The people of Northern Ireland have been wrongly blamed for this violence. The people are being punished because of the violence and threat of violence by the IRA. The Orange Order is being publicly punished and abused because of this deliberate violence by the IRA.

This Assembly and Government was created on the basis of a number of key promises made in the handwriting of the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The House will recall that he visited the Province during the debate on the referenda on the Belfast Agreement. At Coleraine, he made a number of personal pledges to the Unionist people concerning the interpretation of the meaning of the Belfast Agreement. The consistent feature of Tony Blair's involvement in the referenda debate was one of "promises making" which resulted in "promises breaking." Could I remind the House that the Prime Minister said that those who use or threaten violence shall be excluded from the Government of Northern Ireland. Writing in the 'Belfast Telegraph' on 22 May, he said

"I give my word, and I will keep it. There will be no fudge between democracy and terror. Only those who have given up violence for good can play a part in the democratic future of Northern Ireland."

What have the people of Ulster done to deserve such a despicable act of treachery from the Prime Minister? Why does he insist on turning the principles of democracy on their head in order to accommodate organised murderous thuggery? Have the vast majority of the people of this Province been unfaithful? Have they been lawbreakers? Have they been disloyal? Have they spoken treachery? Loyal people of Ulster do not deserve this treatment. They have been loyal, true,

upright and law abiding. For three decades many of them have suffered the most serious woundings and bereavements. They have also suffered the most vicious Republican violence and the lying propaganda that goes with it. They have not retaliated. All they have asked for are equal rights, equal treatment and equal freedom. Today we are to see democracy destroyed, our freedom spoiled and our rights denied.

The power of the IRA has now become a legitimate tool in the Executive of our country. Ministers will not rely on mandates but on murderers who are armed and ready to kill. It will not have gone unnoticed in the House that a Member representing the East Londonderry constituency has today put her name to this motion on the exclusion of IRA/Sinn Féin. I would like to thank Pauline Armitage for that.

This is not just a DUP motion — examine the signatures. All the Unionist parties in the House have put their names to it, including some who are members of the Official Unionist Party. Indeed, I thank all those Members from a broad spectrum of Unionism who are supporting this motion. We are sending out a certain and united voice across this Province that we love: on this great issue of whether those representing terrorists in Northern Ireland should be in or out of government there are more Unionists elected to the House who say “No — they should not be in the Government of Northern Ireland” than say they should.

If the boot were on the other foot, if the Nationalist community were so divided and, indeed, if a majority of its elected representatives were to voice its opposition to the operation of such a political process we all know that the Government would listen and respond to it and bow to the wishes of the majority. I expect any democratic Government sitting in the Mother of Parliaments to listen to the majority of Unionists this day. I appeal to them no matter what way this vote goes to listen to the majority of Unionists. Northern Ireland can never be at ease with itself when the majority community is so uneasy about the operation of the political institutions. That is a fact that they must face up to. I know that the Government want to close their eyes to it.

The last time I spoke to the Prime Minister he had the brazen audacity to tell me that he had broken none of his pledges. I read them over to him, and he still maintained that he had broken none of them. A Prime Minister who can say that to an elected representative from Northern Ireland would say anything. The Government can and, indeed, today will blacken the name of us who take a stand this day in the House, but they do that at their peril.

They should realise that there is a scurry across Ulster, a massive resistance and resentment to the operation

of a process that insults our honoured dead and pours scorn on the very principles of the democratic process.

2.15 pm

Today is a defining moment, not only in the Assembly, but for the Unionist people and democracy itself. Does this Assembly want Northern Ireland to be plagued forever with the scourge of terrorists at the heart of its Government, conning itself that some form of words or some sleight of hand will be enough to convince people that the decommissioning issue has been satisfactorily addressed?

The Official Unionists’ defence spokesman has said he is satisfied with what has happened with the IRA bunkers. Think of it — the bunkers have now been given special status, immune from search by the authorities in charge of the security of the country in which they are, and Unionism’s spokesman is saying that those bunkers’ being firmly under IRA control satisfies him on the question of decommissioning.

Today is decision day for the Assembly. To Unionist representatives, I say that their actions today will be interpreted farther afield than in this Chamber. They will find no hiding place. Abstention is not an option; they will have to vote for or against this motion, or else explain to the Ulster people their reluctance to do so. Today the hour to be counted has come.

I refer to the motion and remind the House that

“this Assembly resolves that Sinn Féin does not enjoy its confidence because it is not committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful means”.

If you do not vote for that, what are you saying? You are saying the Assembly does indeed give its confidence to IRA/Sinn Féin and believes it to be committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful means. Today there is no room for neutrality in this struggle.

There is only one way for Unionists to register opposition to having the representatives of armed terror in Government, and that is to vote for this exclusion motion. Failing to do so, whether by abstention or by voting against, will send a clear message to the Unionist community that those Unionists led by Mr Trimble support Sinn Féin/IRA’s being in the Government of Northern Ireland. There will never be a clearer choice between terrorism and democracy, and there will never be a better chance in the history of this Province for us to register our views. Those Unionists who fail to support this motion can expect to face the wrath of an outraged Unionist community at the next election. This is a straightforward issue.

Do Unionists want to go on sharing power with an organisation which retains its terror capability and is at the moment directly engaged in terrorism?

The IRA has not finished its terror. No truer words were spoken than those of Gerry Adams at the City Hall:

“They haven’t gone away, you know.”

There are those today who bear awful witness to that awful fact. There is no doubt that the IRA continues its terror though every effort is made to disguise what is going on, and there is a failure on the part of the media and the security forces to tell and rightly catalogue the ravages of terror.

I was talking to a security force man recently who told me that every night he takes his men out they are petrol bombed in Republican areas. These incidents never reach the press. The democratic process is diminished and treated with contempt by those who hold the very views that I am putting in the House today. Some of the people who hold these views talked not so long ago about no half-way house between Government and being engaged in terrorism, but now they have somersaulted. During the talks it was Dick Spring, the then Foreign Minister of the Irish Republic, who said that Sinn Féin/IRA could not be in Government by day and in terror by night.

The Deputy First Minister, who has just left the Chamber, announced at a recent party conference that he would “take on” the men of violence if they dared to think that they could have terror and democracy together, and he threatened what he would do with those who continued to be engaged in terrorism. Those were great words. They sounded well, but they have all been proved to be useless and as worthless as the promises of the Prime Minister.

The Nationalists’ representatives here have a duty to the wider public as well. They can stick with their close relationship with IRA/Sinn Féin. The SDLP can keep the IRA in Government if that is what its members wish. But just let them stop and ask themselves what sort of message that sends to the Unionist people. Their support for IRA/Sinn Féin fuels the view that the SDLP has advanced on the back of IRA terror and is now so inextricably linked to that organisation that they cannot free themselves or act independently of it. If the SDLP Members have genuine concern, as they tell us they have, for the Unionist people, for their neighbours and for the democratic process, they would surely exclude Republican terrorist representatives from Government.

We are told that this debate is taking place in the shadow of our glorious political development. That is the latest IRA statement. The searching of secret IRA arms dumps by international observers is nothing more than a worthless stunt, a further attempt to gull the community and present mass killers as peacemakers. What does that latest IRA statement reveal?

First, it reveals that the IRA possesses a lot of illegal weapons. Secondly, they are under the total control of

the IRA. Thirdly, two people, one of whom spoke at an IRA rally in west Belfast, have been allowed to see a small portion of these weapons but are unable to reveal their location. Does this build up any confidence at all in the right-thinking people of this Province, having experienced in their own bodies and their homes the violence of those who control these bunkers? The concerns of the community I represent need to be assuaged, and these bunkers do nothing to convince me, or my constituents, that we should put confidence in the IRA’s good intentions.

Mr Coulter and Mr Leslie, Official Unionist Members of the Assembly, sent a letter to council delegates:

“We believe the commitment by the IRA to put arms beyond use.”

“We believe” it, they said.

“The IRA statement contains a much stronger commitment to decommission than anything said by the IRA or their Sinn Féin mouthpiece.”

I am amazed, considering where these gentlemen live. How can they breathe good north Antrim fresh air and still make such a statement? It is up to the Ulster Unionist Party to keep the pressure on them until they have completed the transition from terrorism to peace and democracy.

However, there is an admission here that they have not. They are not even on the road to peace and democracy. If they were, would they want bunkers or to retain their murder weapons and arsenals? Here we have an admission that an undemocratic party is in government; that the purpose of being in government is to achieve a change of heart. They are saying “We must work and put pressure on them to convert them, but we will give them the prize of office first and then we can buy them into democracy.” This is rewarding Sinn Féin before they deserve, or are entitled to, such an award. This is simply blackmail.

IRA/Sinn Féin do not deserve to be in government. They must change and, if they say and continue to say “We are not changing”, then they must be rejected by all constitutionalists and by all who believe in democracy. It is not up to the democratic process to change all the rules in the book in order to accommodate terrorists. It is up to the terrorists to stop their terrorising, to give up the means of terror, to be like any other party.

Sinn Féin’s failure to follow these rules makes their place in the Government totally unacceptable. No amount of explaining or defining by the Ulster Unionist Party can change the reality of the stark fact that a fully armed terrorist organisation that pays lip-service to non-violent commitments is in the Government of Northern Ireland. That is immoral and a stop should be put to it.



2.30 pm

The attitude of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to this is amazing. The Deputy First Minister castigated my Friend yesterday for daring to ask a question. Yet the Minister of the Environment asked a question of Ministers on the other side, and nothing was said. And what about the IRA/Sinn Féin Ministers in the Executive? Did the Deputy First Minister stand up and rebuke them for their attitude to our national flag? Did he get up and denounce Mr McGuinness, who said that he would not tell the people who knew who carried out the Omagh bombing to tell the police? I did not hear any loud calls from either the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister, about that, none whatsoever. Yet they rebuked my Colleague because he asked simple question that he was entitled to ask. Even you, Sir, who have full control of the House and how it operates, admitted that, and admitted it freely.

There is no doubt that the IRA continues its crimes, and it is for this reason that its alter ego, Sinn Féin, cannot be permitted to continue in the Government. The crime that it is engaged in is not some minor petty crime that will soon wither on the vine. The IRA continues to be the most sophisticated and ruthless terror organisation in Europe and the western world. It is continually engaged in attacks in Northern Ireland. It possesses a massive weapons arsenal, part of which is now internationally protected, and it has international criminal links.

Currently, in the United States, a former FBI agent is on trial for supplying the IRA with weapons, over seven tonnes of them. If it is keen on decommissioning, what is it doing ordering seven tonnes of weapons in the United States of America? The IRA has not disbanded and has no intention of disbanding. The IRA exists because of the power of the gun. Members in the House who represent the IRA are here because of the power of the guns. It was not the ballot box that brought them, but the power of the gun behind the ballot box, the intimidation of voters, the printing of health cards and so on as was quite evident, and admitted by the Chief Electoral Officer when, at the last parliamentary election, one of their candidates was elected for Mid Ulster.

I have attended meetings with the Secretary of State, as have representatives from other parties, including the SDLP, and pointed out the breaches in electoral law. Has anything been done about it? Not a thing. I was told the other day by the Secretary of State that nothing would be done. The election to Westminster will go on under the same rules — nothing to be done. As I have said, the IRA has not disbanded and has no intention of disbanding. It exists because of the power of the gun, and it knows that if that power were taken away, it would be extinguished. That is why the Belfast

Agreement got it wrong — it failed to realise that IRA/Sinn Féin is not like any other political party.

Today we have to decide, if we are going to continue to pull the wool over the people's eyes, and continue with the lie that Sinn Féin/IRA Members are just like the rest of us when, in reality, they are terrorists, and terrorists continuing the job of terrorism. The IRA continues to be responsible for the most savage so-called punishment beatings taking place across Northern Ireland.

Since the start of this year, the IRA has shot 21 people and beaten 25 people in Northern Ireland. It is an organisation on cease-fire, whose arms, we are told have been put beyond use. Tell that to the victims of the IRA. The IRA has failed to offer up its illegal weaponry for destruction. It is a continuing threat in its pursuit of terrorist outrages to secure its aims as a terrorist organisation. Its continuing engagement in murder and other acts of violence, and its links to Sinn Féin, mean that Sinn Féin cannot enjoy the confidence of this House.

Let us examine what Sinn Féin/IRA has been doing at night, while Martin McGuinness and Barbara Brown are Ministers by day. Let me list what has happened this year.

**Mr M McGuinness:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have noticed that every now and again Rev William McCrea holds up a small poster of me. I wonder whether it is an attempt to have himself elevated to the position of Cardinal by the DUP Pope in time for the south-west Antrim by-election?

**Mr Speaker:** I again draw the attention of the House to my ruling. Aids of various kinds have been used in the Chamber from time to time, but they are all out of order. No aids, other than notes, may be used.

**Mr Dodds:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It might be appropriate to point out to the so-called Minister of Education that the constituency is called south Antrim, not south-west Antrim. Can he get it right?

**Mr McNamee:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I point out that Mr McGuinness is not the so-called Minister of Education; he is indeed the Minister of Education.

**Mr Speaker:** He certainly is. Of that there is no doubt. Dr Paisley, please continue.

**Rev Dr I Paisley:** I shall be coming a little closer to Martin McGuinness in a moment. Let me list this catalogue to the House. On 7 February a man aged 23 was beaten with hammers in Downpatrick. On 25 February two Northern Ireland electricity workmen were beaten with iron bars in south Armagh. On 10 March a man aged 30 was shot in north Belfast. On 11 March a youth aged 16 was beaten in north Belfast. On

13 March, a man of 26 was beaten in Creggan. In Londonderry a man of 20 was shot in the ankle. A man of 24 was shot five times in his arms and legs in south Armagh. All those incidents — in Creggan, Londonderry, west Belfast and south Armagh — took place on 13 March. On 14 March a man aged 20 was shot in Strabane. On 15 March a youth of 17 was shot in east Belfast. On 1 April a man of 20 was shot in both ankles in west Belfast. On 2 April a man of 22 was shot in both legs in north Belfast. On 3 April a youth of 19 was shot in both legs, and a man of 26 was shot in both ankles in west Belfast. On 4 April a man of 45 was beaten and stabbed in north Belfast. On 7 April a youth of 18 and a man of 20 were beaten in west Belfast. On 8 April a man of 26 was shot in both feet in north Belfast

On 9 April a youth of 19 was shot in both legs in west Belfast, while a man was shot in the leg in west Belfast. On 11 April a man of 23 was shot in Toomebridge, County Antrim. On 16 April a youth of 17 was shot in both feet in west Belfast. On 24 April a youth of 17 was beaten in north Belfast. On 25 April a youth of 16 was beaten and slashed in west Belfast, and a youth of 19 was beaten and slashed by the same gang. On 26 April a man of 20 was beaten in north Belfast and a man of 30 beaten and lacerated in Downpatrick. On 2 May five families were intimidated from their homes in west Belfast. On 4 May a man of 25 was shot five times in the legs and arms in Dungannon, County Tyrone.

On 5 May a man of 41 was beaten and shot in Dungannon. On 6 May a man of 37 was shot in both legs in west Belfast, a man of 42 shot in the legs in west Belfast, a man of 24 shot three times and beaten in south Armagh and a youth of 19 was beaten and had his legs broken in north Belfast. On 10 May a man of 23 was beaten and had his arms and legs broken in west Belfast. On 15 May two youths aged 19 and a man of 29 were beaten in south Armagh. On 25 May a man of 64 was beaten in Strabane, County Tyrone. On 30 May two men, aged 23 and 22, were beaten with pickaxes and hammers in Dundalk. Two weeks ago a bomb exploded in Ballymurphy in west Belfast. The RUC has linked this explosion to the Provisional IRA.

Not one word of condemnation by Sinn Féin/IRA has followed these attacks. These attacks have been identified by the police as the work of Provos. What is more, on Saturday 28 May, the evening when the Ulster Unionist Party council voted to put Sinn Féin back in to Government, Edmund McCoy was shot dead by two close associates of Gerry Kelly, who is a Member of the House. The murder was sanctioned by the Provisional IRA officer commanding, who specialises in extorting protection money from drug dealers. McCoy was the twelfth drug dealer shot by the IRA since their first ceasefire in 1994.

In case anyone would ask why I do not list the shootings and attempted killings and so on by those on the other side of the fence, let me say before the House that I condemn them as rigorously as I condemn those I have listed. The difference is that those on the other side are not in the Government of Northern Ireland. We are dealing with those in the Government of Northern Ireland. Let us not drag red herrings into this debate. Let us deal with the fact that we are dealing with those in Government in Northern Ireland.

The decision of the Ulster Unionist Party to accept that the IRA had put guns beyond use evidently does not apply to these IRA people murdering their fellow Roman Catholics. The Ulster Unionist council, its leader and the Secretary of State, who actively encouraged the people to accept the word of the IRA, must shoulder some of the blame for what has happened. Those people are told that the IRA's war is over, and yet this horrible list of people shows that the IRA war is not over. It is ludicrous to have two Sinn Féin/IRA Ministers by day while the IRA terrorises and kills by night.

2.45 pm

Let me talk for a moment about the referendum communication that was sent out by the Ulster Unionist Party. It had some questions, such as

“Will paramilitaries be allowed to sit in the Northern Ireland Government?”

Answer:

“No. The UUP will not serve with any party which refuses to commit itself by word and deed to exclusively peaceful and non-violent means. It is a fact that the Agreement says only those who have renounced violence will be allowed to exercise powers in any future Ulster Government. We will hold Tony Blair and other parties to their obligation on this issue.”

I do not need to make any comment on that. I think that it is very sad when a section of the Unionist party goes to the people of Northern Ireland and makes that promise and then turns its back on that promise.

The Official Unionist Party has failed on both counts. It was wrong to tell the people of Northern Ireland that IRA/Sinn Féin would not be in Government. The agreement was to put them into Government. The Ulster Unionist Party has also failed the Unionist people in its promise that it would hold Blair and others to this commitment. That was beyond its strength, for it could not achieve that. The Official Unionist Party asked the Unionist people to support the agreement under these false pretences.

In the same document the UUP asked

“Will a ‘yes’ vote undermine our flag and culture?”

The answer is “No”. Yet, on the buildings in the Stormont estate, under orders of the IRA/Sinn Féin

Minister of Health, the Union flag was not flown. We know also that in the education building, under the other IRA/Sinn Féin Minister, it was not flown either. Yet the Official Unionists told the people that a “Yes” vote would not undermine our flag and culture.

Why is it, even today while we sit here, that the national flag does not fly over this Building, when in other parts of this United Kingdom the national flag flies over those buildings where the work of legislation for this United Kingdom is being done? Why is that? I am told that the Executive has taken a decision on this matter. We are back to the days of Judges, when all men do right in their own eyes, and so there will be no enforced decision on this issue.

On policing, this question was put by the Official Unionist Party in its referendum manifesto:

“Is a ‘yes’ vote a vote to scrap the RUC?”

The answer again was a massive lie:

“No ... In the event of terrorism ending and any alterations made to the size of the RUC we will ensure that the Chancellor of the Exchequer takes into account the sacrifice of these brave men.”

So when they are pensioned off, it will stand in the ranks and fight for their pensions. But the answer is “No”.

We all know that this is not an issue for the Chancellor. We all know that it was the issue for Patten, and we know the result of Patten. Now they have got their Bill through the House. Mr McGrady has told us that they have won their battle on this Bill.

Some of us will see that Bill in the incoming week, and on 11 July, to add insult to injury to the people of Northern Ireland; they will ram it through the House of Commons. This is the way the present Government talk about preserving the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

I said I would come closer to Martin McGuinness before I finished. He may have run away, but he cannot run away from the Hegarty case in Londonderry — he cannot run away from that. A woman’s son was told to leave the country, as many people are told to do by the IRA.

The other side of the House wanted to attack my friend Dr McCrea in this House today. They did attack him — they tried to kill his wife, his family and himself — but they failed. No wonder they attack and abuse him verbally, because they attacked him with guns in an attempt to kill and wipe him out.

This woman — a mother with a mother’s heart and a mother’s love — wanted her son to come home. She went to Martin McGuinness and asked if he could come home. He said “Yes, but we will have to have a talk with him”. She was fully assured that nothing would happen to her son. After he came home the IRA called with him, took him away and murdered him. I want to

say in this House that a man who told a mother to bring her son home, in the knowledge that he was being brought home to his death, is not fit to be a member of the Government of Northern Ireland. That is why our motion today is clear. Sinn Féin does not enjoy the confidence of this House. It is not committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful means, and should be excluded. A man with the record of Mr McGuinness should be excluded from the House.

Not so long ago — and I referred to this a moment or two ago — Mr M McGuinness was on television, and he was asked about the awful bombing in Omagh. He was asked directly “if you knew people who knew the people that did this deed would you advise them to go immediately and inform the police?” He said “No”. He said he would not do it. We have a member of the Government telling us that when an awful atrocity, like Omagh, is committed, as far as he is concerned, he would not advise those who could help the police catch the perpetrators of this awful crime to contact the police, yet we are told that this man should be in the Government of this country. Surely the Unionist Party cannot today seriously expect Unionists to endorse a Government that includes Ministers who will not abide by the rule of law, and who actively hinder the police in their attempts to catch so-called IRA dissidents.

It is disgusting to pressurise the people of Northern Ireland into accepting Sinn Féin in government when it has not decommissioned. I will not parade all the promises made by Mr Trimble on these issues — they fill a large piece of newsprint. Day after day, month after month, year after year he said, “We will not serve in government until there is decommissioning.”

There has been no decommissioning. The IRA has handed in nothing. The IRA has protection for its weapons, and it is quite happy to have those weapons protected because it has plenty more that it can use that are not in bunkers and have not been put beyond use.

Those today who deny the truth of the things that I have been trying to say to the House fail to see what the effect of this will eventually be on the whole community. If the House gives the signal that violence pays, others will take to violence. If the House says that people can be violent, that they can murder, but that we will let them out before they serve their sentences, other people will take the road to violence. The message needs to be sent plainly and clearly — violence does not pay, and there are no seats in Government for violent men of blood. Not ever. There cannot be in a democracy.

I am amazed to hear Members telling us of the glories of the democracy of the European Union. I am not for the European Union. I am for the co-operation of sovereign states in Europe, but I am not for the incorporation of our country into a united Europe. Look at Europe. What happened in Austria? There was a



leader there who did not take to the gun or arm his supporters. He got a sizeable vote and yet Europe refused to recognise him, saying that he was a Fascist. We have those in Northern Ireland who have done the very deeds of the bloodiest Fascists, and they have been forced into Government here. They are hypocrites in the European Union. I heard a Minister from Portugal praise the arrangements in Northern Ireland, yet he gave orders that no ambassador from the European Union was to talk to the ambassador from Austria.

They say that some of us in this House are extreme because we do not have conversations with or speak to Members of IRA/Sinn Féin. We are not as extreme as the British Government who cut off all relations with a country simply because they did not like the way in which the people of that country had voted.

Destruction of this Province is at stake. It is the triumph of Fascism which is the main objective; it is the burial of democracy which is being sought, it is the reign of terror that has become the objective. This is the final target.

As I draw my remarks to a conclusion, truth, though trampled down, will one day rise again to take the throne. Honour, though besmirched by the enemy, will not be finally dishonoured. Liberty, though it may be enslaved for a while in chains, will break through to final freedom and emancipate us all in the day of victory. Peace, miscalled, slandered and made to wear the clothes of surrender, will rise to wear the unstainable robe of purity. And purity is the basis of all peace. God speed the day when this will happen.

3.00 pm

**Mr P Doherty:** A Cheann Comhairle. At the last Assembly election the DUP received a mandate which elected 20 Members and entitled it to two seats on the Executive. In that same election Sinn Féin received a mandate which elected 18 Members and entitled my party, Sinn Féin, also to two seats on the Executive. No rhetoric from the DUP can annihilate that mandate. It entitles us to claim, and to have, those two seats.

One month before the Assembly elections there was a referendum that laid out the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. It also laid out the terms on which this Assembly would meet and vote on various motions. In that referendum the people of Fermanagh, Tyrone, Derry, Antrim, Armagh and Down voted by some 71% in favour of the Good Friday Agreement. The people of the Twenty-six Counties also voted by a majority of 94% in favour of the Good Friday Agreement. That is the basis on which we are in this House, and that is the basis on which we hold seats on the Executive.

For almost two years now the DUP has attempted to collect 30 signatures to bring forward this motion. For some time it had 29 signatures and so was unable to

bring it forward. One wonders what tricks in the book were used to persuade, or to break, Pauline Armitage in order to get that last signature.

When we get over the usual DUP preamble and come to the core of this motion of exclusion, we find that it talks of the Assembly not enjoying confidence in Sinn Féin and suggests that Sinn Féin Members be excluded from holding office as Ministers for twelve months. This motion stands in the name of Ian Paisley and Mr Peter Robinson, and it clearly acknowledges in writing, at last, that the name of my party is Sinn Féin. It is there in writing, and I would ask them from now on to call us by our proper name — the name that they have put in writing by way of this motion.

Why has this motion been put forward when, quite clearly, it will not succeed? They know it will not succeed and that it is a waste of time. It is not about excluding Sinn Féin, because they do not have the power or influence to do that. It is part of the battle within Unionism — a battle between the Unionists who might contemplate change and the Unionists who are opposed to change, opposed to equality and opposed to the Good Friday Agreement.

We all know of the DUP and its association with, and membership of, various Unionist military organisations — the B-Specials, the UDR, the RIR, the RUC and Ulster Resistance. There is documentary evidence and linkage with various loyalist groups. We all know this. Everybody across the Six Counties — indeed, everybody across Ireland and Europe who are interested — knows of this association and of this tie-up. A book by Pat Marrinan called ‘Paisley’ gave details of Ian Paisley’s paramilitary involvement from Malvern Street right through to the deaths at Ballyshannon electricity pylons. All of that is well documented.

We also know the hypocrisy of the DUP — how they sit on the various councils across the Six Counties and serve with Sinn Féin Members, and of the foreign trips they take with Sinn Féin Members. What about their record in this House? What about their membership of the Committees?

The Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Gardiner Kane, Mr Ian Paisley Jnr serve on the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee with Sinn Féin Members, Gerry McHugh and Francie Molloy. Boyd Douglas of the United Unionist Assembly Party also serves on that Committee. They go on trips to Portavogie with Members of Sinn Féin as part of the work of this House.

David Hilditch and Jim Shannon serve with Mary Neilis and Barry McElduff on the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee. Frazer Agnew also serves on that Committee. Isn’t it pure, blatant, unadulterated hypocrisy that they serve on these Committees? Sammy Wilson and Oliver Gibson serve on the Education Committee with Gerry



McHugh and Barry McElduff. Gregory Campbell and Wilson Clyde are on the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee — which I chair — along with my Colleague Dara O'Hagan. They take part in the debates, involve themselves in the dialogue, and speak through the chairperson, who happens to be a member of Sinn Féin. Mr Campbell tries not to get into the debate, but when he has to, he does so regularly.

William McCrea and Edwin Poots serve with Mitchell McLoughlin and Mick Murphy on the Environment Committee. Denis Watson, the Orange Order leader who will not speak to the residents, but who will sit with Sinn Féin on the Committees, takes tea and coffee from the same pot.

Oliver Gibson and Gardiner Kane serve with Sinn Féin Members, Francie Molloy, in the chair, and Alex Maskey on the Finance and Personnel Committee. Peter Weir is there also, dialoguing with Sinn Féin and partaking in Government with Sinn Féin.

More Members of the DUP, Paul Berry and Iris Robinson serve with John Kelly and Sue Ramsey on the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee — and there we see Pauline Armitage also involving herself in the same hypocrisy.

Roger Hutchinson, Mervyn Carrick, and William Hay serve with John Kelly and Mary Nelis on the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee. They are all serving with Sinn Féin Members.

The Regional Development Committee has William Hay, Jim Wells and Roger Hutchinson serving with Conor Murphy.

The Social Development Committee has Mark Robinson and Sammy Wilson serving with Michelle Gildernew and Gerry Kelly. The hypocrisy goes on and on.

The Audit Committee has Mark Robinson and Gerry McHugh. It will go well in your constituencies when you try to explain serving with Sinn Féin to the electorate

DUP Members, Maurice Morrow, Iris Robinson together with Denis Watson again serving with Sinn Féin Members, Alex Maskey and Conor Murphy.

Then we have the membership of the Standing Committees. In the Committee of the Centre we have Gregory Campbell, Oliver Gibson and Jim Shannon serving with Michelle Gildernew, Alex Maskey and Mitchell McLoughlin.

We have Maurice Morrow, Sammy Wilson and Frazer Agnew serving with Conor Murphy and Pat McNamee on the Committee on Procedures.

The Public Accounts Committee has Mervyn Carrick and David Hilditch serving with Sue Ramsey and

Pauline Armitage. All of these hypocrites, who will not serve with Sinn Féin, but who will sit in Committees, serve on councils across the North, and go on foreign trips. We have Edwin Poots and Jim Wells, and we have Pat McNamee —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It may be acceptable in parliamentary terms to refer to the hypocrisy of various parties' positions, but it is not acceptable in parliamentary terms to refer to other Members as hypocrites. This may seem to some Members to be a fine dividing line, and I can recall some who have drawn word pictures to try to get around the parliamentary rules. We shall try to stick with them.

**Mr P Doherty:** Ian Paisley said earlier that the truth will come out. Well, the truth is coming out here about the way in which these DUP Members serve on all of the Committees and the Assembly Commission where we have Gregory Campbell serving along with Sinn Féin's Dara O'Hagan. There are 18 DUP Members serving on Committees. The two who do not serve are Peter Robinson and his fellow Minister. Why do they not serve? Why do these cardinals appointed by the Pope, as Dr Paisley called himself, not serve? What do Mr McCartney and his former colleagues think of this, when they do not serve on any of the Committees at all?

Surely there is a lack of logic in this. What is it all about? What are they at? What are they trying to do? Are they so blinded by their sectarian bigotry, so unwilling to accept equality, and so unwilling to accept the democratic mandate of Sinn Féin? What lies behind it all? It is surely a battle that is going on within Unionism to find where the heart and soul of Unionism really lies.

This motion is a waste of time and energy. It will be defeated, and the quicker it is defeated, the better for all of us. Let the DUP try to come to its senses, to come to understand that if we are to find a way to make progress it will have to accept that our mandate right across Ireland, our mandate in this state and in the Twenty-Six Counties state, is equal to its mandate and that we will not have it negated.

**The First Minister (Mr Trimble):** There is indeed a serious issue for us to consider today — a very serious issue which ought to be addressed, an issue that, so far as I have been able to ascertain, has not yet been mentioned. That issue involves violence, and the violence that occurred last night, and the night before on streets in Northern Ireland. Riots are taking place in Northern Ireland. Last night and the night before we saw paramilitaries pelting our policeman with stones and bottles, displaying their arms and using those arms. That is the issue which ought to be at the forefront of our minds today.

We all know the violence that we saw last night and the night before could get worse. We have to ask ourselves, in the light of this threat to society, what we are doing? Are we collectively as an Assembly, as political parties, or as individual elected representatives trying to exercise a calming influence on society, or are we exacerbating the situation? In that context, I have very grave doubts about the debate here today. What is it going to do, given the background of the violence that is occurring, but has not yet been mentioned? Is this debate going to calm that situation, or is it going to exacerbate it? Is this debate not going to increase the tension? Is this debate not intended to increase the tension? Has this debate not been held back to bring it as close as possible to the points at which tension will occur in order to exacerbate the situation? I am extremely concerned, as the situation deteriorates this week, and we see, as we no doubt shall, further violence, I know who is going to take the rap. It will not be the Members here, but the Orange Order.

3.15 pm

The truth of the matter is that the DUP does not care about the situation developing. I say to the media reporting this, that they should go to the DUP and ask what contribution it is making to the maintenance of peace and calm in Northern Ireland today. That should be at the forefront of everybody's mind.

However, rather than address the real situation on the streets, Dr Paisley gave a philippic in which he attacked, in very familiar terms, the way in which power is being shared through an Administration with Republicans, as indeed it is, and he and his party are doing it.

The truth of the matter is that, if the DUP really wanted to stop the Assembly, it could have done so. There was a moment a few weeks ago when we had before us the matter of the accelerated procedure for the Appropriation Bill. If that had been objected to, the Northern Ireland Administration, the Assembly and all associated — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I cannot permit conversations to go backwards and forwards *sotto voce* between sedentary Members. That is not acceptable.

**The First Minister:** As I was saying, there was a moment a few weeks ago when the Assembly and the Administration could have been brought to a complete halt by just one person's saying one word. Do Members remember what the word was? It was "No". They did not think of it, for they did not know what it was.

**Mr P Robinson:** Rubbish. You do not even know what you are talking about. Absolute rubbish. Lies.

**The First Minister:** Mr Speaker, I hear the word "lies" from a sedentary position. That is wholly untrue, and it does the Member concerned no credit whatsoever

that he sits there casting aspersions in that manner, all the time knowing them to be false. I think the Members concerned—

**Mr McCartney:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**The First Minister:** No, Mr Speaker, he can have his own words later. *[Laughter]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr McCartney:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You are perfectly well aware that, while any "No", used as Mr Trimble has suggested, might have brought the proceedings to a complete halt at that point, to suggest that such a halt would have been permanent is wrong. On a point of order, you should deal with the misleading statement made by the last Member who spoke.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am somewhat doubtful as to whether that was a point order. However, if that is the case, there is no question that the accelerated procedure for the Appropriations Bill required the leave of the House. From a technical point of view, it is absolutely clear that no Member says "No". I was asked to comment on a point of order. I am not prepared to comment on a point of politics. If there is a point of order, it is a procedural point, and I have responded to that.

**The First Minister:** The truth of the matter—

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you tell the House what would have happened if one person had said "No" that day?

**Mr Speaker:** There would have been no accelerated passage for the Appropriation Bill — meaning that it would not have been able to pass before the end of this session. I am not prepared to permit this issue to become a matter of political debate. I shall take a final point of order from Mr Robinson.

**Mr P Robinson:** Is it not true that in circumstances when we cannot proceed with the accelerated process, the normal processes could take place if the recess were curtailed?

**Mr Speaker:** When one does the sums, one finds that that would not have been possible because the timing required would not have permitted it to go through in the time that was available.

**Mr P Robinson:** You would have had to change the recess.

**Mr Speaker:** Even if the recess were changed. I have been asked a question, which I have answered to the best of my knowledge.

**The First Minister:** These last exchanges have been quite interesting. They open up the possibility that the parties sitting to my right did not realise that had they said "No" at that time, the money for the Administration

would have run out in the middle of August and the Administration would have ground to a halt.

It does not detract from the reality. Those parties — I will make an honourable exception for the Gentleman who insulted me — whose members say that they are opposed to the Administration and the presence of Sinn Féin in it, are fully involved. We have evidence of that. We know that they have attended more than 250 Committee meetings with Sinn Féin, have taken part in debates, and have addressed questions directly to Sinn Féin Members.

Two of those Committees are interesting. The Assembly Commission, which has administered a budget of £26 million, is an Executive body. It is not a debating body, or a deliberative Committee. It is an Executive body, with responsibility for a substantial budget, and which consists of five members, one of whom is a member of Sinn Féin, and one of whom is a member of the DUP. They are involved in the Administration.

At the other extreme is the Gift Shop Committee, in which the DUP is involved and takes Executive decisions. Members of the DUP have no problem exercising Executive authority along with Sinn Féin. They want the system to work, but they also want to snipe at the UUP. That is what this is all about. We do not mind them sniping, and people outside know that they want the system to work. The people see through the hypocrisy that we have had today.

There are other issues that I want to address, including the decommissioning of weapons, which has already been mentioned. Let us be clear. The only progress that has been made has been as a result of our efforts and work. The DUP has achieved nothing and does not want to achieve anything. That is the reality. In so far as progress has been made, it is because of our efforts, but that progress is not complete. We are not yet where we want to be, but at least there has been progress, which is undeniable.

I have some words for Sinn Féin too which are important. Those complaining about the lack of time should not have wasted it. The same charges could be made against Sinn Féin. The people who claim to be committed to peaceful means need to display that, day in and day out. There is still progress to be made. Sinn Féin claims that it is here on a mandate. That mandate, under the agreement, places on Sinn Féin a commitment to exclusively peaceful means. That commitment must be demonstrated. If we looked only to the past to see whether it had been demonstrated, it is obvious what the answer would be.

As I said on the first day on which the Assembly sat, just because people have a past does not mean that they cannot have a future. We are trying to bring about that

better future. In doing so, we are creating the chance for change. We hope that there will be some crossing over the bridge from terrorism to democracy. We shall say “Yes, we want to see you crossing that bridge.” But we also say to you that in respect of every promise you make, every pledge you give towards peace and towards decommissioning, we will hold you to it. We have demonstrated that. In January and February it was clear which party was prepared to resign over the issue, and it was the Ulster Unionist Party.

We want to see a democratic — peaceful Ulster — a peaceful Northern Ireland at ease with itself, and to achieve that we are prepared to go the extra mile. We have no doubt about the destination, and that destination will be based on the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland — and their wishes alone.

**Mr A Maginness:** This debate is an end-of-term political stunt by the DUP. It is a piece of pure theatre, acted out by the DUP and their erstwhile allies to entertain their audience of expectant supporters. It serves no purpose other than to indulge their supporters in a crass display of ‘blood and thunder’ histrionics in this Chamber.

They are incapable of realising their purported objective of excluding Sinn Féin from the Northern Ireland Executive. I know that, you know that, Mr Speaker, the press know that, everyone knows that, and so this is a purposeless motion, doomed to failure at the end of this debate. It is a piece of procedural graffiti scrawled on the Order Paper of this House. It has been done to fool the public and for no other purpose. It is designed to pretend that the DUP is a powerful driving force in this Assembly and that it is different from the Ulster Unionist Party, which it regards as its real opponent — not Sinn Féin. It is obsessed with damaging and undermining the Ulster Unionist Party, wanting to replace it as the leader of the Ulster Unionist community.

This is a tactical device to weaken the Ulster Unionist Party throughout Northern Ireland and to undermine its leadership. Indeed, Mr McCartney said that the purpose of this debate was to expose Mr Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party. He admits that the real implied purpose of this debate is not to exclude Sinn Féin but to weaken the Ulster Unionist Party.

What is the reality in this Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive? The reality is that the DUP is piggybacking on the backs of the Ulster Unionist Party and, indeed, the other pro-agreement parties. Its members are enjoying the benefits of office, while at the same time pretending to the public not to be part of the Administration. Their semi-detached stance is, like this motion, a piece of theatricality, once again designed to please their gullible supporters. The reality is that you



cannot hide indefinitely in the wings. You have to be honest with people and emerge onto the stage with the other players in Government — the SDLP, the Ulster Unionists and, indeed, Sinn Féin.

We have been told that if the DUP does not get its way its Ministers are going to resign from office and be replaced by other DUP members. First of all, none of us has noticed any great desire on the part of Peter Robinson or his Colleague, Nigel Dodds, to depart from office. In fact, they display a very obvious liking for their respective positions. The lure of office seems to have taken its toll.

3.30 pm

Be that as it may, what are the consequences of the DUP's playing musical chairs with two Departments for which it is responsible? While it plays politics, the Departments risk damage and, indeed, may suffer. What does that do for the people of Northern Ireland? Does it help them? Who will suffer? The people of Northern Ireland will suffer, because of the failure to properly tackle the serious problems of housing, the roads network, the transport system, the railway system, the bus service, the Water Service and the development of a regional framework for the next generation. Those grave and urgent matters will not be properly addressed, because the DUP prefers to play politics and not to serve the public interest.

The public interest is easily abandoned by the DUP. Let me say, here and now, the pro-agreement parties will not permit the vital interests of the people of Northern Ireland to be sacrificed by the DUP for party political reasons. If necessary the Departmental Committees could be used to act where DUP Ministers fail to exercise their responsibilities. If they are not responsible, then we will be responsible.

This is a contemptible motion, for it is in contempt of the will of this Assembly as it was elected three years ago. It is in contempt of the will of the people of Northern Ireland, as expressed in a referendum three years ago. That mandate, given to us by the people of Northern Ireland, stands unaltered and undiluted. The people of Northern Ireland want peace. They want a stable political system. They want serious cross-community leadership that will lead them to a prosperous, stable, tolerant and reconciled society. That is the aim of the Good Friday Agreement. That is the aim of this Executive, and the people see the beginnings of that system now, and they welcome it. They have no desire to see the substantial political progress which we have made in that direction being pulled down by the ham play-acting of the DUP.

**Mr Close:** Some of the arguments used against the tabling of this motion are spurious and illogical. We are told that there is no chance of the motion's being

passed, because it cannot possibly achieve cross-community support, and, therefore, is a waste of time. I do not believe the motion will get passed, but that is no reason for not having a debate. What sort of an Assembly would this be if the only motions that we could debate were those that were assured of success? This is a democratic Assembly, and I believe we should defend the right of anyone to put down a motion and have it debated on the Floor of this House.

Is this motion a waste of time? Certainly not. Anything that further exposes the hypocrisy of the Democratic Unionist Party cannot be, and is not, a waste of time. I view it as a glorious opportunity to give the DUP Members the time and the space in which they can make further fools of themselves. It has taken the Democratic Unionist Party a long, long time to get the signatures to have this motion debated. Why? Because the majority of elected representatives in this House recognise that the DUP is flogging a dead horse. They recognise that the DUP's case is rather weak and that its motivations are all too obvious.

The Democratic Unionist Party knows that its motion will not succeed; it will fail. Is it not a hallmark of the DUP that it fails on important issues? It said that it would smash Sinn Féin. Not only did it fail to do so but, I believe that because of extreme language and sectarianism, the DUP might have brought about an increase in the vote and the growth in support for Sinn Féin. Bigoted and sectarian remarks help to drive people to the extremes, and we all know that extremists feed on extremism. No one could call the Democratic Unionist Party a moderate party.

The DUP also told the people of Northern Ireland that it would wreck the Good Friday Agreement. It ran away from the negotiations — I can only assume that it did so because it had no alternative to sharing power. The DUP tried its utmost to persuade the good people of Northern Ireland that there was a future in their saying, "No". However, the people would have none of it. They gave the DUP their answer: 72% of the people of Northern Ireland said, "Yes, we support the Good Friday Agreement"; 72% said, "Yes, we want a new beginning"; and 72% said that there was no future in negativity and that they must move forward.

Any party that calls itself democratic must surely accept the voice of the people in a referendum — any party except the Democratic Unionist Party. It is still trying to persuade us that "Yes" means "No". It seems to have a total fixation with the word "No". It advocates majority rule, but refuses to accept that 72% is a majority. Therein lies the motivation behind the motion. It has got absolutely nothing to do with the exclusion of Sinn Féin, but everything to do with overthrowing the voice and the will of the people of Northern Ireland.



The motion is not about democracy; it is about dictatorship — the dictatorship of the Democratic Unionist Party. It wants to smash not only Sinn Féin, but all the political parties that do not follow the DUP's negative precepts. It has declared political war within the Unionist tribe. In so doing, it is guaranteeing the further growth of Sinn Féin in the Nationalist tribe. Its enemy in this sham fight is not Sinn Féin. The DUP knows better than most that votes do not pass between the extremes. Its fight is against moderation, the success of the Assembly and the overwhelming voice of the people of Northern Ireland.

The exclusion of Sinn Féin would be totally counter-productive. It would be negative. Progress has undoubtedly been made in moving away from the horrific and bloody past. Firm commitments have been given by the IRA to initiate a process that will completely and verifiably put its arms beyond use in a way that will gain maximum public confidence. When further discussions by the IRA have been resumed with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning to resolve the arms issue, and when arms dumps have been inspected and secured by Martti Ahtisaari and Cyril Ramaphosa, the DUP chooses this moment to cynically inject negativity and fear into the minds of the people of Northern Ireland — on 4 July, one week before 12 July.

What has changed? The DUP seems to exist to generate fear and concern in the minds of the people of Northern Ireland. Then what does it do? It cynically exploits that fear. It has a history in Northern Ireland of whipping up fear and emotions and then performing the pilot act.

That is not to say that I am satisfied with the current state of the peace process. Much more needs to be done by paramilitaries on all sides to convince the people that normal decent society is just around the corner. We need to see an end to paramilitary skull- and bone-smashing. We need to see an end to paramilitary organisations. We need to see an end to turf wars, racketeering and the violence that is nearly endemic to this place. We need to see positive moves by both sets of paramilitary organisations on the arms issue, not cynicism, and an end to the type of sloganising that depicts one bunch of thugs as better than the other. We do not need to see any more sick murals gloating over death and barbarism, such as recently appeared on the Shankill Road. Is true remorse really demonstrated by the painting of obnoxious, ghoulish nightmares?

Consider the current situation at Drumcree. Where are the defenders of the RUC now? Who is throwing the bricks? Who is throwing the brickbats? Who is firing the shots, standing in the company of the UFF and trying to vomit their hatred on the people and the security forces? We need to see further change, but it

will not be occasioned by this motion. This motion is proof positive that the DUP does not have a constructive or positive idea in its head to move Northern Ireland away from its bad past.

The DUP appears to have been reared on negativity. For breakfast, dinner, tea and supper, it has a meal of negativity. "Not an inch", not a hope. It reacts badly when progress and positivity are on the horizon. Like bats in the sunlight, they cannot survive when progress is being made. The Assembly offers hope and progress. The Executive Committee and all the other institutions brought about by the Good Friday Agreement offer hope for the people of Northern Ireland. The Democratic Unionist Party is afraid of that hope. If permanent peace were established, what would the Democratic Unionist Party do? If confidence in the future were secured, what would the Democratic Unionists do? They cannot exploit fear if the people are not afraid. If the people are confident about the future, the DUP has nothing on which to feed. If it does not feed, it will starve and die.

This motion is a desperate DUP attempt to destabilise the Assembly. It will not succeed. Rather, the defeat of the motion will be an opportunity for the Democratic Unionist Party to show the people exactly what it is all about: political hokey-cokey, with Peter in and Peter out, Nigel in and Nigel out, they do the hokey-cokey and they change them around, that is what it is all about.

**Mr C Wilson:** The significance of this debate will not escape the wider public in Northern Ireland. If nothing else emerges from this debate — and our opponents would clearly like the matter to go away — the vote will demonstrate the lack of a mandate and authority of Mr Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party. The majority of Unionists in the Chamber today will support the motion. The lack of authority and of a mandate that Mr Trimble will be made aware of today is a lack of authority within the Chamber, in terms of the representatives of the Unionist community, but it is also true of the wider Unionist community.

3.45 pm

It would be very easy for our opponents to dismiss those who are wrongly described as anti-agreement. It would be easy for them to say that we are beaten and that our cause is lost. I would like to illustrate how I believe that the true will of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant, can be demonstrated in the House today. The only thing that we can point to is what has happened in the past. Looking at every election held in Northern Ireland since this process commenced, one becomes aware that when candidates, whether pro-agreement Ulster Unionists or from anti-agreement parties, have presented themselves to the electorate, they have all had one thing in common. They pledged to the Unionist electorate that

they would not sit in Government with those “inextricably linked” — to use the Prime Minister’s terms — to terrorist organisations, and they would not sit in Government with those who, by day, were sitting in the democratic body of the Assembly and, by day and night, were planning further acts of terror.

In the last European elections, people were clearly presented, by Dr Paisley and by Jim Nicholson, with the same message — that a vote for the Ulster Unionist candidate, or the vote for Dr Paisley and the DUP, was a vote on the issue of whether terrorists should be admitted to Government without prior decommissioning. The vote was also on the issue of the future of the RUC and the Union flag. The issues were the same in the last Westminster election, and the Assembly elections to this House.

Other Members have pointed out that the Ulster Unionist Party assured those that it was asking to trust with their vote that all of those matters were matters on which the Ulster Unionists would meet their election commitments.

A recent opinion poll was carried out at the request of the University of Ulster and the Queen’s University of Belfast by Colin Irwin. It is the only one that we can point to at the moment. In relation to a question on whether the Executive should be re-formed prior to the Ulster Unionist Party vote, the figures were quite revealing and are what I base my case on today.

Sixty-four per cent of Protestants and 29% of Catholics were of the view that there must be total decommissioning of paramilitary weapons before an Executive could be put in place. That decommissioning had to take place in its totality before Sinn Féin could be brought into an Executive. On whether there should be partial decommissioning, the figure increased in the Catholic community, with 45% saying that they required at least token decommissioning.

Mr Trimble does not represent the vast majority of people who voted for the Ulster Unionist Party. They did so, as Dr Paisley pointed out, on the basis of the additional pledges of the Prime Minister that no terrorists would be in Government, that there would be no continuation of the release of terrorists unless violence stopped for good, and, of course, that the Royal Ulster Constabulary would not be disbanded. Mr Trimble stands with the 2% of the Protestant or Unionist population who, according to this poll, believed that no decommissioning of paramilitary weapons was required before an Executive could be formed. That is the true figure that Mr Trimble represents when he stands here today and attempts to say that he is representing the Unionist community. Indeed, when one looks at whether the Catholic community in Northern Ireland would be happy with bringing unreconstructed terrorists

into the Government of Northern Ireland, the figure reached is no higher than 20%.

Despite the slur placed on those deemed to be anti-agreement, I say quite clearly that we are not the villains of the peace. Most of those have left the Assembly Chamber because they do not like to hear the truth. The reality is that those who have held this community to ransom, and who have terrorised and plagued it for 30 years, are to be found in the ranks of Sinn Féin/IRA represented by Mr Martin McGuinness and Mr Gerry Adams.

The corruption of this process, which is called a peace process, and the corruption of law and order that has taken place in this community to allow these people into the Government of Northern Ireland, has been encouraged by Mr Blair and his associates, Miss Mowlam and the current Secretary of State. They have helped Mr McGuinness and Mr Adams to bury their pasts and their past mistakes. I use that term because we are well aware that while these people sit in Government over those whom they terrorised, there are families in this Province whose mothers, fathers and other relatives are lying in unmarked graves, their lives brought to an untimely end by those who orchestrated violence — namely Mr Adams, the commander in charge of the Belfast brigade of the IRA on “bloody Friday” and Mr Martin McGuinness. Those two gentlemen were responsible for the deaths of 1,700 innocent victims in Northern Ireland. Yet today they are sitting in Government over the very people and community they terrorised. Who will speak for those people today? This process was designed to corrupt the democratic process. What else, of course —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I advise the Member that I will be scrutinising carefully some of the comments he has just made — they were rather particular in their nature.

**Mr C Wilson:** I am quite happy for you to do so, Mr Speaker. I look forward to any challenge to what I have said. My remarks echo what has been said over the years by political commentators and those who have written the history of Sinn Féin and the IRA.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member and other Members must understand, however, that, as I drew to a Member’s attention earlier, some things that are said outside may not be appropriate in a parliamentary Chamber. He needs to be careful that specific accusations, which may have been reported elsewhere, may not necessarily in their particulars be attributed so directly to other Members when they have not been proven in a court of law. That is why I advise the Member so, and other Members too.

**Mr C Wilson:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Of course, one —

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** This Chamber has complete immunity; it is a parliamentary Chamber. I have read the Act, and it has the same privilege and immunity as that of the House of Commons. If something is said that would be actionable outside the Chamber, that is just too bad for the person outside. They cannot take action about remarks so made.

**Mr Speaker:** I do not in any way dissent from what the Member has said about absolute privilege, but that does not mean that anything is within the bounds of parliamentary language. It was in that context that I urged caution on the part Mr C Wilson, but Dr Paisley is quite right on the question of absolute privilege.

**Mr C Wilson:** It was interesting to hear the First Minister commenting about the activities of Loyalist paramilitaries at Drumcree over the past few evenings. What else can one expect from a process that witnessed the former Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, emerging from a prison to inform the press that she had just spoken to two of the heroes of the peace process, “Johnny” and “Michael”? When the startled press asked who they were, she said that they were Johnny Adair and Michael Stone. Other Members have referred to these people as representatives of the Unionist community. Mr Stone and Mr Adair are on record as being supporters of the Belfast Agreement, and we hand that fact back to the First Minister.

I advise those in the Orange Order and the Unionist community to question whether these people who are masquerading and hijacking the protest at Drumcree, are there to support the cause, or whether they are there to undermine and destroy the cause. I appeal to people to have nothing to do with those who are destroying the cause. Our cause is just and right. We condemn the people in masks and with firearms — they do not represent the majority of people in the Unionist community.

We do not need to dwell in the past to examine the activities of Sinn Féin and the IRA — we can come right up to date. In Florida recently there have been ongoing court cases at the very time when the Sinn Féin/IRA movement was apparently on ceasefire. They were, indeed, shipping in guns for use in further acts of atrocity, murder and mayhem throughout our community, and if we come right up to date in terms of what has been happening in this Province, we are aware, of course, that Ed McCoy was shot dead, according to reliable information from the security forces, by Sinn Féin/IRA. The recent bomb at Ballymurphy was attributed, by those who know these things, to the Provisional IRA who were preparing to launch an attack on the RUC.

On behalf of my party — the Northern Ireland Unionist Party — I fully support the motion standing in the names of Rev Dr Ian Paisley and Mr Peter

Robinson, and I encourage all fellow Unionists to support this motion. It is a motion that is capable of being supported by all who believe in law and order and democracy.

**Mr Watson:** Before addressing the motion, I condemn unequivocally and without reservation the violence and destruction that has occurred in the last couple of days. I have to say, however, that it is understandable, given the frustration among the Protestant people who see everything being taken away at the behest of Republicans and nothing being given in return. If the First Minister, through his Chief of Staff, Bro David McNarry and others, had not openly encouraged principal district officers in Portadown to go against the advice of the County Grand Lodge Officers and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, then some of the mess that has unfolded there may not have done so.

I am reminded that the First Minister has already said that we have “a novel form of government”. Those words have been proved to be correct. Over the last 30 years we have witnessed the rape of democracy by Sinn Féin/IRA as it has pursued its onslaught of murder on our community. It even has the audacity to use the courts to its advantage to destroy this Province and remove all vestiges of everything British.

On the day of the referendum our Prime Minister, writing in the ‘News Letter’, said

“Representatives of parties intimately linked to paramilitary groups can only be in a future Northern Ireland Government if it is clear there would be no more violence and the threat of violence has gone. That does not just mean decommissioning, but all bombings, killings, beatings and an end to targeting, recruitment and all structures of terrorism.”

On 1 July 1998 Mr Trimble quoted from his party’s manifesto:

“Before any terrorist organisation and/or political wing can benefit from the proposals contained in the agreement on the release of terrorist prisoners and the holding of ministerial office in the Assembly, the commitment to exclusively peaceful and non-violent means must be established. The Ulster Unionist Party will be using various criteria that are objective, meaningful and verifiable to judge whether this is being achieved.”

He concluded that

“Ulster Unionists will not sit in Government with unreconstructed terrorists.”

On 9 November 1998 we were told by Mr Foster

“We need decommissioning now — not next week or next year.”

On 15 December 1998 he said

“Nothing is going to happen until there is decommissioning, and the UUP will keep its promises and will not be rushed into doing things that are not right.”

On the same day Mr Trimble told us that we would have to table a motion for the exclusion from office of those who had not begun the process of decommissioning.



Despite all this rhetoric we now have a Government in place.

In Mr Trimble's and my constituency of Upper Bann, there has never been any semblance of normality or a ceasefire. The lingering sore of 16 unresolved IRA murders since 1984 continues to fester and cause bitter resentment.

Of course, we have witnessed the intransigence of the Republicans in our own constituency, and that surely reflects the same impasse that we have experienced here over the last two years. They bay for parity of esteem but are not prepared to reciprocate. They insist on denying Protestants their civil and religious liberty. This has been part of an orchestrated campaign by Sinn Féin. When he was speaking to one of his Colleagues in the Chamber today Mr Adams was heard to say "We now have the Orange where we wanted them." This was said no longer ago than today.

4.00 pm

The May 2000 deadline was of no relevance, as we know, because there is no deadline that is binding on Sinn Féin — it only has to use its influence — and none at all on the IRA as it was not party to the Belfast deal.

Why will there be no decommissioning by the IRA? Simply because the leadership knows only too well that there is no consensus in its movement and that the mere discussion of this issue would be divisive and potentially disastrous. Therefore this entire process has been laid on a foundation of murder, bombings and terror. Selected bunkers have been opened for inspection, but those arsenals are all still intact and pointed at the law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland.

At no time has the IRA ever shown any remorse for its deeds. In no other democratic country in the world would there be terrorists in the Government. But, of course, what do we find here? We find one in the post of Minister of Education — and I am reminded that the Provisional IRA has, down through the years, murdered school teachers, school children, principals, students, others who work in schools and school-bus drivers. Many innocent victims have been murdered in the presence of young people and students. Millions of pounds have been wasted through damage to schools and universities by IRA bombs. There remains a crisis in education funding today, which could be attributed, in part, to the 30-year terrorist onslaught directed against us.

We look at what the Health Minister presides over and find that people are receiving attention after being hit around the head with baseball bats or having their hands nailed to planks of wood in crucifixion-style attacks, which can only be described as devilish and wicked in the extreme. This Minister provides funding for the treatment — rather ironic. As I have already

said, in no other democratic country in the world would we find terrorists in the Government, but here we find that democracy has been turned on its head so that we avoid another Canary Wharf bomb.

The motion is a simple one: we can either choose to exclude the political representatives of the most brutal killing machine in western Europe and take a stand for democracy, decency and justice, or allow them to remain in this Chamber with their stockpile of weaponry, which they have refused point-blank to decommission, outside the door, so that they can go back to doing what they do best. Therefore I say to all right-thinking Unionists in the Chamber that they should support the motion and oppose terrorists in Government until they hand over their arsenals.

I support the motion.

**Mr Ervine:** This debate on the exclusion of Sinn Féin seems, to a degree, to be about huffing and puffing. We all know that it will not be successful, and yet, as one Colleague has already said, there is perfect reason for airing such issues on the Floor of the House. We are airing this issue in the first week of July, against a backdrop of difficulty.

I can remember as a kid how I looked forward to the July holidays. I can remember a sense of innocence that existed, and I can remember a sense of joy. Now there are many people in my community who are dismayed as we approach July. But not all of them are dismayed; there are those vying for positions, who watch our society as it almost pulls itself apart, vying for positions, whether they be muscle-strapped paramilitarists strutting about Drumcree, or whether they be those who raise contentious issues such as the expulsion of Sinn Féin.

People like me are accused of being traitors. It would seem that we are wedded to, have a great affinity with and get on terribly well with Sinn Féin. That is what our opponents tell everyone.

Our political opponents know very well the background from which I come. For me, the price of being a traitor is not to get hit over the head with an umbrella at Scarva — the stuff I have to worry about moves at a higher velocity than that. But still they make the calls; still they loudly make the calls, and if those calls were to be believed then perhaps we would have someone here in my place, or in my Colleague's place. That is the reality. It may sound dramatic but it is an absolute reality.

Dr Paisley said the electorate would punish us. I am standing here ready, unashamed, and waiting for my punishment, because my quest is a quest for peace. I do not see anything wrong with that. I know that our society has come through great difficulty — I have seen the blood and the brains on the pavements. I have



buried members of my family, so the theory that somebody holds a monopoly on pain and suffering is nonsense. We have all gone through that pain.

The truth is that every peace process in the world will have its difficulties. There will be moderates who will have the vision, and there will be Neanderthals who will bite at the ankles of the visionary. That is the reality, and it is going on in peace processes across the world. People have to make a choice between the pain of dealing with those who they formerly fought with, or detested so much that they would have blown their heads off, what their children might have to go through, and whether there is an opportunity for a future where we can say “it is worth a try.” That is the issue. And if I am someone from the shadows — and while I am not taking too much flak today because we are not just yet ready to take positions in Government — the truth is, of course, that what you say of Sinn Féin and the IRA you mean of me.

Cedric Wilson made it very clear and the DUP has made it very clear that nothing has changed. But that is nothing new. Nothing in paramilitary life has ever changed. You stand up; you do what you believe you are being exalted to do, and then once you have done it you are condemned by those who exalted you. Nothing has changed. It never changed and it will not change for the new brand of UFF that we are seeing on Drumcree hill. It will not change for the new brand of LVF, Red Hand Defenders or Orange Volunteers — and, by the way, if they did not exist someone would have to create them. Oh, sorry, somebody did. The reality is that nothing new is coming from the grand democrats.

But let us measure what we are facing, and what we have to gain, against what we have to lose. Any war must end. Any piece of violence or conflagration must end. In any conflagration there is the first attack and the last — and how tragic it must be to lose someone at the last. Nevertheless, it has to end, and who is it that has to end it? Usually, around the world, it is politicians — not so Northern Ireland. The soldiers had to go to the other soldiers and say “get out of the trenches, we have had enough.” That is what happened. You will excuse me calling them soldiers. It is just a badge of identification for those who have fought and died for what they believe in. They may not be the constituted soldiers that some of you would like, but, nevertheless, that is how they are defined in their own community. The soldiers said, “Hey, the politicians will never end this, come on.” That is what happened.

Had we waited for constitutional politicians to move together, to have proper and reasonable dialogue with each other in order that the violence of our society might end and our children would get a chance, we would have waited for a very, very, very, very long time. That is the truth of the matter.

Whether or not I like Sinn Féin is not the issue. The issue is whether I would like my grandchildren to grow up in a society that has a chance of normality. And I believe the risk is worth taking. I am asked all the time what is it like to sit beside Martin McGuinness — I was asked it when I was on television the other night. Well, you get used to it. But it was not specifically something that I could have said a few years ago, because all of us have our sense of difficulty with all of these things, and I imagine that there are some of them who have their difficulties with my Colleague and me.

In Northern Ireland today we face more hype than danger. The situation is not perfect, but then there is no such thing as a perfect peace — that is an inscription you put on a headstone. That is a reality. There is greater hype than danger. The IRA has abandoned its anti-partitionist stance. The IRA, so far as we can tell, has abandoned the armed struggle. *[Interruption]*

**A Member:** Do you believe that?

**Mr Ervine:** At least I am trying to find out. *[Interruption]* Whether it has or has not, I see it cowering, absolutely cowering, under the ranks of rolled-up DUP manifestos that have it shattered and frightened.

**Mr Boyd** *rose.*

**Mr Speaker:** You have a point of order, Mr Boyd?

**Mr Boyd:** Mr Speaker, will you direct the Member to speak through the Chair.

**Mr Speaker:** If I were strict as to whether Members spoke through the Chair, I would be off my own chair on a rather regular basis. *[Interruption]* At least, however, the Member has not used the word “You” to accuse the Chair of any other things. That does happen from time to time. The point is, nevertheless, well taken for all Members.

**Mr Ervine:** That interruption by the Krankies — oh well.

We do not have perfection, or anywhere near it. It also seems clear to me that it is extremely popular in my community to tell people what you think they want to hear. Of course there is a detestation of Sinn Féin and the IRA. There is a serious detestation. But what do we do — feed on that? Do we try to change the circumstances of this society? I advocate that we change the circumstances of this society, and in trying to do so, there are risks. I and members of my party take those risks every day. Two members of my party have died this year alone, specifically in relation to the arguments over “yes” or “no” and the propensity of those in the “no” camp on the paramilitary side to facilitate their lifestyles by the sale of drugs.

Whatever our feelings about the paramilitary groups of today, or the new paramilitary groups of today, those groups exist Loyalist and Republican. Those groups consist of grandfather, father and son and they will not easily be got rid of, but we must try, as best we can, to get rid of them incrementally, slowly but surely. We must give them a stake in society, a sense that there is a different way than the way that they previously did things. One might argue that the Republican movement could have given some consideration and stopped fuelling the extremes within Loyalism and Unionism. It cannot be right that, in their attempts in the past to cover up the fact that there is no united Ireland, to cover up the fact that partition has been accepted, to make things easy for themselves, the Republicans have been comfortable — *[Interruption]* I am finishing now if I may. Let me finish.

**Mr Speaker:** The time is up. *[Interruption]* I am keeping very tight to the time for everybody.

**Ms McWilliams:** I have a sense of déjà vu about today's motion. Not very long ago, in this Chamber, we were having a discussion about the fact that after that day's debate had finished, we were due to go to a Business Committee meeting upstairs, and a comment was made about the facilities provided upstairs. I remember very well that Mr Sammy Wilson of the DUP interjected, saying that he would never sit down with a woman upstairs and that he would never sit down with Sinn Féin upstairs. Not only has the DUP been sitting down with Sinn Féin upstairs in the Business Committee, but it has since progressed to all of the other Committees and then into the Government, and there it stayed. I call that progress. One could be reminded of Mahatma Ghandi's famous words "First they ignore you," — and I should remember this, particularly from my time in the Forum — "then they ridicule you, then they fight you, and then you win."

Winning sometimes has a different connotation to the winning which I should like — the realisation that we are all in this together. Continuing to protect one's own patch and see failure as a loss of one's power, influence, and domination — as something one does not want to be part of — is long gone in Northern Ireland. The consensus style of politics eventually created, not a demand for surrender, but a demand for us to work together.

4.15 pm

Naomi Chazan, who, as the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, should know more about this than anyone, recently visited Stormont. She said there are four things that can destroy any process: fear, fatigue, friction, and failure. I said before that we have interrupted the culture of failure. Friction is not necessarily an unhealthy thing, but when it creates fatigue and, more importantly, the

politics of fear rather than hope, it begins to destroy people. That is what we shall not let happen.

Let me say a little about the hypocrisy I have witnessed at first hand during this process. Perhaps it was useful that Dr Paisley interjected to remind us that it is too bad if one says something in a parliamentary process. I feel one ought to take more responsibility when naming individuals, particularly when their lives are at risk and that it is more than simply "too bad" when that happens. Nevertheless, I do not wish to be in the politics of naming and shaming, but the politics of shaping and framing. However, I shall name. Before the Good Friday Agreement and the IRA's statement about opening up its arms dumps to inspection, those who said that they were always against dialogue with Sinn Féin — the Jeffrey Donaldsons of this world — were sitting down with its members in peace seminars in Salzburg. None of us ever stated this, for we thought it helpful and useful for that to happen. Speaking about it would lead backwards rather than forwards. There have been many silences in order to protect this process.

However, the day has come for us to stand up and be counted and expose the level of hypocrisy. Not only are people sitting together in Committees, but they are also speaking together. Members of the DUP and those who have added their names as petitioners and made up the 30 are doing what we would always have wanted them to do. They have been sharing jokes and having a merry old time with other members of those Committees. It must be placed on the record that we are talking not only of these Members sitting alongside Sinn Féin members, but of their sharing in decisions and in the creation of policies. Long may it continue.

**Mr Wells:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The hon Member for South Belfast is making very serious allegations against those who put their name to this motion. She should do the honourable thing and be specific about what she is talking about and name those she believes to be doing this, for I can give an absolute, categorical assurance that none of our party has been involved.

**Mr Speaker:** The dilemma in my responding to your point of order is that I have of course only recently pointed out the inappropriateness of naming Members regarding specific accusations, since it frequently falls outside what is parliamentary and acceptable. The Member would be in a dilemma were she to follow my ruling on the previous arrangement only to find me making a different and unparliamentary ruling as you request.

**Mr Maskey:** Since we are talking about naming people, I wonder if the Member would be at all surprised to hear that Roger Hutchinson, for example, tortured Francie Molloy and myself halfway through last year with his pleading to try to save this Assembly,

while at the same time telling us not to let anyone from his party see him, since his constituency would roast him. That is some of the hypocrisy of Mr Hutchinson.

**Ms McWilliams:** Some Members have already said that this is a timely debate, but I think, for two reasons, that it is very untimely. I was very disappointed to hear one Member who is in favour of this motion, condemning the violence of last night and then going on to say that it is understandable. I can understand the reasons for people embarking on a course of civil disobedience, but I can never, ever understand, nor could I ever justify, what has been going on during the past few nights. I am extremely concerned when I hear people who are prepared to support this motion seeming to have no problem whatsoever in allying themselves with that kind of behaviour. Such actions cost us dearly in lives and in money.

Enormous demands have been made, and rightly so, during this process for us to begin to work across our differences and with our differences. Why is it always that those who tabled this motion, moved this motion, and will vote for this motion have made the highest demands of the agreement that they are so very opposed to?

I take some heart from comments made after Senator Mitchell's review. Both the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Féin produced statements on 16 November. Sinn Féin stated

"We are totally opposed to any use of force, or threat of force by others for any political purpose. We are also totally opposed to punishment attacks".

It may never be enough, as our agreement was never enough, simply to write down the words. But all of us together must take action to ensure that it stops.

That is the second reason for my considering this debate untimely: it is eating into the recess when we could be in Committees producing policies and making decisions about the protection of our young people. The Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee attempted to do so today at 1.00 pm, but it had to finish by 2.00 pm to enable us to engage in this debate. That is the kind of action that I entered the Assembly to take, not to wallow in the nostalgia of some perfect past.

David Ervine and I visited the war graves in Palestine last week and saw on a headstone "Peace, perfect peace". It is sad that it is written on a gravestone. I constantly make the point to those who feel that perfect peace is going to come out of the air and appear in front of us that they ought to start committing themselves to some course of action to ensure that, imperfect as it is, the process will continue. Anyone who remembers what we have come through in the last 30 years knows that we have come a long way. We may only be managing this conflict, but we have begun to transform it. One day we may resolve it, and then maybe we will begin to talk

about the kind of perfect peace that some people, who simply fire a motion into the system, seem to feel that they will gain as a result.

Finally, if this motion is about exclusion, I will certainly vote against it. The main principle brought to the negotiations, one which we have stayed with ever since, was the principle of the politics of inclusion. Let us disagree about the past. We may even be suspicious about the future, but with all the parties, pro- and anti-Agreement, we can build a framework for that future.

**Mr McCartney:** I support this motion, not because I am a Unionist, not because I am a member of the reformed faith — or, as some would say, a Protestant — I support it because I am a democrat. I know of no institution of government anywhere in the world that claims to have the slightest semblance of democracy, that includes in its Executive arm representatives of a political party inextricably linked with an armed terrorist group determined to remain armed. When Monica McWilliams talks on about the importance of sitting in her Committee, she entirely ignores the fact that she can do so only because the most fundamental principle of democratic government is being trampled underfoot by the threat of violence. That is the position.

It is sad that there are only two Members of the SDLP and virtually no Members of the pro-agreement Ulster Unionist Party present in the Chamber at this stage. In reality, this Assembly has become, in democratic terms, a slum. It is a slum, because the fundamental principles of democracy that would have made it an honourable institution are missing. Terror and the threat of terror have created it; it is being maintained by terror and the threat of terror; and if it falls, it will have been because terror has not been satisfied.

Let me turn to some of the remarks that have been made today, principally by Mr Pat Doherty. He talked about hypocrisy and alleged hypocrisy. There was one person he did not mention as being involved, in any circumstances, in any of this hypocrisy, and it was myself. I have never ever been accused by Sinn Féin, the SDLP or by any branch of Nationalism of being either sectarian or bigoted, but I am a democrat, and, as a democrat, I have no objection to Republicans or Nationalists putting forward their view for the future, provided they do so on a democratic basis. I have a total and absolute aversion to participating in any shape or form, either in Committees or in any other way, with the representatives of thugs and gangsters.

Three Sinn Féin Members of the Assembly have been publicly identified, in the national press and by members of the security forces, as being members of the seven-man IRA Army Council, with whom that party is inextricably linked. It is common knowledge that all the



highest offices in both organisations, Sinn Féin and the IRA, are held by the same people.

Let me now turn to this piece of rhetorical gobbledegook and nonsense known as the IRA peace statement, including the alleged confidence-building measure. Monica McWilliams talks about peace, but the very first paragraph of this statement sets out the terms under which Sinn Féin/IRA will permit us to have lasting peace in Northern Ireland. You can have lasting peace provided the causes of the conflict are removed, provided Northern Ireland is wiped off the map, provided the British withdraw from Northern Ireland — whatever that may mean, whether that means the pro-Union population, or merely the British Army — and when partition is ended. Everything else in that statement is conditional on that opening paragraph.

The second paragraph dealing with the glorious Belfast Agreement, an agreement obtained by forgery, fraud and deceit, by an overwhelming public-money subscription to the processes of propaganda, by a supine press and media, which instead of preserving the integrity of the fourth estate and being objective reporters and impartial examiners of public policy, became cheerleaders for a Government-inspired policy. That is how the Belfast Agreement was arrived at.

4.30 pm

What do we find in the second paragraph of the IRA statement? We find that the IRA considers that the Belfast Agreement provides the political context in an ongoing process that provides the potential for the removal of the causes of conflict. In other words, it views it, as it has very fairly and publicly stated, as a transitional process to a United Ireland. As long as the British Government guarantee that they will continue in that transitional mode, the IRA will continue moving to its objective of Irish unity. It will keep its guns silent, but it will not dispense with them, and it will not destroy them. Only when that agreement has been implemented in full, according to Sinn Féin/IRA specifications, will it consider putting the weapons beyond use. It does not propose, for example, in putting the weapons beyond use, to adopt either of the schemes in Gen de Chastelain's operations — destruction or dumping. It will then talk about putting the weapons verifiably beyond use. At that point, if the political objective has been achieved and Ireland is united, if Sinn Féin has seats in the Dáil in a coalition with Fianna Fáil, if it has places in government — North and South — what need will there be for the weapons? Of course they can be dispensed with then.

To describe the confidence-building measure as a macabre political joke is to give it the benefit of language it does not deserve. A limited number of dumps are to be chosen by Sinn Féin/IRA, the contents are to be designated by Sinn Féin/IRA, and they are to

be inspected in secret by two members of other Governments approved by the IRA. Those dumps will remain fully in the control of the IRA and will represent only a tiny fraction of its total arsenal, which will remain immediately available should it be needed. This peace process is driven by the principle of appeasement.

Immediately after the joint declaration of December 1993 the then Prime Minister, John Major, made a speech to the nation. He said that the only people who could give peace were the men of violence and that they could give that peace in two ways — they could either be suppressed or appeased. It was decided to appease them, and the British Government have appeased them ever since, for one reason — to keep the bombs out of the City of London. That is the driving political imperative for this whole rotten process, including this Assembly, which is an empty sop to the pro-Union people. It has neutralised them politically in terms of their majority. It fractures and violates every principle of democratic government. It is a transitional process. Like the mule, it has no pride of ancestry and no hope of posterity. That is what this Assembly is.

As Mr Doherty said, the Nationalist community has given his party a mandate, but no people, no party can have a mandate to do wrong. That was established by the Nuremberg trials in 1946, which said that even though the Nationalist Socialist Party had been elected on a overwhelming popular mandate, its representatives were not entitled to murder six million Jews and commit other acts of violence. The same principle applies to Sinn Féin. It has no business being here and it ought to be removed.

**Mr Dodds:** The motion has been tabled by those who believe that apologists for gunmen should have no place in government. The vote this evening will be a test for every Member of the House. Do they want a Government involving IRA/Sinn Féin or a Government who are exclusively and totally committed to peaceful and democratic means?

We have been castigated about stunts. What greater political stunt is there than the empty Benches of our political opponents? Having run away from their electoral manifesto commitments, they are now running away from the argument. Beaten in the argument, they cannot stay to hear the debate and face the music. The debate clearly shows, as the vote will show, that the majority of Unionists in the House do not agree with Sinn Féin/IRA being in government. One of David Trimble's main policies in allowing Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, the representatives of gunmen, to be in government is not supported by the majority of Unionists in the elected Northern Ireland Assembly. Indeed, it is not supported by the vast majority of the Unionists outside the House.

Secondly, the vote will demonstrate that there is no cross-community support for David Trimble or for



Seamus Mallon to be First and Deputy First Ministers. They require 50% plus one of the votes of the House. I challenge them, if they are so confident, to resign their posts and put themselves forward for re-election. When the Assembly was reconvened Mr Mallon went through the charade of pretending that he had not resigned, rather than putting the matter to the vote. Such honour. We are lectured about morality, honour, honesty and truth, yet, the proponents of the agreement are not prepared to go through the democratic process because they know that they do not have support in the House.

Mr Trimble spent 80% of his time attacking the DUP and other anti-agreement Unionists. Mr Seamus Close — Mr two per cent of the vote in the Alliance Party — spent his time attacking the Unionists in the House. The smaller parties once again allowed themselves to be used as fodder for the main pro-agreement parties. *[Interruption]*.

As the Member said, they are nodding dogs. The reality is that, rather than attacking Sinn Féin/IRA for what it is doing in the streets in murdering and maiming, some Members prefer to attack democrats. They prefer to attack the Unionists who are simply using the procedures of the House in a perfectly democratic and legitimate way. Indeed, the procedure — the means by which we are debating this motion — was inserted in the agreement and in the legislation by the pro-agreement parties, who now have the audacity to talk about it as some sort of political stunt. Talk about hypocrisy.

Mr Trimble and the Ulster Unionists censure and attack DUP Ministers. Of course, they will censure and attack all of us for taking the stand that we do. However, not a word was said to Sinn Féin/IRA about its refusal to fly the national flag or to support the RUC, nothing was said about the murder of Ed McCoy, the gun-running in Florida or the bombing in Ballymurphy at Glenalena Crescent when clearly the IRA was involved.

Dr Paisley mentioned the maimings. Between 1 January and 11 June this year there were 111 paramilitary attacks, 21 Republican shootings and 24 Republican assaults. During this time there was a fully stocked IRA arsenal at the behest of IRA/Sinn Féin. However, not a word was said to Sinn Féin. There was no censure from Mr Trimble. There were no attacks from the Ulster Unionist Party or its colleagues in government. There were plenty of attacks on those of us who are standing by our electoral manifesto commitments and doing what we pledged to do in the Assembly.

Let us look at the issue of decommissioning. We were told that there would be no cherry-picking in the Belfast Agreement, but what happened to 22 May deadline? Mr McGimpsey lectured us when the Assembly was suspended, saying that unless something

happened by 22 May and all weapons were disposed of, everything would come crashing down. What happened to that deadline? It was arbitrarily and totally dismissed. Talk about cherry-picking. That fundamental aspect of the agreement was simply set aside, but the people were not consulted. It was never put to a vote. We now have in its place a deal that allows Sinn Féin/IRA to be in government. There are no guns up front, nor is there a requirement to hand in guns at any time.

In 'The Times' of 9 May Michael Gove put it accurately when he said

"There is no commitment to the destruction of any weaponry, no commitment to tell anyone just what was in [the IRA] arsenal, no commitment [by the IRA] to open anything other than a few of what could be very many arms dumps, and no commitment not to use any of its weapons again. Anyone who thinks this is decommissioning, as defined by this Government for so long, deserves to be committed themselves."

That is the situation. At the time of the Hillsborough deal Mr Trimble said

"This statement raises more questions than it answers."

He never got any answers to his questions. He said that we need to know what "beyond use" actually means. Of course, he did get the answer, but he got it from Tony Blair, and that satisfied him. Mr Blair said in the House of Commons that he believed there still had to be decommissioning and permanently putting beyond use, but what use are the words of Tony Blair? Have we not learnt by now that his promises and pledges are totally and absolutely worthless? There was no word from P O'Neill or from the IRA, but Mr Trimble was so eager to get back into Government with Sinn Féin/IRA that he grasped those words, meaningless as they are and without any certainty, timetable or clarity.

We are told that progress is being made. Mr Trimble asks what the DUP has achieved. Of course, we have been honest. We have said throughout that there will never be any handing over or decommissioning by the IRA. What has Mr Trimble done? What is this confidence-building measure? We have two gentlemen, one of whom spoke recently at a Sinn Féin/IRA rally in west Belfast. The other, who claims to have been down in the dumps inspecting IRA arms, can hardly get up Downing Street. This is certainly a confidence-building measure for IRA gunmen. They will be very confident, knowing that all their guns are nicely, safely and securely stored in dumps down south and given legitimacy by the Irish Republic. They are now protected; nobody is to go near them, to touch them or do anything with them without the say-so of the IRA.

The two gentlemen concerned did not tell us, or perhaps they do not know, how many arms dumps there are. They did not tell us, or perhaps they do not know, what percentage of the arms is actually contained in these dumps. Perhaps they were not told — and we

certainly were not told — where these dumps are. Gen de Chastelain, who we were told is the guarantor of this process, was not even involved. He was simply told. Crucially, these dumps and the IRA weaponry within are still under the total control of the IRA. They can go back to using their weaponry whenever they choose. On 10 May Dennis Kennedy wrote in *‘The Irish Times’*

“The so-called confidence-building measure proposed by the IRA for the independent inspection of a number ... of arms dumps is meaningless in terms of the decommissioning of illegally-held weapons, and indeed is of much greater significance in terms of recognition of the IRA’s right to hold those arms.”

That is the reality of the situation. Mr Trimble tells us that this is a first step, but Bertie Ahern let the cat out of the bag. He said that this is the successful end of the process. This is as good as it gets. There is going to be no more handover of weapons. In the meantime people can be murdered, maimed, threatened and intimidated.

Martin McGuinness and Bairbre de Brún are in government, doing as they please, as we said they would. They refuse to fly the national flag or co-operate with the police, and nothing is done about it. This process does not mean decommissioning in any shape or form. I recall the words of a gentleman who said, back in January when this proposal to put arms beyond use was first floated,

“There is a lot of silly talk. The only thing that matters is the scheme. The scheme refers to destruction.”

That is quite right. Who said it? It was Mr David Trimble on 14 January this year. What did this silly talk refer to? The idea that weapons could be permanently inaccessible, rather than destroyed, and put in secure underground bunkers — the very thing that he has now settled for.

Many Ulster Unionist Members will try to run away from the vote by abstaining. They lack the courage to come here and vote for what they agreed at Hillsborough. What does it say to their colleagues and partners in Government when they are not prepared to vote publicly and openly for what they agreed in the Hillsborough deal? At the same time they deliberately refuse to vote to exclude IRA/Sinn Féin although while they are content to attack the DUP and other Unionists. There is a clear choice in this debate — a vote for the IRA or against the IRA. There is no neutral or abstentionist ground.

4.45 pm

**Mr Hussey:** I support the motion. I realise that there may be a quixotic-type element to the motion. Mr Alban Maginness argued that the motion is doomed to failure. Unfortunately, it is doomed to failure by the inaction of the SDLP to uphold democratic principles and to work with the constitutional parties in this Chamber.

My rationale in this debate will differ from that of other Members taking part, and I hope that Members will respect that. Members will know that I am not an anti-agreement Unionist. My understanding of the Belfast Agreement was that there would be pain and gain for all involved in the process. It was on that basis that I reluctantly gave my support to the agreement. However, at the same time, I hope that all will recognise that I have been consistent on where my bottom line lay — the major gain that I understood would be forthcoming from the Republican movement. The progressive removal of its arsenal of terror from our society was to have been completed by 22 May last.

It was the IRA murder of a very close friend that persuaded me to enter local politics. Over the years so many people in my locality have been placed in an early grave by Republicans. I believe that the cycle of terror, murder, violence and community upheaval for political ideology has to end, and the means of its continuance have to be removed from society. I found one of Mr Close’s sentences very interesting. In it he said “if permanent peace were established”. That lets us know that Mr Close does not believe that there is a permanent peace.

The first item on my personal manifesto for election to this House was, and remains, the demand that to be acceptable in Executive positions requires a beginning to actual decommissioning. Members will know that it was on this issue that I asked to be relieved of my Deputy Whip duties in my party group last November and further, that I opposed a return to this Assembly after suspension.

To broaden the issue slightly, I personally have no problem with the establishment of cross-border bodies for the mutual benefit of our people. Indeed, I represent my district council on a cross-border body, and I believe that it is wrong not to have Unionist voices in such bodies. Indeed, as I look round a rather depleted House, I recognise Members present whom I have seen at various cross-border events, initiatives and conferences. Further, I have no problem with inclusive power-sharing institutions of Government for Northern Ireland, but those in Executive positions in such an Administration must be clearly adhering to normal democratic credentials.

IRA/Sinn Féin constantly refers to its electoral mandate. This electoral mandate has been recognised. Its Members sit in Assembly seats and take positions on the various Assembly Committees, together with representatives of other parties. This enables them to represent their constituents and to fulfil their electoral mandate. However, without a verified beginning to actual decommissioning, how can we accept that there is a proper fulfilment of the normal democratic credentials that are a necessary prerequisite to Executive responsibility?

I contend that the Ulster Unionist Party has fully, sincerely and painfully adhered to the requirements of the Belfast Agreement, while IRA/Sinn Féin has failed, so far, to live up to its side of the agreement. Mention was made of the IRA statement. That statement regarding the placing of some arms in some dumps with regular inspection is I believe, only a blocking measure to decommissioning as established by the requirements of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997.

I further believe that the present situation offers nothing more than the immorally titillating offer of the prospect, perhaps, of Republicans turning their backs on terrorism with the eventual possible decommissioning of their armoury and maybe the dismantling of their military wing. Republicans continue to prevaricate on whether or not they are prepared to become democrats in any normally accepted interpretation of the term. The Republican movement has had ample time to decide in which way it is prepared to go.

Ulster Unionists have not cherry-picked the agreement. Why should Republicans be allowed to do so continually? Let us see a beginning to actual decommissioning. Let us see an end to ongoing murderous and criminal activities. Let us see proper reciprocation from IRA/Sinn Féin on its side of the agreement.

I am reminded, as I close, of some words from the Secretary of State when he said that Northern Ireland would become a byword for political failure unless we make the agreement work. Maybe Mr Mandelson should consider the failure of our Westminster Government to ensure that democrats could move on without unrepentant terrorists, as promised by our Prime Minister. Whose failure was Mr Mandelson addressing? Sinn Féin does not enjoy my confidence.

I support the motion.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** My Colleague from North Belfast has correctly said that the hour of decision has now arrived in the Assembly. The Assembly will be taking a crucial vote tonight. It will decide whether this House wishes to continue with the armed representatives of mass thuggery in the Government of Northern Ireland, or whether it wants to take a step in the direction of democracy and expel those people from the Government. It is likely that the former decision will be taken.

Let it be made clear that this House will be taking a decision that does not have the confidence of the majority of the Unionist people's representatives. It will not have the blessing of Members of my party, or of Members of the so-called negative anti-agreement parties, but following, as I do, the speech from the Member for West Tyrone, it will not have the blessing

of the majority of Unionists in this House tonight. That message must be heard across Northern Ireland and be in every Member's heart as he leaves the Chamber this evening.

We could stand here and bandy about section 30 of the Northern Ireland Act which says that no one should be involved in the Government of Northern Ireland who is not committed to non-violence. We could bandy around the Code of Conduct and the Pledge of Office contained in the Belfast Agreement. The issue is, as the proverbial dogs in the street know, that Sinn Féin/IRA is not fit to be in the Government of Northern Ireland. Indeed, its pathetic rebuttal of our motion today is the clearest possible indication, and its absence from the House is not about contempt for the DUP. Yes, it would like the media to think that. Neither is its absence about contempt for "No" parties or about any contempt it may have for me. Sinn Féin/IRA's absence reflects the fact that it has run out of arguments to defend its now indefensible position. It does not have the courage or the neck or the ability to come here and argue its position.

Abraham Lincoln said that what is morally wrong can never be politically right. The reality is that it is morally wrong to put gunmen into any institution of Government. We could never, even with the best advocate in the world, produce one argument in favour of its being politically right to put those people in the Government of Northern Ireland.

It is little wonder we see violence on our streets today and saw violence on our streets last night. The Assembly, like it or not, has sent out the message to thugs across Northern Ireland that violence pays. It is little wonder that people are marching up and down streets burning cars and buses when the message to them is that their vote is worthless but their violence might be noticed. After all, it was the violence of others that propelled them into the Government of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist party leader came to the House today and attempted to sell dodgy merchandise. He came to the House as an advocate for Sinn Féin/IRA. Sinn Féin put up a pathetic rebuttal, but after that pathetic rebuttal it got Mr Trimble to be its lawyer and advocate its case. Indeed, he attempted to do that. Mr Trimble's rebuttal was not only pathetic, but it represented the pathetic state that he, the leader of a majority party in Northern Ireland, has found himself in. Did people elect him to be the mouthpiece of Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin? Did people elect his party to stand behind Sinn Féin and protect it? I do not think so. But that is exactly what he did in the Chamber today.

Trimble, for all his self-proclaimed legal skills, his self-adulation, his knowledge and so-called depth, either did not check the small print before signing up to the



agreement and to the Hillsborough Agreement, or he got so distracted in checking the commas and the semicolons that he missed the point of what he was doing — propelling terrorists into Government. Mr Trimble forgot that possession is nine tenths of the law. Now he has given members of IRA/Sinn Féin possession of Government offices. Look at the difficulty that we, the majority representatives, are facing in trying to get those people out — a difficulty of Mr Trimble's making.

I am not surprised by Mr Trimble's position here today. After all he has argued at least six different positions already on decommissioning. First of all in 1994 the Ulster Unionist Party declared that it would require total decommissioning from the Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin before it could even enter talks. Less than a year later the party took a second position, reducing its requirement under the Washington Three principle and requiring IRA decommissioning only to start before Sinn Féin could enter the political process.

Then position three in 1996 was that the party had to accept the Mitchell compromise, which required decommissioning to take place alongside the political talks. Position four came in 1998. The party had signed up to the Belfast Agreement, in which all participants reaffirmed their commitment to total disarmament, and decommissioning would take place by May of this year. Position five came in November 1999 when the party was asked to change its policy again to allow the Executive to be established on the understanding that decommissioning would follow shortly after. When it did not follow we reached the latest position — position six — the one that says that the IRA's arms are now beyond use and Mr Trimble's greasy stranglehold on Sinn Féin will eventually squeeze from it more concessions on this issue.

The Ulster Unionist position on the issue of putting armed, unrepentant terrorists into the Government of Northern Ireland has not slipped once or changed twice — it has altered, six times, in total, while Sinn Féin's position has remained rock solid. Shame on those Unionists who have allowed this to happen.

There are normally 18 perfectly good reasons sitting under that Gallery for Sinn Féin's not being in the Government of Northern Ireland. But tonight they have run away.

5.00 pm

Sinn Féin is not fit to be in the Government in Northern Ireland, not because of its terrorism in the past, but because of its continuing terrorism.

What is the curriculum vitae of the Minister of Education? Between 1971 and 1973 he was the officer who commanded the IRA's Derry brigade and was responsible for destroying more than 150 of the city's shops, leaving only 20 trading. His CV goes on: in 1973

he was arrested in Donegal, close to a car filled with a 250lb bomb and 500 rounds of ammunition, and was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. The following year he was arrested and charged with membership of the Provisional IRA for which he was imprisoned in Belfast's Crumlin Road jail in 1976. His ignoble past continues.

In 1998 he said that he would never apologise to anyone for supporting the Provisional IRA. As was mentioned earlier, as a Minister in the Government of Northern Ireland, he advocated that people should not help the police to catch the Omagh bombers. Is that the example that we want to give to the people of this country? Is he the sort of person who should be running a Department? If so, shame on this House; shame on the so-called democratic process; shame on democracy.

**Mr Roche:** The motion to expel Sinn Féin/IRA from the Executive has the support of every law-abiding citizen in Northern Ireland who is genuinely committed to democracy. Sinn Féin/IRA is committed to terrorism, not merely as a means of securing its political objective of Irish unity, but as an end in itself.

Patrick Pearse is the fountain head of the so-called Irish Republican movement. Pearse's political outlook was based on the morally disgusting philosophy that bloodshed is cleansing and sanctifying. The Members of Sinn Féin/IRA are the political offspring of Pearse. The so-called Republican movement is responsible for the murders of 2,140 people and the injury of about 30,000 people in the past 30 years of Sinn Féin/IRA terrorism. Such terrorism was driven not by a legitimate political objective, but by nothing more commendable than deep-rooted sectarian hatred.

By the early 1990s, Sinn Féin/IRA was on the edge of defeat by the RUC. That should be put firmly on the record. It was decisively documented in Jack Holland's recently published 'Hope Against History'. The position has been turned around by the implementation of the Belfast Agreement, and the Patten report will systematically destroy the RUC, contrary to the assurances that Mr Trimble and Mr Taylor gave to the previous Ulster Unionist council meeting.

Two members of Sinn Féin/IRA, assisted by a convicted murderer, now form part of the Executive that governs the law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland without the surrender of a single bullet to lawful authority. The recent so-called inspection of three arms dumps is not a step towards decommissioning; it is the de facto legitimisation by the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic, of the retention by Sinn Féin/IRA of a terrorist arsenal, while two of its members hold seats on the Executive. The so-called inspection is the very opposite of a step towards decommissioning. That is what Mr Trimble and those



who support him have signed, sealed and delivered to the Unionist citizens of Northern Ireland.

One of Mr Trimble's advisers recently described the UUP leader to me as a strategic genius who had wrong-footed both the SDLP and Sinn Féin/IRA. The UUP leader has retreated from every strategic position that he has adopted since negotiations began in 1996 and, in the process, he has conceded to Nationalists virtually everything of significance that is necessary for the maintenance of the Union.

Mr Trimble, I need hardly tell this Assembly, is no strategic genius. The UUP leadership has conceded a form of government for Northern Ireland that is an affront to common decency. Why is that the case? The answer is very simple. There is no book written about the Provisional IRA that does not mention Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness as the leaders of that terrorist organisation. But what precisely is attributed to them in that capacity?

David Sharrock and Mark Davenport, on page 108 of their book, 'Man of War, Man of Peace,' state categorically that in July 1972 Gerry Adams was responsible for the discipline and the day-to-day running of the entire Belfast brigade of the Provisional IRA and that he was among those who planned "bloody Friday". To my knowledge, this claim by Sharrock and Davenport has never been legally contested by Gerry Adams despite the fact that the allegation associates him with one of the most morally outrageous acts of the twentieth century.

The same considerations apply to Martin McGuinness. On 24 October 1990 Patrick Gillespie was blown to bits as a human bomb at Coshquin. The bomb was detonated by the IRA while Mr Gillespie was strapped into the driver's seat. According to Jack Holland in his book 'Hope Against History' Martin McGuinness was the "overall commander" of the Derry Provisionals who were responsible for this "act of total barbarity." Dr Edward Daly stated that the use of Patrick Gillespie as a "human bomb" marked "a new threshold of evil for the IRA" — and that was as recent as 1990.

Jack Holland states, on page 132 of his book, that under Martin McGuinness "the Derry active service units had devastated the city, reducing its downtown area to streets of bombed and boarded-up buildings", — a point that has just been made. He also states that the Derry Provisionals, under the leadership of McGuinness, had "also been among the first to carry out a ruthless murder campaign against off-duty UDR men."

One of the victims of that ruthless campaign was a 10-year old child killed on 8 February 1978 when an IRA booby-trap bomb exploded beneath her father's car. The bomb killed the child, her father and badly injured her young brother. The children were being taken to

school by their father who was a part-time member of the UDR. It is totally unacceptable that individuals with this type of record should be in a democratic Assembly never mind in an Executive regardless of what mandate they claim to have.

This is a moment of truth for any party in the Assembly that claims to be committed to the practice of democracy. The SDLP has long ago failed the test of commitment to democracy. The virtual absence — now total — of SDLP participation in this debate demonstrates its contempt for democracy. Under the leadership of Mr Hume and Mr Mallon the SDLP is indistinguishable from Sinn Féin/IRA. The SDLP is, at this very moment, giving unqualified support to Sinn Féin/IRA in relation to the holding of a terrorist arsenal while two members of Sinn Féin/IRA are in the Executive.

**Mr Paisley Jnr:** For the record of this House, while the SDLP Benches are empty the bar is full.

**Mr Roche:** That is well worth putting on the record. It is remarkable that Mr Hume and Mr Mallon are so committed to supporting Sinn Féin/IRA that they are prepared to see the demise of the SDLP due to the political creditability they have given to Sinn Féin/IRA. Mr Trimble has claimed that this debate is irresponsible. The political irresponsibility lies with Mr Trimble. The UUP leadership has broken every election pledge that his party has made to the Unionist electorate, in order to accommodate the demands of Sinn Féin/IRA backed by the SDLP. A debate about the issue of decommissioning cannot be a matter of political irresponsibility. The issue goes right to the heart of democracy and the rule of law. The irresponsibility of Mr Trimble's forming an Executive with Sinn Féin/IRA has now put him in a minority in the Assembly and among the Unionist electorate.

The building of a proper system of devolved government in Northern Ireland based on democracy requires two fundamental conditions to be met. First, a Unionist leadership fixated with the appeasement of terrorism must be replaced. Secondly, there must be no place in the Government of Northern Ireland for the members of political parties committed to terrorism and the threat of terrorism. This is a motion that must be supported by every right-thinking person in the Assembly.

**Rev Dr William McCrea:** We must not forget that while we are here to debate this important motion on the exclusion of IRA/Sinn Féin there are many people in society who are still carrying the wounds of 30 years of terrorism. There are still widows carrying broken hearts and children longing for the return of their fathers, which, because of terrorism, will never happen. But this does seem not to count to many people. Many elected representatives of the Unionist community have given a new meaning to the letters IRA "I ran away". They

could not face up to the reality of the debate, and how could they? How could any Ulster Unionist defend the putting of IRA murderers into Government over the very people whom they murdered for 30 years?

And how could Sinn Féin have the brass neck to defend the catalogue of murder and destruction for which it was responsible for over 30 years? For example, Martin McGuinness was mentioned. He seemed somewhat edgy today when he happened to see a photograph of himself — he thought that there was blood on his hands. I remind Martin McGuinness of a leading article in the 'Irish News' on 23 June 1986, in which he said

"Freedom can only be gained at the point of an IRA rifle. I apologise to no one for saying that we support and admire the freedom fighters of the IRA. In the whole of Western Europe there is not a revolutionary or a social organisation that enjoys as much popular support as we do, and we must be conscious of that fact and build on that. The British and their native collaborators know that the IRA is out to win. Republicanism will not be satisfied with another glorious failure."

He went on

"Resistance has deepened and our absolute commitment to victory has provoked a similar commitment on the part of the British to destroy us."

People are edgy about Martin's past, and they tell us that we should not bring this up, but those are actually his words — not ours. He said "I apologise to no one"; he said "We support and admire the freedom fighters of the IRA"; he said "Freedom can only be gained at the point of an IRA rifle".

By his own words he stands condemned. The tragedy is that behind every one of those murders is a personal catalogue of pain and heartache.

Nobody wants to know about it. You raise hackles if you happen to remind them about the past, but we are not talking about the past only — we are also talking about the present. We are talking about a situation that exists to this very day, because the McCoy family carry the pain and the hurt of the murder of their loved one. I wonder if the gentlemen who sail around the world at British expense to look at these bunkers can find the gun that murdered Mr McCoy there, or is that one staying outside to be used the next time they want to shoot someone.

5.15 pm

The last act of courage the Provos wanted to carry out before going in to ceasefire mode was to wipe out not only me but also my wife and children. They wanted to wipe the seven of us out, thinking it a heroic act. They could have slaughtered the complete family.

I want to tell the IRA that, as far as we are concerned, they may have made us bleed for 30 years, but they have never made us bow. We shall never bow the knee

to Republicanism. We never did so to Adams, when he led the Provisional IRA's Belfast brigade, or to McGuinness, when he led the Londonderry brigade. These men's record and the stain of innocent blood which cries from the ground for justice today are well written. It stands not only in the history books, but on the record of God Himself for the Day of Judgement. It stands on their conscience, for they know exactly what they have done and why.

I remember looking at a photograph of a family in Castlederg. It was a wedding photograph showing a bride, bridegroom, best man and bridesmaid. The only person left alive was the bride, for the groom was slaughtered by the Provos, blown to bits like the best man and bridesmaid. What was their crime? They happened to be members of families that belonged to the security forces, and, as far as the IRA was concerned, they ought to be destroyed and slaughtered. That is the sickening reality.

What has this country, mighty Britain, done? What has David Trimble done? They have rushed to elevate them and get them into power. They have set them over the people they slaughtered, over whose graves they walk, whom they mock and sneer at when they drive down the street in their ministerial car. Do not call that democracy for it is low and sickening and, as far as the people are concerned, repugnant.

The First Minister, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, lambasted the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party for eight minutes and five seconds out of his 10 minutes. He was going so well that both his wings were flapping, and he was about to take off. He was full of energy because of the venom he spat out at the DUP. When it came to the last minute to speak against the Provos, his voice was silent. He looked over sheepishly at his friends. His feet were not jingle-jangling as they usually do, shifting from one side to the other. He looked over at them and let out a little bleat, a little baa to his friends in Sinn Féin, but his venom was clear. The general public will have heard it today, and those that watch proceedings on television will have seen exactly where his venom is directed. He even turned on the Orangemen in his own district, for Drumcree is in his constituency. The truth, when the history books are written, will remind us that David Trimble did more to stop the parade going down the road than anyone else. If it were got down the road, he had to be sure he would get the credit, the laurels or be pushed to the top of the ladder of success.

We are chided for being Unionists, but I make no apology to anyone for saying I am proud to be one. I am proud to be elected on behalf of Unionist people in the constituency of Mid Ulster. The people have provided us with a mandate to speak on this issue today. We promised the people, and where are the pledges? Of

course Mr Taylor's is probably somewhere in his pocket — which is bound to be bulging now — along with a great deal of other literature on the police and other matters. There are so many papers that he is bound to have them in the dining room cabinet.

As far as the people of Ulster are concerned, these men should realise one thing: the day of accounting, when they will stand before the electorate, is coming, and the electorate will tell these people that they have no confidence whatsoever in them. Today a majority of Unionists are clearly united. We accept that we have our differences on individual policies, but one thing galvanises and brings us together. It is love, not for party, but for country. We love our country and want to see genuine peace come to Ulster, not the peace of the grave given to us over 30 years by the Provos.

Mr Trimble may have his Provo friends, but he should remember that by reaching out his hands to embrace them he is rejecting his Unionist family. It is interesting to notice in Mr Trimble's speeches that he does not talk about the Unionist or pro-Unionist family any more. The only thing he talks about is the pro-agreement family. Why? Because he has forgotten Unionism; he has turned his back on Unionism; he tramps it in the ground, and he embraces those that want to destroy everything that the tradition of Unionism stands for. On this day in July 2000 I am proud that we are able to take our stand against the murderers — Sinn Féin/IRA — and I trust that the motion will be passed with a resounding vote by this Chamber.

**Mr Agnew:** Along with Colleagues here, I would like to refer to the murder of Edmund McCoy, which happened, within 24 hours of the Ulster Unionist Council's decision to allow IRA/Sinn Féin back into Government. He was murdered by two close associates of Mr Gerry Kelly, a Member of this Assembly. Mr McCoy was a drug dealer who had refused to make a payment of around £10,000 to the Provisional IRA. As a result, he was executed by two members of a hit squad who were under the control of the officer commanding the north Belfast IRA. During this period, the IRA has shot and mutilated two Roman Catholics, they have exiled another fifteen, and three of its members have also been convicted in Florida for obtaining arms. Perhaps one of those guns was the gun that killed Edmund McCoy.

In recent days, of course, the Provo quartermaster in Ballymurphy injured himself and his own father when preparing an explosive that many believe was meant for the RUC. Those who told the world that the IRA's war was over failed to tell the world that the murder of Roman Catholics by the IRA was OK and would not be seen as a breach of the IRA ceasefire. When the RUC Chief Constable publicly stated that the IRA was responsible for the murder of Mr Charles Bennett, an

alleged informer, the then Secretary of State, Dr Mowlam, jumped to defend the Provos and dishonestly declared that the IRA ceasefire was still intact. Kangaroo courts, mutilations, expulsions, intimidations, punishment beatings, drug dealing, robbery, protection rackets and even murder are all part of this 'Good Terrorist Agreement'. IRA/Sinn Féin is the greatest threat to peace in Northern Ireland, particularly as a vast number of Protestants now believe that terrorism and violence pays.

Clearly, if it had not been for the criminal activities and the physical-force mentality and tradition of Irish Republicanism, they would not be in Government today. I suggest that there is probably not a Unionist in this House today — and I am talking about all shades of Unionism — who does not find Sinn Féin objectionable. The argument that the RUC was unacceptable to Nationalists, and that that, in turn, led to Sinn Féin/IRA's being requested to take direct action against anti-social elements is, in itself, an almost acceptable one. However, how could Sinn Féin — although they are obviously not going to answer because they have all cleared off — tell us what member of the Nationalist community came to them and asked for Andrew Kearney to be shot in front of his partner and a two-week-old baby because he had been in a fight. In fact he had beaten up the IRA commander in Ardoyne a few weeks earlier.

Is the Garda Síochána an acceptable police service? Thirteen members of the Garda Síochána have been murdered by Republican terrorists over the last 30 years. In the Irish Republic the IRA has been murdering, beating and exiling people. Garda Gerry McCabe was murdered by some of the IRA men who escaped from the Maze prison, along with who? None other than our old friend Gerry Kelly, back in 1983. Was Garda McCabe a good police officer? Then, of course, in April this year two registered, card-carrying members of Sinn Féin were caught in Walkinstown with a loaded gun and details of a leading Dublin criminal, who was non-political. The file is now before the DPP in the Irish Republic.

If Sinn Féin/IRA is policing the Nationalist community, could its members tell us why a senior member of the Republican movement, a former IRA prisoner convicted of bombing, is now a self-confessed child molester? He was allowed to remain in Barcroft Park in Newry after he had admitted sexually abusing children in that Republican controlled estate. Was it because he had been the key player in running a smear campaign against former IRA terrorist, Eamon Collins, who was murdered by the IRA last year, after he, in turn, had fallen foul of his former colleagues? Does this inaction against a self-confessed child-molester mean that if you are a member of Sinn Féin/IRA your crimes against the community are acceptable?



Was the former Sinn Féin spokesman for drugs shot when he was caught in possession of a large quantity of drugs in Londonderry in 1995? No, he was not; he simply resigned from the party. Were the IRA joyriders who killed three young children and their mother on the Falls Road in 1976 shot by the IRA? Of course they were not. That particular incident led to the formation of the Peace People. Was Gerry Adams's bodyguard, Chico Hamilton, shot last year when he was charged with receiving £70,000 of stolen goods? Of course he was not. They get off with these crimes. It seems that Sinn Féin has been rewarded for doing wrong, and it will continue to do wrong while being rewarded. Sinn Féin is not fit for Government — its members are mafia godfathers who have feathered their nests on the backs of their victims.

**Mr Weir:** In rising to support the motion, I share the disappointment at the vacant Benches before us. If the First Minister, in particular, is still in the Building he is welcome to come and listen to my speech. I am also disappointed that Irish Nationalism has reverted to its traditional role of abstentionism. It seems that on all sides there are many in the House who not only do not want to hear the truth, but cannot handle it — and that is the reason they are absent.

It is significant that we debate this on 4 July — American Independence Day — because America was expressly founded on the notion that all men were created equal. To use the words of Abraham Lincoln, their aim was to create

“government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

We meet today to determine whether our Government is one that too can meet that high democratic ideal, whether a Government that contains terrorists can truly be for all the people.

Some have said this is a form of futile debate. I agreed in part with the first 55 seconds of Seamus Close's remarks when he said that it was important to debate this matter today. If he is correct and indeed if others are correct and, as we suspect it will be, this motion is defeated, the people who have supported it will go away and use other democratic means, such as the powers of persuasion and argument, to win the day. If some of the Members opposite, in other circumstances, do not get their way, what tactics will they use?

They will use the threat of violence. Power for them comes from the barrel of a gun. It is the ability of democrats to restrict themselves to exclusively peaceful means that makes them democrats, and that is why this debate today is so important. This is not just a matter of the future threat that terrorists can pose to society, it is also a matter of the present activities of the IRA and other paramilitary organisations.

5.30 pm

The one thing people did not vote for in the referendum, whether they voted “Yes” or “No”, was an armed peace. The majority of people want to see real peace in this society. I have grown up as part of a generation which has known nothing but the troubles. I yearn for peace, but it will not be peace at any price. It will not be peace achieved by putting terrorists into government.

How then has the IRA, in particular, repaid the people who took a chance on it two years ago? Rather than cementing peace since the agreement has been signed, the IRA and other paramilitary organisations have been involved in recruitment and targeting. We have seen them maintain a private army. There has not been any form of disbandment of the IRA. We have seen them maintain a private mafia which has carried out criminal activity, extortion and bank robbery. We have seen them with vigilantes on the streets, intimidating people out of their homes, telling people to leave the country, breaking limbs and committing murder. However, we have not seen them undertake a single act of decommissioning. Indeed, thanks to the information we have of the guns that were smuggled in from Florida and goodness knows where else, the IRA — rather than decommissioning — sits with more weapons today than it did on the day the agreement was reached. However, we are told to keep our fingers crossed, that perhaps things have changed, that since the IRA has been allowed into government it has turned over a new leaf, in spite of the many opportunities that it has scorned in the past.

Significantly, since it has been let into government three things have happened. First; and I am sure we are all very grateful for this, it has again appointed someone to talk to the de Chastelain Commission in the same manner as last December and in the same manner as discussed endlessly for over a year during the talks process. The UVF has also had an interlocutor during most of that period, yet in spite of all the talk not a single weapon has been produced. I share Derek Hussey's view that this device was merely a blocking mechanism to deal with decommissioning by discussing it rather than delivering on it.

Secondly, the major development, trumpeted by many in the media, was the inspection of the arms dumps. That well-known opponent of the agreement, Mr Andy Wood, a former press officer of the Northern Ireland Office — we all know about Mr Ramaphosa and his sympathies with the IRA — said

“I have to say that Martti looked as if he'd have trouble getting down to inspect his shoelaces, never mind an arms bunker. If Saddam Hussein could run rings round a United Nations weapons inspection team with real experts in it, you have to ask what chance do the Finn and the South African have?”



We are told that this arms inspection has happened. We are not told when it happened, where it happened, how many weapons were in this bunker, or how many dumps were inspected. We are not told the nature of these weapons, or even when the dumps are going to be inspected again. What we have been told, in terms of decommissioning, gives vagueness a bad name. It is clearly insufficient. To use the words of Mr Wood again:

“puts me uncomfortably in mind of the old crack about Christopher Columbus, when he left he did not know where he was going, when he got there he did not know where he was, and when he got back he did not know where he had been or what he’d seen.”

This is what we have gained out of the arms dumps, and it has been a remarkable revelation to us all in the House. We have gained the very important information that the IRA has lots of guns. Forgive me, but I had always assumed that, as it has committed mass murder in Northern Ireland for the last 30 years, it had lots of guns. This to me does not build a great deal of confidence, certainly not confidence in the current process. It is clearly an attempt to create a smokescreen to avoid the real issue of decommissioning. In none of its statements does the IRA indicate if or when it is going to decommission.

Remember that in the run up to the suspension of the Assembly in February those were the two questions that Seamus Mallon posed to us. Yet we do not have satisfactory answers to the test that he put, let alone the test that any self-respecting Unionist should put.

The third crucial thing which has happened since the Ulster Unionist Council vote on 27 May was the murder of Edmund McCoy. Not only do we have Sinn Féin in Government without a single bullet having been handed in, without a single effort having been made permanently to commit themselves to exclusively peaceful means, but we have a party in the Government which is not even on ceasefire. That, to me, is totally unacceptable.

The choice that faces us today is one that should draw support from every self-respecting democrat here and not just from those who have been against the agreement, or simply from Unionists, whether they support the agreement or not. Every self-respecting democrat should know that Government based on having terrorism within it is a Government which is ultimately doomed to failure and corruption. I urge, albeit to empty Benches, the SDLP Members, even at this late moment, to have a Damascus Road conversion and to support this motion so that we too can have a Government of the people, by the people and for the people, a Government on the basis of democrats alone with terrorists expelled.

I urge everyone to support the motion.

**Mr Campbell:** I rise to support the motion, and I do so with mixed feelings. Since the signing of the Belfast Agreement we have heard much from those who are very voluble when they are here, but are absent today, about the need for inclusivity in this process. They constantly lecture us and tell us that our contribution is essential. They tell us that they spent the better part of two years formulating structures to allow us to make our contribution. Then, when we get a valid motion with 30 signatures on the Order Paper, those who demand and trumpet the inclusivity of this approach all depart. It is inclusive, but they do not want to be part of it when Unionists are speaking, particularly when it is the majority of the Unionists who are speaking.

I want to take a little time to dwell on the background of the scenario which brought us here today. Many years ago the SDLP was trying to persuade Sinn Féin to adopt a particular analysis of the Northern Ireland situation — long before ceasefires, long before the Belfast Agreement. We often hear it said that when the Unionists contest, oppose or draw attention to the deficiencies of the Belfast Agreement, what we are doing is jeopardising the peace process. It is almost as if the peace process is predicated upon the Belfast Agreement.

In 1988, six years before what passes for the ceasefire that was called by the IRA, the SDLP conceded that there were difficulties in persuading the Unionists to move towards the concept of a new, agreed Ireland. They claimed that an end to the IRA campaign and the subsequent demilitarisation of the North would introduce Unionists to the idea of a new Ireland. That, according to one Gerard Murray was what John Hume said.

Even in 1988 the SDLP, through its leadership, was trying to introduce Unionists to the concept of a new, agreed Ireland. Before that, in 1985, lest anyone should think that this process is only five or six years old, the person who is the Minister of Education, Martin McGuinness, was quoted in a film called ‘Real Lives: At the Edge of the Union’ which received considerable notoriety at that time. It was not featured to any considerable degree at the time, but it is significant that he was quoted as saying

“If someone can show me another way to achieve a united Ireland, I will support it.”

The interviewer had asked him why he supported the campaign to achieve a united Ireland by murder. His answer was

“If someone can show me another way to achieve a united Ireland, I will support it.”

It is precisely because the British and Irish Governments, the SDLP and the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party have shown them that there is another way to a united Ireland that the guns are comparatively

silent — compared to the 1980s. That is why we have the Belfast Agreement. That is why Republican paramilitaries say “We will wait in abeyance to see what the agreement can deliver. If the agreement delivers the end objective, we will put our guns beyond use.” That was the genesis of the IRA statement that allowed Mr Trimble to go to the Ulster Unionist Council. Provided it has the capability of delivering the end objective, they will put their guns beyond use.

Now we come to today’s position. We have a system of government designed to deliver, in the long term, the united — or agreed, or new — Ireland that they so avidly seek. It is set up today, two years and a couple of months after the Belfast Agreement.

There have been a considerable number of references to participation, by myself and some of our Unionist Colleagues, in the various workings of the House, and in other places. There was an attempt by David Trimble, the First Minister, by Pat Doherty, and previously by Michael McGimpsey, to say that and to imply that there is full-blooded participation, discussion, debate, dialogue and all sorts of political inter-relationships between the Unionist family and the IRA. I want to be absolutely clear on this. It was significant that Mr Doherty made the comments. Many Members of the House have been approached by Sinn Féin Members attempting to have informal discussions and dialogue.

Some of us have been approached in the Chamber, in the committee rooms, on the stairs, and in the lift. I had the unfortunate experience of being approached in the lift by one of these individuals. I have been approached in the car park and in the restaurant. We have heard references to participation in the Committees, in the House and in councils and council committees, in the Assembly Commission and the now-infamous Committee of the Centre. All of those approaches we treat with utter and total contempt.

Bring me, or anyone here, a Sinn Féiner who has had correspondence, communication, debate, dialogue, dispute or anything with me or any member of my party anywhere, and I will present you with a liar — an unmitigated liar. These people attempt to engage in discussion. Mr Speaker, you will be aware that there have been many Commission meetings. I have never had any dialogue, discussion or debate with the Sinn Féin member. In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee of the Centre, I was taken before the Committee of Privileges for precisely that reason: because I treat these people with contempt. We will not recognise them. We will not do it.

5.45 pm

There are times, of course, when we must sit in Committees, and they must sit in Committees — they are legally entitled to do so by the electorate. I often

liken it to going to a café or restaurant. If I go there because I must go there, and Sinn Féin comes in, does anyone think that I am going to leave the restaurant, because a murderer has come into that restaurant? If they do think that, they are very badly mistaken. I will not be leaving because Sinn Féin has come in. However, if the manager of the restaurant were to come to me and say “Mr Campbell, I would like you to sit down and discuss the menu with Mr McGuinness”, then the manager would get very short shrift. I hope that clarifies the position about the contempt that we have for murdering gangsters, and how we will continue to treat them.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I must draw to the Member’s attention a matter of parliamentary discourse. When he speaks in general terms of contempt, that comes close to the wire. If he refers to contempt for another Member, that is unparliamentary. There can be no doubt about that. So this is not a question of parliamentary privilege, but of unparliamentary language. I draw the Member’s attention to that.

**Mr Campbell:** Mr Speaker, you will be aware that I did use the plural when I said “murdering gangsters”. However, I will not persist. Violence is sometimes used to justify and condone the IRA’s campaign; it is very often done in the media. My hon Colleague Mr Watson made reference to what has gone on in the Province in the past few nights. I would join in his condemnation of all those attacks. Nonetheless, we have to say that it is entirely understandable. It is regrettable; I condemn it, and it should stop. Nonetheless, we have to say that it is perfectly understandable because Loyalists see that violence pays and violence gets results. However, they ought to stop.

**Ms Armitage:** I stand here today as an Ulster Unionist — a very lonely one, but that is nothing new for me. I am also a committed Ulster Unionist. Thirty years ago I was one of those dreadful young Unionists. Today I am just a moderate, modest old Unionist. No doubt there are men in grey suits who would like to see me pack my briefcase and leave the politics to them. Perhaps in this House a more appropriate description for them would be “the men with grey hair. Unfortunately they have already left. However, I remain and intend to do so.

It has been suggested that I was forced and put under pressure to sign this motion to exclude Sinn Féin Members from holding office as Ministers. This is totally untrue. I offered to sign the motion. The only pressure applied to me was from my own conscience. I fought the Assembly election on a manifesto of “No guns, no Government”. I canvassed for MEP Jim Nicholson on a manifesto of “No guns, no Government”. Today we sit in Government with Sinn Féin, yet not one gun, one bullet or one ounce of semtex has been

destroyed, nor is there any commitment that the IRA's massive armoury will ever be destroyed.

In April 1998 Prime Minister Blair told us that decommissioning schemes would come into effect in June 1998 and that the process of decommissioning should begin straight away. If Mr Blair had kept his word, decommissioning would have been well under way by now, and we would have had weapons credibly and verifiably destroyed — put out of use for ever. Unfortunately, our ever-smiling, reassuring Prime Minister has broken his word to the decent law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland. That is why we are debating this motion today. If he had kept his word, and if Sinn Féin had kept its commitment to the Belfast Agreement, there would have been no need for this debate.

Two years after the signing of the Belfast Agreement we have learned that there are a couple of arms dumps somewhere in a foreign country. The 30-year war was fought in this part of the United Kingdom; why then is it so acceptable to have dumps in the Republic of Ireland? I do not know how many dumps there are; I do not know what is in these dumps; I do not know who controls these dumps; and I do not even know how many people have access to these dumps. According to a newspaper report, Republican sources say that Martin Ferris, a convicted gunrunner, organised last month's inspection of these dumps. Gunrunner — is that part of the confidence-building process? Can someone tell this House where are the thousands of guns and tonnes of Semtex that are not in these supposedly safe dumps?

I would not have thought that the Republic of Ireland was the safest place for these guns. We all know how things go missing south of the border. Prisoners disappear, extradition forms are mislaid and the IRA cannot even tell the families of the disappeared people where they have buried them.

We have also been told that this debate is a waste of time and that it will not succeed. Many debates in the House have not succeeded, and many promises have not been kept. Why all the fuss about this one? I understand that the other constitutional parties cannot support this motion. I regret that decision, but I suppose, to be fair to them, that they did not fight on a "No guns, no Government" manifesto.

Sinn Féin has said many times that it wants to see the Patten Report implemented in full. I would say to Sinn Féin Members, if they were here — they are not, but I will say it anyway — that I want to see the decommissioning section of the Belfast Agreement implemented in full. The people I represent want to see the guns and the explosives completely destroyed — and not just put into safe keeping until someone,

somewhere, decides that he just might want to use them again.

I was at a meeting in East Londonderry recently, and an Assembly Member was very excited because the Minister of Education had apparently removed his Sinn Féin green ribbon before entering a building. I am beginning to wonder if some Unionists are now settling for the decommissioning of the green ribbon. *[Laughter]* I sincerely hope not, and I live in hope. Democracy cannot co-exist with private armies.

Finally, I quote from a statement of the Ulster Unionist Assembly group at Stormont:

"No Shadow Executive or Executive which would include Sinn Féin can be formed until actual and meaningful decommissioning has commenced. Without actual decommissioning no party associated with a paramilitary organisation will have honoured its obligations under the Agreement and will therefore be ineligible to hold office."

I say to my fellow Ulster Unionists that that statement was issued in their names and in mine, and with our approval. Search your conscience today, fellow Unionists, and make sure you can live with it tomorrow.

I support the motion.

**Mr S Wilson:** I wish to make a few general remarks about some of the allegations which have been made about today's debate. We have been told that it is a stunt. Everyone is talking about this motion being a stunt. We have had it from the First Minister; we have had it from his colleagues in the SDLP; we have had it from his allies in Sinn Féin; we have had it from the PUP and we have had it from the Alliance Party. The fact is that none of them wanted this debate to take place. They have run away from the debate because they know that it is not a stunt. The vote at the end of today's sitting will show that David Trimble no longer has the authority, about which he has lectured us time and time again. He will no longer be able to claim to have a democratic mandate for what he is doing. That is why they wish to pour derision on this debate. They cannot face up to the impact which this is going to have — that they no longer speak for the majority of Unionists. David Trimble leads a minority Unionist Administration. When they refer to the referendum and say that the authority of this Assembly is the referendum vote, the vote which we will be taking here today will remind them that they are bereft of that argument.

We have been lectured about the need for accountable democracy and accountable Government, yet today, here is the evidence of how accountable the people who supported the Belfast Agreement want to be. They do not want to give an account of themselves. They want to run away from having to answer the arguments.



My Colleague who winds up will, I am sure, pick up on the points which I have missed and he may, perhaps, reinforce some of the points I am going to make. The First Minister made a brief appearance here today, and it has already been pointed out that he spent 80% of his time attacking fellow Unionists. In fact, if you had looked at his speech you would have said that he could be rightly dubbed “the Rice Crispie man”. During the first part of his speech he snapped and crackled against other Unionists, but when it came to the part where he had to point the finger at Sinn Féin, he popped and we heard nothing.

Let us just look at some of the arguments he made. He considered that today’s debate was inappropriate, that we ought to have been considering the threat to the security of the Province, that we ought to have been looking at the riots in our streets, that we ought to be asking what to do, those were his words. Let me tell Members that in the face of violence on the streets, the one signal you do not give out is that that violence will be rewarded, yet the First Minister came in here today and defended rewarding violence. He then accused the DUP, as did others, and said that if we had really been serious about bringing this Government down, we could have done so in the Appropriation debate. David Trimble might want us to hurt the people of Northern Ireland, but we have no intention of voting down money for services for our constituents and for people who do not vote for us. We are intent on hurting him and his gang. We are intent on hurting this Administration but not the people out in the streets, therefore, he is not going to get us to walk into that kind of thing. That is exactly what the anti-agreement Unionists want us to do. When it came to the IRA, what did we get? We got a little admonishment — the pop. He said that he would hold them to their promises. I noticed they all smiled at him when he said that, and not a bit of wonder, because he threatens the stranglehold and he gives them a political cuddle. He did the same here again today. He gave them comfort. He was suggesting that even in the face of the majority of the Unionist community opposing what he was going to do, he would stand by them.

6.00 pm

Even though you have abused your Ministries, I will stand by you.” We did not hear any of his “They are not house-trained” remarks today — he saves those for the run-up to a crucial vote in the Ulster Unionist Council. His Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure did not come to the House to defend himself; he was as bereft of arguments today as he is of hair every other day — and last week he had the audacity to talk about this being fraudulent. What could be more fraudulent than to rail about Sinn Féin’s not being “house-trained” and then to come to this place and defend not just letting them into the House, but letting them run the House.

When one looks at the arguments that have been advanced in defence of including Sinn Féin in Government it is quite clear that the Ulster Unionist Party and its party leader have lost their way. While he talks about being hard on Sinn Féin and putting it in a stranglehold, the sad fact is that he has elevated it. Sinn Féin has been seeking to re-brand itself and has done so, but not by its efforts — the SDLP gave it a hand after its bloody murders in Enniskillen. John Hume picked it up out of the gutter, and now David Trimble has set it up on a pedestal.

The man who was accused in the Saville Inquiry of firing the first shot in Londonderry has now been made the big shot in education by David Trimble and the people who are now defending this Administration.

We watch Sinn Féin trying to re-brand itself, and I watch it in the Assembly on a week-to-week basis. The Minister of Education sits and smiles, and sometimes even laughs at the jokes made about him — the “happy-clappy” wing of the Sinn Féin Assembly group. We are all reasonable people and we can have a little laugh, but every now and again — and Dr Ian Paisley made reference to this today — the “louty-shouty” wing of Sinn Féin makes its appearance. When Barry McElduff goes to Europe he shows that he is a “happy-clappy” kind of chap; when Francie Molloy stands up and has a row in the Chamber with the SDLP, we see the “happy-clappy” face disappearing; and when it gets out on to the streets of Northern Ireland and starts kneecapping and shooting people, we see the “happy-clappy” face disappearing even more, and the “louty-shouty” element coming to the fore again. And yet we have people who call themselves Unionists but who have elevated Sinn Féin to this position.

Alban Maginness talked about us piggybacking into Government on the back of the UUP. He knows all about piggybacking — the SDLP has piggybacked all around the country on the back of Sinn Féin; in fact it is so used to piggybacking that it would not agree to come to my dinner the other night until it found out whether Sinn Féin was coming. And he talks about others piggybacking.

If his Colleague, the Deputy First Minister, had been prepared to be honest with this House and admit that he had resigned, he would have seen whether or not the DUP was interested in piggybacking into Government on the back of the Ulster Unionist Party. There would be no Administration because, at that stage, the DUP would have been able to ensure that no Administration was set up. He never rose to that challenge; he never gave us the opportunity.

In closing, I say to those members of the Ulster Unionist Party who are not here — perhaps they are watching on the monitors — that they cannot abstain; they cannot be neutral on the question of terrorists in



Government; and they should be here in this Chamber to vote to undermine this Administration.

**Mr Boyd:** I support this exclusion motion. This is a sombre occasion because we must never forget the innocent victims of IRA terrorism. The pro-Union community is totally opposed to an Executive which includes the architects of the terrorism that has been directed against us for 30 years while the IRA retains its arsenal and its structures for use at its discretion. Such a situation is totally unacceptable.

The representatives of Sinn Féin/IRA do not share the common desire of ordinary people for stability. They are committed to a revolutionary principle. For them the Assembly is merely a transitional stage in the revolution, and whether that struggle is defined as armed or unarmed really depends on the degree of violence that the Government are prepared to tolerate in the name of a so-called peace process.

We have the worst of all possible worlds, with terrorists outside the Assembly and their representatives inside it. Today, we have the opportunity to declare in favour of a civil society in which ordinary people are free from gangsterism, intimidation, extortion and terror. Those in the Unionist community who voted in favour of the Belfast Agreement because of the false promises and pledges of Tony Blair and the Government that decommissioning would take place, have since openly admitted their errors and now reject the Belfast Agreement and its appeasement process.

The SDLP, the Women's Coalition and the Alliance Party are all in the pocket of IRA/Sinn Féin — the pan-Nationalist front. We can see what they think of the Unionist community today and the majority of Unionists that we represent by their total absence from the Chamber.

Let us examine the attitude of SDLP Members. The SDLP is a party, which throughout 30 years of terror has constantly condemned violence but has not hesitated to politically profit from that violence. This motion presents SDLP Members with a clear choice between supporting the democratic process and the integrity of the rule of law, or Sinn Féin/IRA's participation in the Executive while retaining its terrorist arsenal and structures.

If SDLP Members support Sinn Féin's refusal to decommission its terrorist arsenal and dismantle its terrorist structures it means that they have rendered themselves indistinguishable from Sinn Féin/IRA. The alternative is for the SDLP to align itself with the fundamental democratic demand that Sinn Féin/IRA must decommission its terrorist arsenal and dismantle its terrorist structures.

Sinn Féin/IRA tell us that they are interested in human rights, yet the instruments of torture in the IRA's

armoury are many and varied. They include baseball bats, golf clubs, nail studded clubs, pick-axe handles, hammers, sledge hammers, hurling sticks, axes, hatchets, drills and many others.

There is no peace. The pro-Union community rejects an Executive which includes the architects of the terrorism directed against them for 30 years while the IRA retains its terrorist arsenal and its structures for use at its discretion. Such a situation is totally unacceptable.

I quote from 'The Informer' by Sean O'Callaghan, one of Sinn Féin/IRA's and Martin McGuinness's previous cohorts:

"The so-called Education Minister, Martin McGuinness, has been an active Republican since 1970. He was Chief of Staff of the IRA from 1977 to 1982. He has been a member of the IRA Army Council since 1976. He has held the position of OC Northern command."

In August 1993 Central Television's 'The Cook Report' named him as Britain's number one terrorist. That is the man who now holds the position of Education Minister in our Executive. The IRA army council chooses the chief of staff. It has two primary responsibilities: to ensure that the IRA has the equipment to wage war and that the organisation operates at maximum efficiency.

According to the informer, Sean O'Callaghan, no chief of staff in recent years has carried anything like the internal influence of Gerry Adams or Martin McGuinness. The IRA Army Council sanctioned the Canary Wharf bomb. Right up to the present day Adams and Martin McGuinness have been firmly in charge of the Republican movement. They could not possibly have remained if the army council of the IRA had approved the ending of the ceasefire and sanctioned the Canary Wharf bombing without the knowledge and agreement of the IRA members Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams. That is according to the informer, Sean O'Callaghan.

The IRA has murdered over 2,000 people in the last 30 years. It is their lethal murder machine that has got them into the Executive — not the ballot box, as they would try to dupe many people into believing.

Since January this year, the IRA has carried out 23 shootings, 32 beatings and mutilations and three murders. The clear message today is that the innocent victims of terrorism still suffer. Their agony and suffering is compounded by the presence of unrepentant terrorists and their supporters being placed in the Government of Northern Ireland.

The Education Minister, Martin McGuinness who is a former chief of staff of the Provisional IRA, has been part of an organisation that has presided over the murders of over 2,000 citizens in Northern Ireland and for which no apology has ever been forthcoming.

This is not peace, justice or democracy, it is appeasement to terrorism. The Provisional IRA has murdered school teachers, school children, principals, students, school workers and school bus drivers. Many of these innocent victims were murdered in the presence of young children and students. Millions of pounds have been wasted through damage to schools and universities by IRA bombs, and many thousands of young people continue to have their education affected because of bomb scares.

The crisis in education funding is a direct result of the 30-year terrorist campaign of the Provisional IRA. That organisation will continue to murder, maim and carry out its criminal activities while it remains fully armed and intact. On behalf of the citizens of Northern Ireland, we call on Prime Minister Tony Blair to fulfil his pledges and take the necessary steps to remove Martin McGuinness from the Executive, with immediate effect.

I call on the Ulster Unionist Party Assembly Members to join with many of their party's Members of Parliament and grass-roots members to reject having Sinn Féin/IRA representatives in the Government. Listen to the young people in the Ulster Unionist Party. I call on every Ulster Unionist to reject the SDLP and Sinn Féin, whose common goal is Irish unity. They should join their Unionist colleagues in excluding Sinn Féin/IRA. My message to Prime Minister Tony Blair and to the pro-Agreement parties is that, although they may choose to ignore the majority of Unionists in the Chamber, they will not ignore the majority of the Unionist people when they speak — and speak they will.

We have endured 30 years of violence and terror. If the House sends the message that violence pays, we shall be heading for the abyss. Members may laugh and mock, but this is a serious matter. I am not advocating violence, but if the motion fails, the message from the Assembly will be that democracy has died in Northern Ireland.

As democrats, we stand for democracy and the rule of law, but we have been ignored and laughed at. My message to the Prime Minister is that Unionists have had enough. I support the motion.

**Mr Speaker:** Having listened to the speeches so far, I believe that the arguments have been thoroughly rehearsed. I therefore propose to move to the winding-up speeches and then to the vote. I have had no indication that Sinn Féin wishes to make a winding-up speech. I therefore call Mr P Robinson.

**Mr P Robinson:** I am sure that Members are grateful for your remarks that they have done such a thorough job in speaking to the motion. The job of someone who winds up at the end of a debate is to deal with the

arguments that had been postulated against the motion systematically and thoroughly. I do not have a difficult task this evening, although before they all hit and ran, some Members made comments which were not very relevant to the purpose and intention of the debate, but which are on the record and should therefore be dealt with. I can, of course, understand why there are empty Benches around us today, and why Sinn Féin's Benches are empty. Sinn Féin knows it is guilty. It knows that there is no defence. The SDLP will do whatever Sinn Féin requires of it, and has gone lamb-like behind Sinn Féin. The sheer embarrassment to the Ulster Unionist Party has caused it to hide in its rooms, lock the doors, pull the curtains across and turn the lights out. If any Ulster Unionist has the courage to turn on the monitor, the Member will hear some of my remarks about the UUP.

During his brief stay in the Chamber, the First Minister spoke for 8 minutes and 10 seconds against the Democratic Unionist Party, and spoke quietly to Sinn Féin for some of the remaining period out of his 10 allotted minutes. He then made some comments that must be dealt with. He said that the DUP and other anti-Agreement Unionists were "fully involved". Hansard will bear out those two words. That was strange coming from a First Minister who called a press conference, along with the Deputy First Minister, to deal with the Minister for Social Development and myself precisely because we would not become fully involved in the process.

If he is to provide an argument for his supporters — should he have any left in the country — it should be a consistent argument, not one which jumps from one position to the contrary almost as the moment requires.

6.15 pm

He never dealt with the motion, and it is a crying shame that we have a Unionist leader who, when asked to speak on a motion calling for the exclusion from the Government of armed, unrepentant terrorist representatives, decides to restrict himself to dealing with entirely different issues, not touching on that matter. He says that dreadful things have happened in this Province over the last few nights and that it would have been better if the House had addressed those important issues. Of course, Members did not have knowledge of those events at the time when they would have had to put down a motion, but that fact would carry no weight in Mr Trimble's mind.

As First Minister, he has the ability in Executive time to call the Assembly to address issues relevant to the Government of Northern Ireland. He could have made a statement on the resources being lost today because of the violence on our streets. If the matter was of such importance and moment for him, he could have come to the Assembly and made a statement. There was time,

for the Assembly was suspended for a period before lunch because there was not sufficient business. However, the First Minister could not care less about the violence in Portadown or anywhere else. It was more important to get material to snipe at the DUP, not to attack Sinn Féin/IRA, but to attack Unionists in the Assembly.

Other Members dealt with what they described as a stunt, a cynical ploy. Indeed, both outside the Assembly and in it, if there was any argument around which the opposition coalesced, it was that this was somehow a stunt. I intend to deal with that matter comprehensively.

First, we moved this motion on the basis of a clearly laid-down procedure, which was not invented by the Democratic Unionist Party or devised by anti-agreement Unionists. It was not even the brainchild of the Assembly. Nor did Parliament, when making the law, conceive this procedure. It is a child of the Belfast Agreement. That which they describe as a stunt, they devised the means for themselves, and there is much evidence to suggest that they knew exactly how those means would be used.

The Belfast Agreement states simply that those who hold office should use only democratic, non-violent means, and that those who do not should be excluded or removed from office. That is a clear statement.

They went to the country in the referendum, embellishing that statement with statements from the Prime Minister and Mr Trimble. When the law itself was being drafted, it was framed in the same explicit terms. The procedure that they devised was clearly set for the one purpose of removing from the Government those not committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means.

What did the parties of the Unionist tradition say during the course of the election to the Assembly? What was their stand on the issue? My party colleagues gave 'Your Best Guarantee' as our pledge to the people. In it we expressly said that our role in the Assembly would be to exclude those who have not pledged themselves to peace and democracy, who still hold on to an arsenal of terror and keep their terror machine in place. That was our pledge.

The Ulster Unionist Party, during the course of the election, did not want to have a lesser pledge than the Democratic Unionist Party. Its leaflet 'Together, within the Union' said

"Before any terrorist organisation and/or its political wing can benefit from the proposals contained in the Agreement on the release of terrorist prisoners and the holding of ministerial office in the Assembly, the commitment to exclusively peaceful and non-violent means must be established. The Ulster Unionist Party will, therefore, be using various criteria that are objective, meaningful and verifiable in order to judge:

that there is a clear, unequivocal commitment that ceasefires are complete and permanent; that the 'war' is over and violence...cease forthwith;

that there is progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures; that use of proxy organisations for paramilitary purposes cannot be tolerated;

that disarmament must be completed in two years; and

that the fate of the 'disappeared' would be made known immediately.

Ulster Unionists reiterate that we will not sit in government with 'unreconstructed terrorists'."

That is the position of the Ulster Unionist Party. I read a statement in the 'Irish Times' yesterday, arising from an interview with Mr Trimble on the 'Inside Politics' programme. With such an election manifesto, I should have thought that the last thing that the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party would want to talk about is the propriety of keeping election commitments. Instead of being embarrassed, he turns on Colleagues—no doubt the two or three who have already spoken in the debate. He said

"It is unfortunate that people elected to the Assembly on a pro-agreement mandate at the first flicker from the DUP abandoned their manifesto commitments. I think that is a situation where people are not reflecting the obligation they entered into with the electorate."

I have read Mr Trimble's obligation to the electorate. It is on the record, but more than that, it is in the mind of every Unionist in the streets, villages, towns and cities of Northern Ireland—and well he knows it. That is the reason why he is trying to put off having local Government elections. That is the reason why he is trying to put off having a by-election in South Antrim. That is the reason why the UUP is talking about how it might extend the life of this Assembly, thereby avoiding going back to the people. The UUP is afraid of its electorate and the views that are held about the party leadership. I have shown the nature of the procedure, from where it was derived, and what it was understood to mean.

Did the main pro-agreement parties, inside and outside the House, understand the use of the procedure and the circumstance in which it would be used? There was no excuse for the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, because in the House on 15 December 1998 the First Minister, then Designate, got to his feet and said

"If the issue of forming an Executive should arise without there being a credible beginning to decommissioning as required by the agreement, we would have to table a motion for the exclusion from office of those who had not begun the process of decommissioning"

He knows what the procedure is for. Not only does he know, but he said that he would use it. In what circumstances? In the very circumstances that exist today. He comes to this Assembly, not even speaking in favour of the motion that he said he would table. He comes to this Assembly, not to chastise Sinn Féin/IRA, but to turn on those who still hold to the policy that he



said he would pursue. He is not the only one among the pro-agreement parties who held such a view.

The holier-than-thou Deputy First Minister held this view as well and annunciated it at the SDLP party conference. He said

“Many Unionists feared Sinn Féin would pocket maximum advantages, among them prisoner releases, changes to policing and criminal law reform, and then fail to honour their decommissioning obligations.”

He was dead right in that.

“I believe that won’t occur but if it did happen the SDLP would rigorously enforce the terms of the Agreement and remove from office those who had so blatantly dishonoured their obligations.”

So, not only the First Minister but also the Deputy First Minister and their parties knew the purpose of this piece of legislation. They knew what the procedure was for and the circumstances in which it would be used. They both committed themselves and their parties to use it in the circumstances that exist today. But they were not the only ones. Outside the Assembly there are what are described as the two Governments. Though he may have other things to consider today, the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, Mr Ahern, said

“Sinn Féin should be barred from the new Northern Ireland Government unless the IRA starts to decommission its weapons. Decommissioning in one form or another has to happen. It is not compatible with being part of a government, and part of an executive, if there is not at least a commencement of decommissioning.”

They had to be barred from government.

The Ulster Unionist Party said “Yes, here are the circumstances in which they should be excluded.” The SDLP said “Here are the circumstances in which they can be excluded.” The Prime Minister of the Irish Republic said that they “should be barred from government”, and he was not alone. The father of Leo Blair had something to say on the matter as well. In a letter to Mr Trimble he made it clear that not only was he aware of the conditions upon which this provision of the Act should be used but that if it was not effective enough he was prepared to move and make sure that Sinn Féin could be put out of Government if it did not meet its obligations, as he saw it, under the agreement. In that letter dated 10 April 1998 he gave a commitment to support changes to the legislation if it was not sufficiently effective in removing those who were still wedded to terror and had not decommissioned their weapons.

But did the wider community have the same understanding of the use of the procedure and the circumstances in which it would be used — they should have. I have, from my constituency, the election literature that was sent around by the Minister responsible for economic and trade issues in the Assembly. This is what that manifesto literature said:

“The Ulster Unionist Party... will not sit in the Government of Northern Ireland with unreconstructed terrorists. This issue must be comprehensively addressed to our satisfaction. Paramilitary organisations must decide that the ‘war’ is over, dismantle, disarm and stop the beatings.”

It was not enough simply to disarm; they had to dismantle their terror machine as well. The electorate in East Belfast read this communication. They may not have voted for him in the numbers that they voted for some other candidates, but read his election communication they did, and they understood it well.

If anybody was in any doubt about what the position of the Ulster Unionist Party was to be, his ministerial Colleague, Mr Sam Foster, made it abundantly clear. Not only did he want to make it clear but he wanted it placed on the record of the House so that none of us would be in any doubt in the future where he stood on this issue. He said on 15 December 1998

“We are talking about setting up bodies and Departments — that is ridiculous before decommissioning. We are being asked to set up a Government in spite of the fact that we know that, outside in the undergrowth, there are weapons and equipment ready to be used — a gun-to-the-head attitude. Is that what we are being asked to do? Are we being asked to govern in spite of the fact that there are illegal armies and equipment out there?”

Mr Presiding Officer, do you really feel that you could preside over a Government? Would it be credible or incredible? Would it be a credible or an incredible Assembly? Would it be dishonest or honest? Would it be deceit or falsehood or a lack of integrity? Are there no morals whatsoever?

Surely we cannot begin to govern until there is decommissioning, when peace I hope will be absolute. The onus is on Sinn Féin/IRA to do so. It is not on the UUP.”

6.30 pm

He added

“Decommissioning is a must, and nothing — nothing — will move until that comes about.”

However, you are right: these are just individuals; it is not the party speaking, but this is. The Ulster Unionist Party on 17 May 1999 said

“There must be a credible and verifiable start to the process of decommissioning before Sinn Féin can participate in government ... The Ulster Unionist Party will not change its position on this matter now, during or after the European election.”

That is comforting, Mr Speaker. “This issue”, they say, “goes right to the heart of the agreement and to the commitments to peace and democracy that Government Ministers must abide by.”

Then, coming up to Christmas, a letter came through the letterbox personally signed by the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and apart from wishing them all a happy Christmas — and I can see the warmth that it brought to my Colleague, if indeed he got it — he referred to the setting up of Government Departments in Northern Ireland. He said



"As your leader I wish to assure you that Sinn Féin will not be included in the agreement that I have referred to above if Sinn Féin/IRA do not honour their commitments to decommissioning made under the Belfast Agreement. If they do not the Ulster Unionist Party will not form an Executive that includes Sinn Féin. Claims that Sinn Féin are entitled to places without decommissioning are completely dishonest. The opening pages of the agreement repeat the need for a commitment to peaceful means and an absence of the use of the threat of violence four times. The agreement provides for the exclusion of those who do not abide by this requirement and this exclusion is cross-referenced to decommissioning. I cannot speak any plainer. I expect the total support of my party and the country at large for my position."

That should have been followed by "(as long as I hold it)".

This debate has given us all an opportunity — not simply the one about which Members on this side of the House have spoken — to fulfil our manifesto requirements, an opportunity to do what was necessary, to give the people out there the expression of opinion that we are opposed to having those who represent unrepentant and armed terrorists in Government. It gave these people an opportunity as well, because if there had been the least intention on the part of any one of them to ever fulfil the obligations of which Mr Trimble claims they are aware, they could have come forward. They could have spent some time, during the course of this debate, trying to convince Unionists that they had an intention to decommission — that the war was over. You did not hear any words like those from their lips today. What is their strategy? It has not changed. The strategy was set out by Danny Morrison at the ardfheis in November 1981 when he said "Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box?" There was silence in the room. "But will anyone here object if, with ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in this hand, we take power in Ireland?" And there was sustained applause in the conference. That is the strategy (the strategy referred to by my Friend, the Member for East Londonderry), the ballot-box and the Armalite — the threat of violence and the reality of actual violence.

The leader of Sinn Féin/IRA stated their position in 'An Phoblacht' on 17 November 1983. Under the heading "Armed struggle is a necessary form of resistance", Mr Adams said

"I would like to elaborate on Sinn Féin's attitude to armed struggle. Armed struggle is a necessary and morally correct form of resistance in the Six Counties against a government whose presence is rejected by the vast majority of Irish people. In defending and supporting the right of the Irish people to engage in armed struggle it is important for those so engaged to be aware of the constant need and obligation they have to continuously examine their tactics and strategies. There are those who tell us that the British Government will not be moved by armed struggle. As has been said before, the history of Ireland and of British colonial involvement throughout the world tells us that they will not be moved by anything else. I am glad therefore of the opportunity to pay tribute to the freedom-fighters — the men and women volunteers of the IRA."

This has been the traditional position of Sinn Féin/IRA — inextricably linked, all part of the one process, moving forward together, Armalite and ballot box. One can hold back while the other is being used, both available for use as they would direct it — and both are still being used.

We have heard statistics about the number of people who have been shot. There was the murder of Edmund McCoy — and many others before that — during this so-called peace process. They were making bombs a matter of days ago — for what purpose, I wonder? They are bringing guns into the country, while the First Minister tells us that they are intent on decommissioning. There is no remorse, no apology, no intention to decommission. Not one word during this debate suggests that there is the least change in the spots of this leopard — not one. The IRA still holds on to its weapons, for the fear that the guns inspire, principally in the mind of Her Majesty's Government. They will never give them up because of the threat that they pose. They know that there are people who ultimately will buckle, just as the First Minister buckled at the threat that the guns might be brought out again — a sad reality.

During the debate I believe we have established that the exclusion procedure we are using was designed and argued for by pro-agreement parties. We have established that the key participants envisaged using it themselves. We have established that the supporters of our motion are using the exclusion procedure in exactly the circumstances in which the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP said that they would be justified in using it. Other Unionists pledged themselves to exclude Sinn Féin/IRA under precisely the circumstances that those who signed this motion, and have spoken in favour of it would ask this House to do today.

In the light of the twin-track strategy of the IRA, in the light of the continued violence and what that violence does to the democratic process, I believe that I have the right and the entitlement to ask of all Ulster Unionists who stood on the manifesto that I read to this Assembly earlier to come out from hiding and not to consider abstaining. How on earth could anybody be neutral on the issue of whether, in the Government of Northern Ireland, there should be present unrepentant and armed terrorist representatives? It is inconceivable that any Unionist could take that position. I ask them to remember that their first loyalty and duty is not to the leader of their party. It is not even to their party. Their first loyalty and duty is to the people who elected them, the people who gave them a mandate and to whom they pledged themselves. That is what they need to remember today.

I will give the last word to Mrs Pauline Armitage, who took a principled position and left a warning to her colleagues hanging in the air when she said

“Search your conscience today ... and make sure you can live with it tomorrow.”

*Question put. [Interruption]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members do not seem to be aware that such motions require a cross-community vote. If no Members of one or other community vote, the motion will fall.

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 32; Noes 14.*

#### AYES

##### Unionist

*Fraser Agnew, Pauline Armitage, Roy Beggs, Paul Berry, Norman Boyd, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Wilson Clyde, Nigel Dodds, Boyd Douglas, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, David Hilditch, Derek Hussey, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, Robert McCartney, William McCrea, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Ian R K Paisley, Edwin Poots, Iris Robinson, Mark Robinson, Peter Robinson, Patrick Roche, Jim Shannon, Denis*

*Watson, Peter Weir, Jim Wells, Cedric Wilson, Sammy Wilson.*

#### NOES

##### Nationalist

*Mark Durkan, John Fee, Joe Hendron, John Hume, Alban Maginness, Alex Maskey, Conor Murphy, Eamonn O'Neill, John Tierney.*

##### Other

*Eileen Bell, Seamus Close, David Ford, Kieran McCarthy, Sean Neeson.*

<i>Total Votes 46</i>	<i>Total Ayes 32 ( 69.6%)</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes 9</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes 0 ( 0%)</i>
<i>Unionist Votes 32</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes 32 ( 100%)</i>

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Adjourned at 6.53pm.*

# **Committee Stage of Bill**





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**NORTHERN IRELAND  
ASSEMBLY**

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**FINANCE AND PERSONNEL  
COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 5 July 2000

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**GROUND RENTS BILL  
(NIA 6/99)**

**The Chairperson (Mr Molloy):** I welcome Ms Goldring and Mr Lambe from the Office of Law Reform.

Ms Goldring is going to make some introductory comments.

**Ms Goldring:** The purpose of ground rents legislation is to simplify the conveyancing procedure in Northern Ireland. We have a complex nineteenth-century property title system. The aim is to clean it up to achieve a modern, simplified conveyancing process.

**Mr Close:** The broad-brush approach in the Bill is certainly welcome. It does exactly what you are setting out to do, and it is very preferable to the 1997 legislation. The concern I hear from people who depend on ground-rent income arises from the aspect of the multiplier. I accept that that is a matter primarily for the Minister, but a comment from our witnesses would help the cause.

A multiplier of nine, for example, has been mentioned. Those who depend on ground-rent income are looking for a considerably higher figure, and I sympathise, particularly in the case of charities. A very strong case can be made for a higher figure as charities exist to provide an income for good causes. If the multiplier were struck too low, that could have a detrimental effect — and they argue that nine is too low.

**Ms Goldring:** A multiplier of nine has been decided upon. It was a source of considerable debate, and we are aware of all the issues and the various representations. The original figure was set at 12, but we had strong representations from the Law Society, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and other practitioners in the field that 12 was too high. We investigated the matter further and sought expert advice from the Valuation and Lands Agency, which is the public authority responsible for the valuation of Government property and with experience of buying out ground rents. Its view was that nine reflected the market value fairly accurately.

We are aware that some organisations bought ground rents as an investment and that they are concerned that

the capitalisation, when the multiplier is used, will not yield the same income. A multiplier of nine reflects a yield of about 11%, which is really quite high and takes into account the difficulty of collecting ground rents and the high void value. But nine is pitching it about right because it is the market value, and the market value inherently takes account of interest rates. We are quite content that at this stage nine is a fair reflection of the market value.

On the wider issue, there is a public interest in the Government's imposing a compulsory buyout scheme. That interferes with the right of people to hold their property, but under European law and jurisprudence the Government are not required in these circumstances to provide full market value so long as there is a fair level of compensation. As regards human rights law and jurisprudence, a multiplier of nine would be considered very fair because it closely approximates to the market value.

**Mr Close:** Many of these investments are long-term. The figure must be reviewed periodically, and the legislation takes account of that. When it is struck, it must be in conjunction with what an investment would produce at the time. Looking at long-term investments currently, I do not necessarily agree that a multiplier of nine should be considered adequate.

**Ms Goldring:** We are basing our figure on expert advice that nine reflects the market value, and we are content that the advice is robust and sound. Back in the 1980s, when interest rates were much higher, the Valuation and Lands Agency was buying out ground rents at a multiplier of four.

**Mr Leslie:** If interest rates are 20% the multiplier will be five, and if interest rates are 5% the multiplier needed is 20. That is essentially the situation. For figures in between, the relationship is direct.

**The Chairperson:** I have been surprised by some of the correspondence I have received on this issue. How can it be that charities and trusts are the holders of ground rents? Will some ground rents have been inherited, or will a trust or charity have bought property and then let the ground rents?

**Ms Goldring:** Over the last 20 years ground rents have been seen as an investment in property, and during those years — and in fairly recent times — ground rents will have been bought up as investments yielding income. Presumably what organisations paid for them reflects the difficulties in collecting rents and voids.

Let me return to the point about interest rates and the fact that they are set at what is accepted as market value. Market value inherently reflects interest rates, and the legislation allows for the multiplier to be periodically reviewed. A huge rise or fall in interest rates would be taken into account in any review.

**Mr Leslie:** The change would not need to be that huge to merit a review. If interest rates rise from 5% to 6% — and it is a function more of long gilt yields than of interest rates — the multiplier too should go up by a fifth.

**Ms Goldring:** I am not sure about the mathematics, but I take your general point. The overriding objective of this legislation is not to provide full and accurate market value levels for investors. There is a wider public policy and public interest involved here, and that is to simplify what is a very complex, cumbersome, outdated conveyancing system.

**Mr Close:** I accept that point.

**The Chairperson:** This is going to be a very interesting Bill.

**Mr Close:** One accepts the principle, but there are individual organisations and groups which should not suffer because of it. All that is required is some fixing. For example, the multiplier should be set at the appropriate rate to start with, and then it should be linked to, say, interest rates or the FT index, to go up or down annually or every six months.

If we get it right at the start we can have an excellent Bill, the principles of which will be accepted by everyone. I have not come across anyone who queries the principle. People are very happy with the improvements and the changes since 1997. However, there is a group affected by this, and I think that part of our job should be to ensure, insofar as possible, that the principle is right and nobody falls outside the loop.

**Ms Goldring:** I suggest that the key mechanism would be to base the multiplier on market value. I am not sure that there is anything better.

**Mr Maskey:** Some of us feel that ground rent is unfair, for a variety of reasons. However, there is something in what Ms Goldring says about wider public interest, and I recognise the need to clear up the antiquated way of dealing with all of this. By the same token, I feel that some of these organisations, charitable or otherwise, have engaged in speculation. Why should we protect speculators?

We have had the recent controversy about prices in the housing market. These have been driven up by many factors — not just market value. I do not think that we should be underpinning the speculators because of other factors that are causing house prices to rocket, which is creating difficulties, particularly for first-time buyers. I am not so sure about that principle.

If there is to be a ground rent at all, I take the point that the multiplier has to be benchmarked somewhere. However, I am not happy that we should just say “Set a level that will allow the thing to keep going up.” It is fair enough that people have speculated, but they have to take their chances.

**Ms Goldring:** We also need to guard against replacing an outdated complex system with a modern complex system. We have tried to get a fairly simple procedure that is easy to use and has flexibility built in.

**Mr Maskey:** Can these ground rents be bought out compulsorily? It is a clear anomaly in the whole system.

**Ms Goldring:** Compulsory buying-out is at the kernel of this. That phase will be brought in at the end of 2001.

**Mr Lambe:** It should begin to be phased in in 2002, but it will be a rolling programme.

**Mr Maskey:** For what?

**Mr Lambe:** It was always envisaged that it would be a long-term process. The original expectation was five to 10 years.

**Mr Leslie:** There is a difference between a voluntary scheme and a compulsory one. In the case of a compulsory scheme, transfer takes place on the sale. If the multiplier quoted is wrong, in the eyes of the party selling, it can easily be adjusted through the sale price. Under a voluntary scheme you have to motivate the ground rent owner to sell. The message we are trying to get across is that, at nine, that will not happen. You would be entirely justified in having different multipliers for the different schemes. The market will tell you, under the voluntary scheme, whether you have got the multiplier right or not through whether or not it volunteers.

**Ms Goldring:** That is true in a sense. The voluntary scheme is something of a pilot, and we can see how it operates. The Minister said during the Second Reading debate that the voluntary phase would be used to see how the process was operating.

**Mr Lambe:** We call it the voluntary redemption scheme, but it is compulsory as regards the rent owner. The rent owner cannot object to the redemption of the ground rent.

**The Chairperson:** So it is a compulsory/voluntary scheme?

**Mr Lambe:** It is voluntary in the sense that the initiative must be taken by the rent payer. As soon as the rent payer initiates the process, it is carried through. The rent owner is given notice that the process has been initiated, but he has no say in the matter.

**Mr Leslie:** Maybe that is how you fix it then. If it were voluntary on both sides, then, in effect, the market would set the rate and would let you know whether you had the right rate. It seems draconian to say that you have to set a fixed multiplier. That is very anti open market.

**Mr Lambe:** The problem with the original scheme, in the Property (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, was that it required co-operation between the rent owner and the rent payer and a cumbersome service-of-notice procedure.

It is the Law Society and estate agents who say that it will not work because the rent owner and the rent payer will not co-operate with each other.

**The Chairperson:** One issue that has been raised is consultation and how detailed it has been. Can you provide us with evidence or documentation on the consultation that would become part of our Consideration Stage?

**Ms Goldring:** I understood, Mr Chairman, that you have a copy of a note which we submitted that sets out the consultation details.

**Mr Lambe:** I certainly e-mailed the note.

**Ms Goldring:** It sets out the consultation process, including the various stages, the details as to who was consulted and the mechanisms used.

**The Chairperson:** We have some way to go, and we will require assistance in going through the different stages of the Bill. Perhaps you will come back to help.

**Ms Goldring:** With pleasure.

**Mr Leslie:** During the debate I raised a number of questions that were not necessarily answered. One of them was about the effect on mortgages and the existing leases. I would like the comfort of knowing that you are confident that we are not going to accidentally trigger the redocumenting of mortgages where a ground rent is redeemed. I know that that should not happen, but I wonder how confident you are about the robustness of the proposals. What have mortgage providers said about it?

**Mr Lambe:** Very little. The issue has not been raised with us since the process began in 1971, when the original survey of land law in Northern Ireland was published.

**Mr Leslie:** Have you asked the mortgage market point-blank for their views?

**Mr Lambe:** We did not ask specifically for their views on that question. Northern Ireland's banks and building societies were consulted but, unfortunately, chose to make very few comments.

**Ms Goldring:** They have not raised that issue as presenting a problem.

**Mr Leslie:** It would be prudent to make sure that they are not concerned about the issue.

**The Chairperson:** I have raised another, broader issue. Why was it thought inappropriate to include in this Bill the subject of ground rent for land that is not used for dwellings, such as the bed of Lough Neagh? This is a big issue.

**Ms Goldring:** The present legislation is confined to dealing with domestic houses and buildings. Are you talking about undeveloped land?

**The Chairperson:** It is not only undeveloped land. I am using the example of Lough Neagh, which is owned by the Shaftesbury Estate. The ground rent would have to be paid by any of the district councils wishing to develop it, and, as a consequence, it has not been developed in some areas.

**Ms Goldring:** You are quite right — the matter is not considered in this Bill. However, if the Committee believes that it should be, we will be happy to provide an initial assessment of the problem — if there is a problem.

**Mr Leslie:** During the debate I raised the issue of nominal rents, which the legislation defines as being below £1. The Minister commented on the run and said that he was “considering an alternative mechanism for sweeping up these nominal rents” and that “such a mechanism may be the subject of an amendment at Committee Stage”. Can you enlighten us on that?

**Mr Lambe:** Under the Property (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 there is a mechanism whereby nominal rents on leasehold estates can be extinguished by the execution of a deed of declaration. At present that procedure is confined to leasehold estates. It does not deal with a nominal rent on a free farm grant, but we are currently exploring solutions to that problem.

The procedure to solve it could well be a simple amendment to article 35 of the Property (Northern Ireland Order) 1997 to create a mechanism whereby nominal free farm rents could be extinguished by the rent payer executing the declaration that would be lodged with the Land Registry. Draft precedent forms have already been created.

With regard to nominal free farm rents, the biggest problem arises in relation to houses that have been sold by the Housing Executive. There are approximately 85,000 on the market. They are all subject to a nominal 5p rent, which the Housing Executive does not yet collect. Those would not fall within the redemption scheme in this Bill, so we are trying to cater for a specific problem in relation to Housing Executive houses. We already have a scheme for existing leasehold property with nominal rents.

**The Chairperson:** We will be returning to the Ground Rents Bill in September—going through it clause by clause and taking evidence. Obviously, there will be quite a bit of discussion on the detail.





# **Written Answers**



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 9 June 2000

## Written Answers to Questions

### AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

#### Interest Relief Loan Scheme

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in pursuance of AQW 163/99, to confirm whether the £100,000,000 interest relief scheme has been formally submitted to the Department, and to make a statement. (AQW 429/99)

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** The proposals in question have not been put formally to the Department. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to make any statement about them.

#### Modulation

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what were the levels of expenditure on Agri-environment schemes, Afforestation and Less Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowances forecast for each year from 2000/01 to 2006/07 prior to the announcement by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on modulation and how she intends to finance this expenditure, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 432/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** I refer you to my answer of 4 February 2000 to your written question AQW 317/99.

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm that to proceed with the current proposals on modulation, the funding and matching funding for modulation from Treasury will not be additional in the way that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food intended it to be. (AQW 433/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** I refer you to my written answer of 3 February 2000 to your question AQW 318/99.

### Northern Ireland Produce

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps will be taken to promote Northern Ireland produce. (AQW 436/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** There are very strict EU rules limiting the extent to which Governments can support publicity campaigns which promote domestically produced goods in preference to similar goods from other parts of the EU. Consequently, public funds cannot be used to endorse food produce on the basis of its region of origin. However, my Department is providing £2 million to support the marketing of Northern Ireland red meat on the basis of its quality. In addition, £400,000 has been earmarked to support marketing in the pig meat sector. My Department also works closely with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in supporting the marketing and promotional activities of the Northern Ireland agri-food sector.

### THE ENVIRONMENT

#### Planning: Third-Party Appeals

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of the Environment if he is considering the introduction of a third-party appeals system in relation to planning projects. (AQW 467/99)

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster):** The case for introducing third-party rights of appeal has been considered on a number of occasions in the past — by the previous Northern Ireland Assembly in 1983 and by the House of Commons Select Committee in 1996. However, it was concluded on both occasions that because of resource implications and potential delay and uncertainty in the planning process third-party rights of appeal should not be introduced. The Department is aware, however, of the current interest in the subject of third-party appeals, and policy in this area is being kept under review.

#### Planning: Farm Diversification

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of the Environment to give assurances to the members of the farming community who wish to diversify that every effort will be made to assure them that planning policy will not hamper their efforts. (AQW 497/99)

**Mr Foster:** While each proposal is considered on its merits having regard to prevailing planning policies, the Department is favourably disposed towards acceptance of farm diversification, provided that it is of an acceptable nature and scale in the locality; is capable of

satisfactory integration into the rural landscape; has acceptable access and parking arrangements; has no potential to cause pollution; and does not cause a nuisance to nearby residents.

### Dioxin Contamination

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Department is aware of recent reports (a) of dioxin contamination near waste incinerators in England and (b) from the United States Environmental Protection Agency on the dangers of dioxins. (AQW 516/99)

**Mr Foster:** (a) The Department is aware of a report on contamination related to ash disposal from a waste incineration plant in the north-east of England — Byker combined heat and power plant, which is situated in Newcastle and is operated under contract for Newcastle City Council. The Environment Agency is investigating possible breaches of environmental legislation in that between 1994 and 1999 some of the ash from the plant was deposited and used to construct pathways.

(b) A draft paper on risks from dioxins was issued by the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 1994 for consultation. The final paper is expected this summer. A UK position paper on dioxins is currently being drafted and will inform future decisions.

### Waste Incineration

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment has been made in relation to the use of incineration as part of the waste management strategy for Northern Ireland. (AQW 517/99)

**Mr Foster:** Waste-to-energy is one of a range of possible options identified in the strategy, but specific assessments are a matter for district councils when preparing their waste management plans.

These plans will have to meet and sustain the challenging recycling targets and demonstrate that new proposals provide the best practicable environmental option (BPEO) in terms of environmental, economic and social benefits. Should any plans include incineration the facilities would be subject to strict EU emission standards.

## FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Official Statistics

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether Northern Ireland will come within

the new arrangements for national statistics announced by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 7 June 2000. (AQW 612/99)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):**

I can confirm that official statistics produced by the Northern Ireland Departments will come within the scope of the national statistics. A copy of the framework document which describes the new arrangements will be placed in the Assembly Library.

## HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Air Ambulance Service

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any plans to provide an air ambulance service in Northern Ireland, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 450/99)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** The issue of an air ambulance service is addressed in the report of the strategic review of the Ambulance Service on which my Department is consulting to 30 June 2000. I also understand that Ards Borough Council, along with other parties, is taking steps to establish a charitable trust to fund the provision of such a service. I will wish to consider carefully the responses to the consultation on the strategic review before taking decisions on how ambulance services can best be improved.

Luaitear seirbhís Aerothar i dtuairisc athbhreitiú straitéiseach an tSeirbhís Otharchair, a bhfuil mo Roinn ag déanamh staidéar air go dtí 30 Meitheamh 2000. Tuigim chomh maith, go bhfuil Comhairle na hArda agus dreamanna eile ag cur Iontaobhas Carthanachta ar bun le díol as seirbhís mar seo a chur ar fáil. Sula ndéanaim socrú ar an bhealach is fearr leis an seirbhís otharchair a fhorbairt ba mhaith liom smaoinéadh go cúramach ar na freagraí a thiocfaidh ón athbhreitiú staitéiseach.

### Hospital Services: (Ballymena)

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action has been taken to ensure the provision of a community hospital/minor injuries unit for the Ballymena area. (AQW 451/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Northern Health and Social Services Board reviewed its acute hospital services in 1998 and recommended the concentration of acute care at Antrim and Coleraine. The board proposed that local hospital services, including day surgery, outpatient



services and diagnostic facilities, should be developed at Whiteabbey and Magherafelt. The board also recommended that minor injuries units should be developed in the Ballymena and Larne areas.

I am now considering how our hospital services can be developed in a way which ensures high-quality care for all those who need it. I want to look at all the options involved before coming to any conclusions. I am very aware of how important hospital services are to local communities in particular, and before any changes are made I shall want to ensure that decisions about the future of services are based on the fullest possible information.

Rinne Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Tuaiscirt athbhreithniú ar a chuid géarsheirbhísí ospidéal i 1998 agus mhol sé gur cheart an géarchúram a lárú in Aontroim agus i gCúil Raithin. Mol an Bord gur cheart na seirbhísí áitiúla ospidéal, agus an mháinliacht lae, na seirbhísí eisothar, agus na saoráidí diagnóiseacha san áireamh, a fhorbairt sa Mhainistir Fhionn agus i Machaire Fiolta. Mhol an Bord fosta gur chóir na haonaid chóireála mionghorthuithe a fhorbairt i gceantair an Bhaile Mheánaigh agus Latharna.

Anois tá mé ag cuimhneamh ar an dóigh a bhféadfaí ár seirbhísí ospidéal a fhorbairt lena chinntiú go gcuirfí scoth cúraim ar fáil dóibh siúd a bhfuil sí de dhíth orthu. Ba mhaith liom amharc ar na roghanna atá ann sula ndéanfaidh mé cinneadh ar bith. Tuigim go maith a thabhadh atá na seirbhísí ospidéal don phobal áitiúil go háirithe, agus sula ndéanfar athruithe ar bith, ba mhaith liom a chinntiú go bhfuil gach cinneadh faoi na seirbhísí sa todhchaí bunaithe ar an eolas is iomláine.

### Influenza Vaccine

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action will be taken to ensure that the influenza vaccine is more widely available and publicised in the future; and what funding will be made available for this vaccine. (AQW 452/99)

**Ms de Brún:** My Department is committed to offering influenza vaccine to all people aged over 65 this year for the first time. As in previous years, people of all ages who are at higher risk of serious illness from influenza will also be offered vaccine. Influenza vaccine will also be offered to key health and social care workers. The Chief Medical Officer has set up a multidisciplinary group to make recommendations for the 2000-01 influenza vaccination programme. The programme will include a public information campaign. A total budget of £1.6 million has been set aside.

I mbliana den chéad uair tá mo Roinn ag cur ceangail uirthi féin vacsaíní in éadan fliú a chur ar fáil do dhaoine os cionn 65 bliana d'aois. Cuirfear vacsaíní ar fáil fosta do dhaoine in aois ar bith atá i mbaol mór

tromghalair, mar a rinneadh le blianta anuas. Cuirfear an vacsaín ar fáil do oibrithe cúraim sláinte agus sóisialta a bhfuil dianriachtanas leo. Tá an Priomhoifigeach Míochaine i ndiaidh grúpa ilghairmiúil a bhunú le moltaí a chur chun tosaigh faoin chlár vacsaíní in éadan fliú do 2000/2001. Beidh feachtas eolais ann don phobal mar chuid den chlár. Tá buiséad de £1.6m curtha i leataobh dó.

### Contraception

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will explain why the morning-after pill is only available in Northern Ireland on prescription from registered general practitioners, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 453/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Emergency hormonal contraception (EHC), also known as the morning-after pill, is available here on prescription from general practitioners. It is also available from family planning clinics, including some youth clinics and hospital accident and emergency units. EHCs are licensed as a prescription-only medicine here and in Great Britain under legal criteria set out in directive 92/26 EEC and the Medicines Act 1968.

Tá an frithghiniúinnt hormónach eigeandála (FHE), nó mhaidin dar gcionn piolla, ar fáil anseo ó na gnáthdhochtúirí. Tá sé ar fáil ó clinici pleanáil chlainne, ionad óige agus ionaid thimpiste agus éigeandála otharlainne. Tá ceadaithe FHE a fháil mar chogas oideas amháin anseo agus i Sasana faoi chritéir dli leagtha sios i paipéir treorach 92/26 den CEE agus in Acht Leighis 1968.

### Occupational Therapy (North Antrim)

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action has been taken to reduce waiting times for occupational therapy in the North Antrim constituency. (AQW 454/99)

**Ms de Brún:** In April this year Homefirst Health and Social Services Trust appointed an additional grade 2 occupational therapist (OT), a 0.5 WTE unqualified assistant OT and a 0.25 WTE clerical officer in the North Antrim constituency. There have been no additional staff appointed by the Causeway Health and Social Services Trust.

In Aibreán i mbliana d'fhostaigh an Iontabhas CéadBaile Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta teiripoir shaothair den dara grád, cuntaí teiripoir shaothair 0.5 WTE nach bhfuil cailithe agus oifigeach cleireach 0.25 WTE breise i ceantar Tuaisceart Aontroma. Níor fhostaigh Iontaobhas Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta Causeway daoine breise.

## Hospitals: Expenditure

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what disaggregation of expenditure by injury/cause of illness is provided by hospitals in Northern Ireland. (AQW 455/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The information is not readily available in the form requested. Health and social services trusts do not allocate costs or expenditure by injury/cause of illness.

Níl an t-eolas, mar a iarradh é, infhaighte. Ní dháilíonn Iontaobhais Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta costais nó caiteachas de réir dochair / cúis tinnis.

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of expenditure by hospitals in Northern Ireland and by admission criteria for each of the last five years. (AQW 456/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The information in the form requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Níl fáil go réidh ar an eolas a d'iarr tú agus ní fhéadfaí é a fháil ach ar chostas a bheadh díréireach.

## Crime Victims: Hospital Treatment

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many victims of crime were treated in Northern Ireland hospitals in each of the last five years. (AQW 457/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The information in the form requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Níl fáil go réidh ar an eolas a d'iarr tú agus ní fhéadfaí é a fháil ach ar chostas a bheadh díréireach.

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what arrangements her Department has for recovering costs of medical care provided to victims of crime. (AQW 458/99)

**Ms de Brún:** There are no arrangements for recovering such costs.

Níl socruithe déanta leis na costais seo a fháil ar ais.

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what financial value can be accrued from cost-recovery from those found guilty of criminal offences which rendered victims in need of Health Service attention in the last five years. (AQW 459/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The information in the form requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh.

## Patients: Complaints Procedure

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what systems are in place to monitor primary care patient satisfaction with their local medical service. (AQW 461/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Health and social services councils represent patients' interests in all areas of the health and social services, and they work closely with Boards in undertaking periodic surveys to gauge patient satisfaction with the family doctor service at local level. These surveys have proved very useful in highlighting aspects of GP services which need to be improved and developed.

GPs are required to operate a patients' complaint procedure covering all aspects of their services and to report annually to health and social services boards the number of complaints received.

Déanann na Comhairlí Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta obair ar son na hothar sna seirbhísí sláinte agus soisialta uilig agus oibreann siad leis na Bhoird deanamh cinnte go bhfuil na hothar sásta le na doctúirí clainne áitiúil. Tá sé seo úsáideach le fadhbanna le na seirbhísí doctúirí a thabhairt chun tosaigh.

Tá ar na doctúir córas gearann a cuir ar fáil do na hothar de seirbhísí s'acu uilig agus tá orthu tuairisc bliantiúil a thabhairt don Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta mar gheall ar an méid gearann a bhi acu.

## Child Protection Register

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will list by community trust board area the numbers of young people committing or attempting suicide while on the child protection register. (AQW 462/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The information requested is not routinely collected. The death or serious injury of a child whose name was on the child protection register would result in a case management review, about which my Department should be informed. The Department is not aware of any review resulting from a case of suicide or attempted suicide.

Ní bhailítear an t-eolas a iarradh go rialta. Dhéanfaí athbhreithniú bainistíocht cháis agus ba chóir an Roinn s'agam a chur ar an eolas dá bhfaigheadh páiste bás nó dá ngortódh páiste atá ar Chlár Cosanta na bPáistí go trom. Ní feasach an Roinn faoi athbhreithnithe ar bith dá bharr cás féinmharaíthe nó cás iarracht féinmharaíthe.

## Illegal Drugs

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will report on the steps she has taken to support the RUC drugs squad in their anti-drugs campaign. (AQW 464/99)

**Ms de Brún:** On 9 February it was agreed that I would take the lead role on behalf of the Executive Committee, working with other relevant Ministers, to oversee the work of the Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs. This remains the position.

To support the implementation of the strategy to tackle the drugs issue, an additional £5.5m has been made available over a three-year period until March 2002. Elements of this funding have been committed for information and research and for the creation of a dedicated drug co-ordination post. The remainder is being used to support individual projects at statutory, voluntary and community level that have the potential to contribute to achieving the strategy's overall aims.

A first round of funding of about £2 million was announced in March 2000. Sixteen projects were successful in obtaining funding. A second funding round was announced on 10 April, with a closing date of 17 May for receipt of bids. Over 70 bids have been received, and it is anticipated that funding decisions on this round will be made before the start of the summer.

Aontaíodh ar 9 Feabhra go nglacfainn an príomhról thar ceann an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin, ag obair le hAirí bainteacha, i bhfeighil obair Ghrúpa Lárnach Comhordaithe ar Ghníomh in éadan Drugaí. Is amhlaidh seo go fóill.

Cuireadh ar fáil £5.5 milliún breise thar thréimhse trí bliana go dtí Márta 2002 le tacú le cur i gcrích straitéis chun dul i ngleic le mórcheisteanna drugaí. Gealladh cuid den mhaoiniú d' eolas agus thaighde agus do cheapachán post comhordaithe dírithe. Tá an chuid eile á úsáid le tacaíocht a thabhairt ar leibhéil reachtúla, dheonacha agus pobail a bhfuil an acmhainn acu le cur i gcrích le foriomlán aidhmeanna na straitéise.

Fógraíodh an chéad bhabhta den mhaoiniú, thart faoi £2 mhilliún, i Márta 2000. D'éirigh le sé thionscadal déag maoiniú a fháil. Fógraíodh an dara babhta den mhaoiniú ar 10 Aibreán agus an dáta deiridh ar a glacadh le tairiscintí, 17 Bealtaine. Fuarthas thar 70 tairiscint agus glactar go ndéantar cinneadh ar mhaoiniú an bhabhta seo roimh thús an tsamhraidh.

## Prescription Fraud

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will detail (a) how many health board trusts are in debt because of prescription fraud; (b) what percentage of the total debt this represents and if she will provide a breakdown,

geographically, of where this is occurring and include the detection and conviction rate for each area.

(AQW 466/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The four area boards account for the income for family health services (FHS) charges, and these charges are administered by the Central Services Agency on behalf of the boards. Consequently the Boards, and not the HPSS trusts, have overall accounting responsibility for prescription and other exemption fraud. Accordingly, there are no HSS trusts in deficit owing to prescription fraud.

It is estimated that prescription fraud in the health and personal social services amounted to £10 million in 1998-99, which represents approximately 4% of the total general pharmaceutical services expenditure, but this overall figure cannot be split by geographical area at this time.

Tá na Ceithre Bhord freagracht as táillí Seirbhísí Sláinte an Teaghlaigh (SST) agus riarann Gníomhaireacht Sheirbhísí Lárnacha thar ceann na mBord. Mar thoradh air seo is iad na Boird, ní na hIontaobhais SSSP atá freagracht as calaois oidis agus as calaois ar shaoirse ó tháillí eile. Mar sin de, níl aon easnamh ar Iontabhais SSS mar thoradh ar chalaois oidis.

Meastar go gcosnaíodh calaois oidis £10 milliún i 1998/99, feidhmníonn seo mar 4% de chaiteachas Seirbhísí Cógaisíochta Ginearálta, ach ní féidir an figiúr iomlán seo a roinnt de réir limistéar geografach ag an am seo.

## Irish Language

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what is the purpose, extent and cost of the use of Irish in departmental papers and forms, and whether the public are given a choice of language, and to state the legal authority for this policy.

(AQW 480/99)

**Ms de Brún:** My Department's press releases, answers to Assembly questions and some public notices appear in Irish as well as English. The related translation costs are currently estimated to amount to about £2,000 per month. The authority for this is derived from the Good Friday Agreement. Members of the public are free to choose with regard to language in their communications with my Department.

Cuirtear an Roinn s'agam nuacht-eisiúintí, freagraí do Cheisteanna an Tionóil agus cuid de na fógraí poiblí amach i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla. Meastar go gcosnaíonn an tseirbhís aistrúcháin don obair seo £2,000 gach mí. Tagann an t-údarás chun seo a dhéanamh ón Chomhaontú. Tá rogha ag an phobal cé acu teanga a ba mhaith leo a úsáid agus iad ag dul i dteagmháil leis an Roinn s'agam.

## McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Mr O'Neill** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 1999 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if she will make a statement. (AQW 501/99)

**Ms de Brún:** No contracts were awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (previously the DHSS) between 1 April 1999 and 30 May 2000.

Níor thug an Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí (an Roinn Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta tráth) conradh ar bith do McCann Erickson (Belfast) idir na dátaí an 1 Aibreán 1999 agus an 30 Bealtaine 2000.

## Health and Social Services Expenditure

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what growth there has been in spending on (a) acute hospital services, (b) psychiatric services, (c) children's and family services and (d) community care, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 520/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The percentage growth in spending, in each of the last five years on acute hospital services, psychiatric services, children's and family services, and community care was as follows:

	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
Acute hospital services	3.88%	4.30%	4.14%	5.95%	8.17%
Psychiatric services	5.63%	3.84%	1.76%	2.48%	7.53%
Children's and family services	-0.17%	-1.39%	8.55%	3.93%	11.55%
Community care	11.58%	0.82%	3.60%	3.03%	9.24%

Is é an fáis céatadán a bhí ann sa chaiteachas ar ghéarsheirbhísí ospidéal, ar sheirbhísí síciatracha, ar sheirbhísí do leanaí agus do theaghlaigh, agus ar chúram pobail gach bliain le cúig bliana anuas:-

	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
Géarsheirbhísí ospidéal	3.88%	4.30%	4.14%	5.95%	8.17%
Seirbhísí síciatracha	5.63%	3.84%	1.76%	2.48%	7.53%
Seirbhísí do leanaí agus do theaghlaigh	-0.17%	-1.39%	8.55%	3.93%	11.55%
Cúram pobail	11.58%	0.82%	3.60%	3.03%	9.24%

## Children Order 1995

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money was allocated in each of the last three financial years to each health and social services board and trust to provide exclusively for the implementation of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. (AQW 523/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Department does not make revenue allocations to health and social services trusts. All trust income is earned through service level agreements with commissioners of care, including health and social services boards. For the last three financial years the Department has provided funding to the boards to purchase services under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 as set out in the following table:

Health and social services board	1997-98 (£000s)	1998-99 (£000s)	1999-2000 (£000s)
Northern	547	956	1,768
Southern	414	713	1,322
Eastern	947	1,727	3,175
Western	379	670	1,235

Ní dháileann an Roinn cuid ar bith dá hioncam ar na hIontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta. Gnóthaíonn na hIontaobhais a gcuid ioncaim uile as comhaontuithe ag leibhéal na seirbhísí le coimisinéirí cúraim, agus na Boird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta san áireamh. Le trí bliana airgeadais anuas thug an Roinn maoiniú do na Boird le seirbhísí a cheannach faoi Ordú na Leanaí (Tuaisceart Éireann) 1995 mar atá leagtha amach sa tábla thíos:

Bord sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta	1997-98 (£000te)	1998-99 (£000te)	1999-2000 (£000te)
Tuaisceart	547	956	1,768
Deisceart	414	713	1,322
Oirthear	947	1,727	3,175
Iarthar	379	670	1,235



## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Mr Tierney** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to

McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) by the Department which are still extant; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 507/99)

**The Minister for Social Development (Mr Dodds):**

As the Department for Social Development came into being on 1 December 1999 I am only able to give details from that date. I can confirm that no contracts have been awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd since devolution on 1 December 1999.



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## NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 16 June 2000

### Written Answers to Questions

#### OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

##### North/South Tourism Body

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to explain the criteria applied in reaching the decision to place the North/South tourism body in Coleraine and to confirm whether or not TSN criteria were applied in making this decision.

(AQW 426/99)

**Reply:** Decisions on the location of new cross-border implementation bodies and the Tourism Company were taken by Ministers, North and South, in the North/South Ministerial Council. Ministers considered a range of factors, including objective need and the importance of ensuring a geographical distribution of offices for all of the new bodies located in Northern Ireland, and this is reflected in the final outcome.

##### British-Irish Council

**Mr Billy Bell** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to confirm when the next meeting of the British-Irish Council will take place and what contribution the Northern Ireland delegation will be making to that meeting.

(AQW 485/99)

**Reply:** No decisions have been taken yet about the next plenary British-Irish Council meeting.

The Northern Ireland Administration agreed at the inaugural plenary British-Irish Council meeting to take the lead on transport issues. In view of the approach to government set out by DUP Ministers, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have assumed responsibility for representing the Executive Committee at sectoral meetings on transport, in place of the Minister for Regional Development.

#### McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if they will make a statement.

(AQW 508/99)

**Reply:** (a) No contract awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd between 1 April 1999 and 2 December 1999 is currently extant.

A total of four contracts were awarded to the company over this period, to a total value of £81,384·53

(b) No contracts were awarded over the period 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000.

(c) No contract awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd between 11 February and 30 May 2000 is currently extant.

A total of one contract was awarded to the company over this period, with a total value of £6,896·17

(d) There are no contracts with McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd currently extant.

#### AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

##### McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 498/99)

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** My Department has not awarded any such contracts.

### Rural Community Network

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has made an assessment of the contents of the Rural Community Network's report 'Reconciliation and Social Inclusion in Rural Areas'. (AQW 430/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** This document is one of a number of policy discussion documents produced by the Rural Community Network looking at various issues that affect the rural community in Northern Ireland. They pull together academic research, past experience and current thinking, with the aim of stimulating wider debate on topical issues and problem areas. In doing so, the documents provide a valuable addition to the policy debate.

### GM Seed

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm whether genetically modified seed from a contaminated batch of Hyola Spring oilseed rape supplied by Advanta Seeds has been planted in Northern Ireland and to make a statement on what areas have been affected and what compensation she plans to put in place for farmers in these areas. (AQW 431/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The recent publicity about the inadvertent mixing of GM seed with conventional seed relates to a spring-sown oilseed rape variety supplied by Advanta Seeds (UK). Checks have established that there is nothing to indicate that there is any of this oilseed rape variety in Northern Ireland. Only a very small area of oilseed rape is grown in Northern Ireland, and most of this is winter-sown. The only Northern Ireland supplier of spring-sown oilseed rape has confirmed that it has not purchased seed from Advanta (UK). While the question of compensation does not, therefore, arise in Northern Ireland, Advanta announced on 2 June that it will compensate those farmers who inadvertently sowed GM rapeseed.

### Farmers' Markets

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give financial assistance for the development of the farmers' market at St George's Market in Belfast and to make provision for similar farmers' markets throughout Northern Ireland. (AQW 434/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The Department, through the Agri-Food Development Service, has provided and is continuing to provide both financial and staff resources

to the Farming and Retailing Movement (NI). This is for the development of the farm retail sector in Northern Ireland and for the promotion of locally produced food.

I am pleased to see this assistance being used in the establishment of the Belfast Farmers' Market and envisage that the Farming and Retailing Movement (NI) will receive continued support of this kind to develop similar markets in key towns in Northern Ireland.

### Pigmeat

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has seen the recently published advertisement by United Kingdom pig producers, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 435/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** I am aware of the recent advertisement promoting pigmeat by the Meat and Livestock Commission, which is a Great Britain body. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on an advertisement by a body for which I have no responsibility.

### Countryside Management Scheme

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the current status of the Countryside Management Scheme. (AQW 437/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) opened for applications between 24 May and 30 July 1999. A total of 1,010 applications were received, of which 280 were subsequently withdrawn or rejected as ineligible. The remaining 730 have undergone a preliminary audit and have been ranked against predetermined criteria to assess relevant environmental features.

A further main audit is currently being conducted on the 575 top-scoring applications, and financial resources available should allow all those who can demonstrate their ability to comply with the scheme and who wish to enter to do so. It is anticipated that agreements will be completed following scheme approval from Brussels later this summer. All applicants were written to in April 2000 and advised of the progress of their applications. A further CMS application period is planned for November 2000 to mid-February 2001.

### Countryside Management Scheme

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money will be available under the Countryside Management Scheme, when it will commence, and when the scheme will close. (AQW 438/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) opened for an initial round of applications



between 24 May and 30 July 1999. This scheme is a component of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Plan (2000-06), which is currently awaiting approval from the EU Commission. Once that approval is obtained — and it is expected in July/August 2000 — successful applicants may enter into agreements with the Department, and the first payments will be made 15 months after conclusion of an agreement.

Expenditure on the CMS in the 2001-02 financial year is expected to be in the region of £1.4 million, which should allow approximately 500 applicants to be invited to join the scheme from the initial application round.

It is planned to open further application periods between November 2000 and mid-February 2001 and on an annual basis thereafter. It is anticipated that a further 500 farms could enter the scheme in 2001-02, 750 in 2002-03 and 1000 in 2003-04. The value of the scheme would be reviewed at that stage.

### On-farm Retail Outlets: Rates

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will make representations to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to reduce the rate burden on farm-based retail outlets. (AQW 439/99)

**Ms Rodgers** [*holding answer 12 June 2000*]: The net annual valuation (NAV) of premises is determined by the Valuation and Lands Agency (VLA) of the Department of Finance and Personnel and is judged on an individual basis, using a number of criteria. In general, the rates for on-farm retail outlets are lower than those for similar outlets in an urban location.

Whilst I and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development are active in assisting farm businesses to seek alternative sources of income, I believe that this is a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel. I will discuss the issue with Mr Mark Durkan, the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

### Pigs

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to state what plans she has to implement a compensation scheme to alleviate the financial problems of local pig producers. (AQW 440/99)

**Ms Rodgers**: One of the financial assistance measures announced at the Prime Minister's agriculture summit meeting on 30 March was a three-year UK Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme. The scheme is designed to improve the long-term viability of the UK pig industry. Since then my Department has been co-operating with the other UK Agriculture Departments in planning the operational aspects of this scheme.

The scheme will be in two parts: (a) aid to outgoers who wish to leave pig farming, and (b) a restructuring or ongoers element for those who wish to remain in pig farming but want to restructure their business to make it viable in the longer term. The scheme must meet EU state aid rules, principal among which for this scheme is the need to permanently reduce UK capacity by at least 16% from that which existed in June 1998. An application has been made to the European Commission for approval of the scheme under the state aid rules. EU Commission approval is still awaited, but, as it is the type of scheme with which the Commission is familiar, the UK is reasonably optimistic that it will be approved. An announcement will be made in due course.

Proposals, although not final, suggest that the outgoers element will be run centrally for the whole of the UK, using a sealed bidding system. The UK agriculture Departments are currently consulting their respective industry representative bodies on this element of the scheme.

The outgoers element will be introduced as soon as possible after Commission approval is received. It is planned to close the application period for this element about 10 October and have approvals issued within one month, actual decommissioning completed by 31 January and payments made by 31 March.

The ongoers element cannot proceed until and unless the required reduction in UK capacity is achieved. The ongoers scheme will involve producers agreeing a loan to carry out a business plan with a bank or other lender institution and submitting an application for assistance based on that plan. The Government will pay the equivalent of a reduction of five percentage points on the interest charge over two years.

In an earlier decision, announced last autumn, a sum of £5 million was allocated by the Government to the UK pig industry to assist the marketing of pigmeat. £400,000 of this allocation has been made available in Northern Ireland. Following discussions with the industry as to how this funding should be deployed, a state aid application has been lodged.

### Fishing Industry

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to state what plans she has to implement a compensation scheme for fishing boats and crew members, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 441/99)

**Ms Rodgers**: I have no plans to implement a compensation scheme for fishing boats and crew members. I do not believe it is appropriate to compensate fishermen for a decline in stocks or for conservation measures

designed to improve stocks and, hence, fishing opportunities in the future.

### GM Crops

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the Department has any plans to permit growing trials of any genetically modified organisms in Northern Ireland and, if so, to give details.

(AQW 518/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** There are no genetically modified crops being grown in Northern Ireland, either commercially, in farm scale evaluations or in research establishments, nor are there any such plans. There is an agreement with the plant breeding industry which rules out the commercial marketing and growing of GM crops in the UK before 2003.

### GM Seed

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what information the Department has about the planting of any seed contaminated with genetically modified organisms in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 519/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The recent publicity about the inadvertent mixing of GM seed with conventional seed relates to a spring-sown oilseed rape variety supplied by Advanta Seeds (UK). Checks have established that there is nothing to indicate that there is any of this oilseed rape variety in Northern Ireland. Only a very small area of oilseed rape is grown in Northern Ireland, and most of this is winter-sown. The only Northern Ireland supplier of spring-sown oilseed rape has confirmed that it has not purchased seed from Advanta (UK).

### Forestry

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to clarify when the Forest Service Agency expects to have its development plans cleared by the European Commission, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 537/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The Northern Ireland Rural Development Plan, including the forestry section, was submitted to the European Commission on 1 February 2000. The plan is expected to be approved by early autumn.

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the Department intends to publish its development plans for forests in Northern Ireland, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 538/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** Once the Northern Ireland Rural Development Plan is approved by the European

Commission, it will be published. The plan will contain a section on forestry.

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps will be taken to ensure parity between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the promotion of private forestry grants.

(AQW 539/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The forestry grant schemes, North and South, vary considerably in their specific requirements and levels of grant. Direct comparisons are therefore difficult, and harmonisation would be impossible without major scheme changes and a substantial increase in the funding in Northern Ireland. Promotion of private planting will be kept under review and will be specifically considered as part of the current forest policy review.

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps will be taken to increase the planting of forests in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 540/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The area of woodland is currently increasing by about 700 hectares a year through a combination of public and private planting. At current funding levels this is likely to be the maximum achievable. All funding is, of course, under review as part of the 2000 comprehensive spending review.

### Spending Estimates

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to explain the reduction of £9 million in spending on food, farming and environmental policy between 1999 and 2001, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 541/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The estimate for 2001 represents baseline provision only, as established by the comprehensive spending review, whereas the 1999 estimate includes the baseline provision for the year plus supplementary estimate provision, chiefly to cover in-year pressures in relation to animal disease compensation and associated fees for private veterinary practitioners.

### Forestry

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps will be taken by the Forest Service Agency to ensure that targets for private-sector tree planting, as set out in the Department's recent five-year plan, will be met, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 551/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The Forest Service will maintain and raise awareness of the availability of forestry grants through the distribution of booklets and leaflets to the

public from Forest Service and agriculture offices. The schemes will also be promoted by Forest Service staff at agricultural and other shows.

### Rural Development Network

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assessment she has made in relation to the Rural Community Network policy document 'The Environment and the Farming Community in Northern Ireland', and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 557/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** This document is one of a number of policy discussion documents produced by the Rural Development Network looking at various issues that affect the rural community in Northern Ireland. They pull together academic research, past experience and current thinking, with the aim of stimulating wider debate on topical issues and problem areas. This latest document provides a valuable addition to the policy debate on the environmental aspects of farming in Northern Ireland.

### Agriculture Strategy

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps will be taken to implement a strategy to ensure a sustainable future for agriculture in the light of a 78% decline in farm incomes, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 560/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** On 3 December 1999 I announced my intention to set up a Group to develop a "vision" for the future of the Northern Ireland agri-food sector. This is intended to enable the industry to develop a strategy to realise that vision. Progress on this exercise was interrupted during the period of suspension, but following the Downing Street summit a steering group was set up, and its first meeting was held on 11 May.

The steering group is now fully into its work, and the four sub-groups set up by the main committee held their first meetings in the week beginning 12 June. I expect to receive a report from the steering group in the autumn and will make this public.

You will also be aware of the decisions announced at the Prime Minister's agriculture summit on 30 March, which have been welcomed by the industry. A short-term aid package included £8.1m in agri-money compensation for Northern Ireland, £8.5m in additional aid for hill areas, and a substantial pig industry restructuring scheme. On top of this, a significant programme of measures was announced to reduce bureaucratic burdens on farmers and to assist with the long-term development of the agri-food sector.

### Rivers Agency

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what performance targets have been set for the Rivers Agency for the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 621/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The following key performance targets have been set for the Rivers Agency for 2000-01:

- to construct or refurbish 5.76 km of urban flood defences;
- to increase the length of designated sea defences having appropriate standards of protection to 34.9%;
- to accommodate increased storm run-off from 190 hectares of development land;
- to replace/refurbish 1.6 km of dangerous culverts;
- to complete maintenance works on 267 km of urban watercourses and 1,029 km of rural watercourses;
- to issue substantive replies to 80% of written enquiries within 15 working days of receipt;
- to respond to 98% of schedule 6 applications within three months;
- to control programme expenditure to within 0.5% shortfall of the final control total;
- to control DRC expenditure to within 1% shortfall of the final control total.
- The Rivers Agency business plan for 2000-01 will be placed in the Library at a later date.

## CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

### Ulster-Scots

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what steps he has taken to ensure equality of treatment and promotion of Ulster-Scots in the media and in primary and secondary schools.

(AQW 474/99)

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey):** Ulster-Scots is one of the languages recognised under Part II of the Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages, which sets out general principles of recognition and support for indigenous minority languages and the removal of discrimination against them. This treatment reflects the current state of development and language planning of Ulster-Scots. It is not the intention of the Government to use treatment of one language as a benchmark for treatment of another. Treatment of both Irish and Ulster-Scots will reflect their respective positions and will be on an equitable basis.

The issue of media coverage of Ulster-Scots is a matter for those responsible for taking editorial decisions for the media.

As regards the education sector, there are no current demands from within the schools system for Ulster-Scots to be taught as a language. There is, however, scope within the statutory curriculum for the study of Ulster- Scots, and any school can include it on a voluntary basis where there is a demand.

### Motorcycle Racing

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assessment he has made in relation to the development of an international-standard motorcycle circuit to promote tourism and sport in Northern Ireland. (AQW 475/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** I should explain that I am unaware of any firm proposal for the development of a motorcycle circuit other than that a number of councils have passed a motion in favour of the idea. While there may be merit in Northern Ireland's having an international motorcycle circuit, it would be inappropriate for me to comment until a specific proposal has been developed. Such a proposal would in the first instance be an issue for the governing body of the sport. The matter would then need to be considered by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, which has statutory responsibility for the development of sport in the Province, including assistance to bodies involved in providing facilities.

### McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Mr McMenamin** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 506/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** I can confirm that no contracts have been awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure during the periods mentioned in (a) to (c). I can also confirm that there are no contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department that are still extant.

## EDUCATION

### Integrated Schools

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education how many (a) Protestants and (b) Roman Catholics are enrolled at each of the integrated primary schools and at each of the integrated secondary schools in Northern Ireland. (AQW 476/99)

**The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):** The figures in the 1999-2000 school census are as follows:

#### INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

	Roman Catholic	Protestant
Forge	105	102
Hazelwood	184	119
Cranmore	58	53
Enniskillen	105	69
Omagh	90	53
Oakgrove	195	147
Carhill	17	29
Rathenraw	62	33
Mill Strand	72	70
Braidside	84	115
Corran	61	33
Acorn	59	106
Spires	30	18
Hilden	9	37
Kircubbin	22	48
Portaferry	33	24
Bangor Central	22	216
Annsborough	41	4
All Children's	115	70
Loughview	68	62
Cedar	59	48
Oakwood	58	39
Kilbroney	35	23
Bridge	189	162
Portadown	87	65
Windmill	78	66
Saints and Scholars	91	55



**INTEGRATED SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

	Roman Catholic	Protestant
Hazelwood College	364	249
Malone Integrated College	193	162
Oakgrove Integrated College	498	241
Erne Integrated College	226	116
Drumragh College	341	169
Slemish Integrated College	139	183
North Coast Integrated College	83	178
Priory College	25	301
Fort Hill College	48	650
Down Academy	34	211
Lagan College	336	419
Shimna Integrated College	243	149
Strangford Integrated College	75	131
Brownlow College	114	215
New-Bridge Integrated College	248	117
Armagh/South Tyrone Integrated College	232	141

Some pupils in these schools may be classified as neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic.

### **School Buildings: Access for Disabled People**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education if he will make it his policy to carry out an assessment of all school buildings to ensure accessibility for wheel-chair users. (AQW 477/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** All new school buildings provide access for disabled people, and school authorities are taking steps to improve access to existing buildings within existing resources. My Department is considering what further action needs to be taken to improve access and facilities for disabled people in schools.

### **Free School Milk**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education what steps he has taken to implement the provision of free milk for all school children. (AQW 478/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I am currently considering the recent report on this subject. I should point out that the cost of providing free milk to all pupils would be some £8 million per annum, and provision only for those entitled to free school meals would cost about £2 million per annum. There already are various schemes in operation to provide milk to specific groups of pupils, including those at pre-schools and special schools, and current arrangements for free school meals ensure that children from disadvantaged circumstances receive a nutritionally balanced meal each day. If the policy were

to be changed, I would want to be satisfied that this would represent the best use of resources in the face of the many competing priorities within the education budget.

### **School Pupils: Security-Sensitive Information**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education what measures he has taken to ensure that all school records which contain security-sensitive details of the children of members of the security forces are subject to appropriate security arrangements. (AQW 481/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Schools are prevented by legislation from disclosing information about the name, address or occupation of a pupil's parent except to the pupil or his or her parent. The physical security of the records which a school holds about its pupils is a matter for the board of governors and the principal of the school.

### **School Meals**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education if he will make a commitment to the future of the rural school kitchens and the provision of school meals in rural areas. (AQW 482/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I am fully committed to the provision of school meals in rural areas. All pupils have access to nutritionally balanced school meals regardless of where they live.

Education and library boards are responsible for the operation of the meals service at controlled and maintained schools in accordance with the policy laid down by my Department. It is for boards to determine the most effective and efficient means of provision, including decisions as to whether to use on-site kitchens or to have meals transported from a neighbouring school or central kitchen.

### **Ballymena Academy Preparatory Department**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education if he will make a statement about the proposed closure of Academy Preparatory School in Ballymena. (AQW 483/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The closure of the preparatory department is a matter for the board of governors of Ballymena Academy in the first instance. The procedure is that the governors would ask the North-Eastern Education and Library Board to publish a development proposal if they should decide to close the prep dept. My Department would give careful consideration to such a proposal before taking a decision.

## McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 505/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Nil return.

## Youth Workers

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Education to state how many full-time youth workers are employed by each of the education and library boards, detailing whether they are employed in administration, formal settings or informal work with unattached young people. (AQW 513/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The information provided by the education and library boards on the employment of full-time youth workers is as follows:

Board	Total Number Employed	Administration Settings	Formal Work	Informal Work
Belfast	59	-	40	19
North Eastern	25	-	14	11
South Eastern	29	-	15	14
Southern	26	-	5	21
Western	41	-	37	4
Total	180	Nil	111	69

## Pupil Protests

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education if he will confirm whether the Department penalised school children who protested against his appointment as Minister, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 545/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The management of absences from school and behaviour within school is the responsibility of the board of governors and principal of the school.

There is no role for the Department in such cases, so the question of departmental penalty does not arise.

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education to confirm that the Department authorised the North Eastern

Education and Library Board to call on the RUC to deal with children protesting at his appointment as Minister.

(AQW 546/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** As I explained in my response to AQW 545, responsibility for the management of absences from school and behaviour within school rests with the board of governors and principal of the school. The Department has no role in such cases.

I understand, however, that, following discussions between some school principals and board officials, the North Eastern Education and Library Board issued guidance in February 2000 to Principals on managing pupil protests, which included reference to the role of the police in public order issues. The Department is not involved in the issue of such guidance by the Board.

## ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### LEDU and IDB Grants

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many grants have been allocated by LEDU and IDB to the North Antrim constituency compared with the other 17 Northern Ireland constituencies during each of the last three years.

(AQW 444/99)

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey):** I attach details of the number of grants allocated by LEDU (Table A) and IDB (Table B) to each of the 18 parliamentary constituencies during each of the past three financial years.

**TABLE A: LEDU LETTER OF OFFER COMMITMENT BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

CONSTITUENCY	NO OF LETTERS OF OFFER						TOTAL OVER 3 YEARS	% OF NI
	1997/98	% OF NI	1998/99	% OF NI	1999/2000	% OF NI		
Belfast East	115	3%	74	3%	50	2%	239	3%
Belfast North	180	5%	106	5%	103	5%	389	5%
Belfast South	170	5%	115	5%	86	4%	371	5%
Belfast West	98	3%	42	2%	36	2%	176	2%
East Antrim	118	4%	75	3%	65	3%	258	3%
East Londonderry	170	5%	140	6%	126	6%	436	6%
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	253	8%	175	8%	182	8%	610	8%
Foyle	245	7%	208	9%	161	7%	614	8%
Lagan Valley	220	7%	169	7%	148	7%	537	7%
Mid Ulster	342	10%	245	11%	267	12%	854	11%
Newry & Armagh	213	6%	144	6%	141	6%	498	6%
North Antrim	170	5%	130	6%	142	7%	442	6%
North Down	196	6%	113	5%	102	5%	411	5%
South Antrim	250	8%	171	8%	158	7%	579	7%
South Down	171	5%	113	5%	119	5%	403	5%
Strangford	132	4%	72	3%	67	3%	271	3%
Upper Bann	168	5%	120	5%	131	6%	419	5%
West Tyrone	121	4%	64	3%	91	4%	276	4%
TOTAL	3,332		2,276		2,175		7,783	

**TABLE B:  
IDB PROJECTS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

CONSTITUENCY	NO OF PROJECTS SUPPORTED		
	97/98	98/99	99/00
Belfast East	9	5	3
Belfast North	5	5	2
Belfast South	5	11	6
Belfast West	3	1	1
East Antrim	8	4	3
North Antrim	8	1	3
South Antrim	6	2	5
East Londonderry	3	3	1
Foyle	2	6	5
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5	9	6
Lagan Valley	6	5	1
Mid Ulster	4	3	-
Newry & Armagh	-	1	2
North Down	4	-	4
South Down	5	1	1
Strangford	2	3	4
Upper Bann	14	9	7
West Tyrone	2	5	-
TOTAL	91	74	54

NOTE:

1. Total project locations exceed total projects as some projects are located in more than one constituency.
2. Companies have still to determine the precise location of one project secured during 1998-99 and two projects secured during 1999-2000. Consequently these three projects are omitted from the above table.

## Economic Council Report

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment he has made of the Northern Ireland Economic Council's Report 133 on publicly funded research and development and economic development in Northern Ireland, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 445/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** A joint and detailed assessment by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment of the Economic Council report is nearing completion. It is being prepared in consultation with other interested Departments and in the context of relevant national and EU policies. On receipt of the assessment, Dr Farren and I will, as agreed, put a joint report to the Executive Committee.

## Business and Universities: Research and Development Links

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures he has taken to ensure that there is adequate funding to finance research and development links between business and the universities in Northern Ireland. (AQW 446/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** Through IRTU, my Department provides an extensive range of funding measures to promote collaborative research and development and technology transfer between industry and academia. These include the Start Programme, the Teaching Company Scheme

(TCS), the Technology Development Programme and, between 1992 and 1996, funding from the IFI Science and Technology Programme. In addition to 18 centres of international excellence, funding has been provided for a number of university incubator facilities. Since IRTU's establishment in 1992, a total of £45 million has been provided for such activities. In addition, £10 million has been committed for the establishment of a science park for Northern Ireland.

### Tourism Budget

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he will give a breakdown of the budget in his Department for promoting tourism in each constituency area. (AQW 447/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board budget for promoting tourism is not broken down by parliamentary constituency.

The board has offered overall marketing support, through ERDF, of £1,080,502 for 2000-01. A regional breakdown of this figure is attached.

#### REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF NORTHERN IRELAND TOURIST BOARD BUDGET FOR PROMOTING TOURISM

North East Region	202,725
South East Region	150,017
Fermanagh Lakelands	150,015
Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau	250,000
Derry Visitor and Convention Bureau	101,369
Activity-based	226,376
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,080,502</b>

### Textile Industry: Job Losses

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what steps he is taking, in the light of recent job losses in the textile industry, to address the issue of competition from the Republic of Ireland, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 448/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** There is no evidence to indicate that the recent job losses at a number of textile and clothing companies are a result of competition from similar companies operating in the Republic of Ireland. The main drivers for the present situation are increased competition from imports from lower-cost economies, the continuing strength of sterling and pricing pressures from customers.

### Employment in Tourism

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give a breakdown, by constituency, of those employed in the tourism industry

and what assessment he has made of the risk to these jobs if cross-border co-operation on tourism progresses.

(AQW 449/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's latest estimates indicate that in 1998 there were 15,000 full-time equivalent jobs directly sustained by tourism. The data cannot be analysed at constituency level. However, a breakdown by local authority area is given in the table below.

Cross-border co-operation on tourism issues has been continuing for a number of years, with no evidence of a detrimental effect on visitor numbers and therefore on employment in tourism in Northern Ireland. The total number of visitors to Northern Ireland increased from 1.294 million in 1994 to 1.655 million in 1999. It is anticipated that ongoing co-operation will bring tangible benefits in terms of increased tourism visitor numbers and revenue, leading to enhanced employment opportunities for all areas.

	TOURISM EMPLOYMENT
Antrim	600
Ards	338
Armagh	144
Ballymena	375
Ballymoney	75
Banbridge	119
Belfast	3,510
Carrickfergus	252
Castlereagh	93
Cookstown	155
Coleraine	1,832
Craigavon	320
Derry	738
Down	701
Dungannon	292
Fermanagh	894
Larne	578
Limavady	356
Lisburn	506
Magherafelt	103
Moyle	935
Newtownabbey	347
Newry and Mourne	395
North Down	948
Omagh	198
Strabane	196
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15,000</b>

### McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by



the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 504/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has not awarded any contracts to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd which are currently extant.

### **Industrial Development Board: Equality Obligations**

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Industrial Development Board will be considered as a public authority for the purposes of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(AQW 531/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** No. The Industrial Development Board is an integral part of my Department, which is itself designated as a public authority for the purposes of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The statutory equality obligations falling to the Department and the commitment made in its draft Equality Scheme, currently the subject of public consultation, apply fully to IDB.

### **Textile Industry**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current position in regard to the textile industry in Northern Ireland, what steps will be taken to encourage industries to locate in those areas most likely to be affected by a decline of this industry, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 591/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** During the 1990s the textile and clothing sector in Northern Ireland faced increasing competitive pressures from low-cost countries. This has resulted in a considerable loss of employment as companies seek to restructure to focus on value-added activities. There are currently approximately 18,000 people employed in the sector, which has a turnover in excess of £1 billion.

The Industrial Development Board (IDB) focuses on attracting new, first-time inward investment to Northern Ireland that will lead to further economic growth as well as additional opportunities for sustainable employment and enhanced job quality

IDB's research suggests that the majority of areas affected by the decline in the textile and clothing sector are those which have been designated as having greatest social need. IDB is committed to achieving a target of 75% of first-time visits by potential investors to these disadvantaged areas and at least 75% of new inward investment locating in or adjacent to disadvantaged areas.

IDB is committed to working with local councils and community representatives, including those in areas which have been particularly affected by the decline in the textile and clothing sector, to understand local issues and to co-operate on how best to market and promote their areas as investment locations.

### **Energy: Sources**

**Mr Carrick** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps he is taking to ensure equality of opportunity for all energy users in the south-east of Northern Ireland and, in particular, what measures he proposes to ensure an equitable distribution of natural gas throughout Northern Ireland, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 304/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** This subject falls within the remit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

I am keen for all energy users in Northern Ireland, not just those in the south-east, to be given the opportunity to avail of economic sources of energy, including natural gas. It is, however, a matter for the private sector to put forward viable economic projects which will allow this to happen.

At present the director-general of gas supply for Northern Ireland, who is responsible for regulating the gas industry, is considering several applications for gas licences to take supplies to the north and north-west and to the south-east.

I was pleased to note that Premier Transmission has recently announced its intention to take forward the next stage in its plans for the development of a north-south pipeline. This could be an encouraging development for the south-east.

## **THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **McCann Erickson: Department Contracts**

**Mr A Doherty** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to

McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 503/99)

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster):** (a)

The Department has awarded a contract to McCann Erickson Belfast Ltd for a period of three years from 1 July 1999 (with an option for renewal for a further two years). The contract is for public relations and advertising work in support of the Department's road safety responsibilities. Expenditure includes research, development and the production of new road safety advertisements, the cost of placement on television and radio and in cinemas of road safety advertisements, together with associated media and public relations activities. The value of the contract is in the region of £600,000 annually.

(b) Nil.

(c) Nil.

(d) As at (a) above.

### Railway Safety

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of the Environment if he will accept that the Department's road safety education officers should include education in railway safety as part of their responsibility. (AQW 522/99)

**Mr Foster:** Road safety education officers currently promote the teaching in schools of road safety at railway level crossings in line with advice contained in the Highway Code. The Department's road safety teaching aid calendar, which is made available annually to all nursery and primary schools, regularly features advice on the use of level crossings. Road safety education officers also assist with the distribution to schools of advice leaflets and posters provided by Northern Ireland Railways, where unmanned level crossings are installed nearby. The safety of passengers

on trains is a matter for the operator, Northern Ireland Railways.

### Planning Legislation

**Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of the Environment if the Department will introduce a review of planning legislation which will promote a balance in planning decisions between commercial and residential interests. (AQW 525/99)

**Mr Foster:** Existing planning legislation already provides a framework which ensures that the interests of commercial, residential and other groups are taken into account when planning decisions are being taken.

### Biodiversity

**Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made and what action he intends to take in the implementation of a bio-diversity strategy; what policy he will pursue in relation to the conservation of the natural environment; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 532/99)

**Mr Foster:** The protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural environment is one of my Department's strategic policy objectives. Extensive consultations were undertaken during 1999 on proposals for a Northern Ireland biodiversity strategy. Analysis of responses to these consultations by my Department's advisory group on biodiversity is almost complete, and I expect to receive their recommendations for a strategy in the autumn. I will wish to take the views of the Assembly Environment Committee before coming to firm conclusions.

## Local Government Finance

**Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total allocation to each district council from the £43 million public expenditure budget to local government, and the amounts allocated for waste management, parks and leisure, technical and other services by each district council. (AQW 533/99)

**Mr Foster:** The figure of £43 million represents the 2000-01 provision for general Exchequer grant and other specific grant payments to district councils. The table provides a detailed analysis of estimated allocations to each council. Amounts of general exchequer grant for

particular services are not available, as this allocation is a matter for individual councils.

## Conservation

**Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to liaise with district councils and community groups to promote the conservation of wild life and the natural environment. (AQW 535/99)

**Mr Foster:** I have been pleased to note that some excellent conservation work has already been done by district councils and community groups. A recent example is the establishment by Belfast City Council of a local nature reserve at Bog Meadows in partnership with the

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DOE): FINANCIAL PROVISION 2000/2001 - ESTIMATED PROVISIONS

District Council	General Exchequer Grant		Food Safety Grant £	Haccp Grant	Shellfish And Fish Hygiene Grant	Energy Efficiency Grant	Construction Products Enforcement Grant	Total
	Derating £	Resources £		£	£	£	£	£
Antrim	860,687	0	0	0	0	6,776	0	867,463
Ards	605,170	780,425	0	0	0	0	0	1,385,595
Armagh	445,575	1,829,066	180,030	28,620	31,500	0	38,199	2,552,990
Ballymena	809,956	0	248,496	27,360	10,800	0	52,727	1,149,339
Ballymoney	307,813	808,155	0	0	0	0	0	1,115,968
Banbridge	356,564	910,882	0	0	0	0	0	1,267,446
Belfast	5,698,854	0	167,700	59,940	3,600	134,335	35,583	6,100,012
Carrickfergus	295,898	612,447	0	0	0	0	0	908,345
Castlereagh	724,337	0	225,713	35,820	34,200	8,813	47,892	1,076,775
Coleraine	432,560	0	0	0	0	0	0	432,560
Cookstown	486,969	638,880	0	0	0	0	0	1,125,849
Craigavon	1,800,970	7,864	0	0	0	169,300	0	1,978,134
Derry	1,231,048	839,356	0	0	0	65,500	0	2,135,904
Down	358,888	1,789,704	0	0	0	36,660	0	2,185,252
Dungannon	896,225	790,521	0	0	0	41,125	0	1,727,871
Fermanagh	553,440	731,097	0	0	0	0	0	1,284,537
Larne	369,483	0	0	0	0	0	0	369,483
Limavady	128,928	898,239	0	0	0	6,306	0	1,033,473
Lisburn	1,296,790	0	0	0	0	17,679	0	1,314,469
Magherafelt	506,486	970,115	0	0	0	0	0	1,476,601
Moyle	109,610	464,937	0	0	0	0	0	574,547
Newry & Mourne	760,515	2,951,911	0	0	0	0	0	3,712,426
Newtownabbey	1,192,138	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,192,138
North Down	476,398	0	0	0	0	0	0	476,398
Omagh	430,439	980,481	163,061	28,260	9,900	79,401	34,599	1,726,141
Strabane	264,557	1,573,443	0	0	0	0	0	1,838,000
Amount Reserved For Finalisations 98/99; 99/00	1,789,702	958,477	0	0	0	0	0	2,748,179
TOTALS	23,190,000	18,536,000	985,000	180,000	90,000	565,895	209,000	43,755,895

NOTE: Payments in respect of most specific grants are made to Belfast C.C. and four employer councils within the Environmental Health Group.

Friends of Bog Meadows, the Ulster Wildlife Trust and the Environment and Heritage Service.

I believe that partnerships of this kind offer many benefits. Under its recently published strategy for environmental education the Environment and Heritage Service of my Department will promote educational partnerships and good environmental practice at local level. I have asked the service to draw up an action plan for putting this strategy into practice and also to publish guidance on conservation work at the local level. This will be designed to assist district councils and community groups in developing conservation plans and local nature reserves.

I expect to receive further advice later this year from the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group on how best to promote conservation on a local scale.

### Sustainable Development

**Mr A Doherty** asked the Minister of the Environment to state what steps have been taken to ensure the integration of sustainable development principles in all policies and actions of Departments, public bodies and wider society in Northern Ireland. (AQW 568/99)

**Mr Foster:** The promotion of sustainable development principles in all the activities of government and wider society is part of my Department's strategic aim.

I will be seeking the commitment of the Executive Committee to aligning all actions of the Administration with sustainable development objectives and making sustainable development a key cross-cutting theme in the programme of government. I expect to publish a Northern Ireland sustainable development strategy in 2001.

### Conservation

**Mr Leslie** asked the Minister of the Environment what further measures are proposed in Northern Ireland to meet the requirements of the European Council's Habitat Directive (92/43/EEC). (AQW 639/99)

**Mr Foster:** My Department proposes to include an additional 22 sites in Northern Ireland on the revised UK list of candidate special areas of conservation (SACs). These sites are listed at Annex A.

Twenty-one candidate SACs in Northern Ireland have already been submitted to the Commission. Additional qualifying features have been identified for 14 of these sites, and for three of these the boundary has also been extended. These sites are listed at Annex B.

Consultation with owners, occupiers and other interested parties on these proposals is under way. After due consideration of comments received, the revised list of UK candidate SACs will be submitted to the Commission.

#### POSSIBLE SACS DUE TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR CONSIDERATION IN OCTOBER 2000.

Name of SAC	County	Component ASSIs Where Appropriate
Banagher Glen	Londonderry	
Breen Wood	Antrim	
Carn/Glenshane Pass	Londonderry	
Cladagh (Swanlinbar) River	Fermanagh	
Hollymount	Down	
Lecale Fens	Down	Loughkeelan Ballycam Carrowcarlin Corbally
Main Valley Bogs	Antrim	Dunloy Bog Caldanagh Bog Frosses Bog
Moneygal Bog	Tyrone	Moneygal Bog Moneygal Bog Pt 2
Moninea Bog	Fermanagh	
Montiaghs Moss	Antrim	
North Antrim Coast	Antrim	Giant's Causeway & Dunseverick White Park Bay
Rea's Wood & Farr's Bay	Antrim	
Rostrevor Wood	Down	
Slieve Gullion	Armagh	
Turmennan	Down	
Wolf Island Bog	Londonderry	
Upper Ballinderry River	Tyrone	

#### POSSIBLE SACS DUE TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR CONSIDERATION IN OCTOBER 2000 WHERE WORK IS ONGOING TO DECLARE THE SITES AREAS OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST.

Name of SAC	County	Component ASSIs where appropriate
Bann Estuary	Londonderry	
Binevenagh	Londonderry	
Peatlands Park	Armagh	
West Fermanagh Scarplands	Fermanagh	
Owenkillew River	Tyrone	



**CANDIDATE SACS SUBMITTED TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR CONSIDERATION IN JUNE 1995, FOR WHICH ADDITIONAL QUALIFYING FEATURES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED.**

Name of SAC	County	Component ASSIs where appropriate
Cuilcagh Mountain	Fermanagh	
Derryleckagh	Down	
Eastern Mournes	Down	
Garron Plateau	Antrim	
Magilligan	Londonderry	
Monawilkin	Fermanagh	
Pettigoe Plateau	Fermanagh	
Rathlin Island	Antrim	
Slieve Beagh	Fermanagh Tyrone	
Strangford Lough	Down	Strangford Lough Part 1 Strangford Lough Part 2 Strangford Lough Part 3 Killard Ballyquintin Point Strangford Lough MNR
Upper Lough Erne	Fermanagh	Upper Lough Erne - Belleisle Upper Lough Erne - Crom Upper Lough Erne - Galloon Upper Lough Erne - Trannish Corraslough Point Dernish Island Inishroosk Killymackan Lough Mill lough

**CANDIDATE SACS SUBMITTED TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR CONSIDERATION IN JUNE 1995, FOR WHICH ADDITIONAL QUALIFYING FEATURES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AND AN AMENDMENT TO THE BOUNDARY IS REQUIRED.**

Name of SAC	County	Component ASSIs Where Appropriate
Lough Melvin	Fermanagh	Lough Melvin Garvros
Magheraveely Marl Loughs	Fermanagh	Burdautien Lough Kilroosky Lough Knockballymore Lough Annachullion Lough Drumacritin Lough Summerhill Lough
Murlough	Down	

## FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Management Trainee Programme

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many candidates were recruited to the management trainee programme in 1996 and how many of those recruited at that time were still on the programme at 31 December 1999. (AQW 473/99)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** Twenty people were recruited to the 1996 management

trainee scheme. Twelve people remained on the scheme at 31 December 1999.

### McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Mr O'Neill** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 502/99)

**Mr Durkan:** No contracts have been awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd for the periods in question.

## HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Hospital Laboratory Staff

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment the Department has made of the difficulties in recruiting and retaining professional laboratory staff in hospitals and what policy she will pursue in relation to salaries for these staff, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 512/99)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** There has been no formal assessment of difficulties in the recruitment and retention of professional laboratory staff. This issue is being looked at in the development of a human resources strategy for the health and personal social services (HPSS).

Professional laboratory staff in that area here receive the same rates of remuneration as their colleagues in the National Health Service. However, it is recognised that the rates of pay of certain laboratory staff is low.

My Department, in conjunction with its counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales, is currently engaged with trade unions in the development of a new pay system for NHS/HPSS staff. Such a system, if agreed, will provide an opportunity for the pay of laboratory staff to be examined to ensure that they are being rewarded fairly for the responsibilities they undertake.

Ní dhearnadh measúnú foirmiúil ar bith ar na deacrachtaí a bhaineann le hearcú agus le coinneáil foireann phroifisiúnta saotharlann. Seo ábhar atá á scrúdú mar chuid den straitéis acmhainní daonna atáthar a fhorbairt don PHSS.

Faigheann baill foirne sa PHSS anseo na rátaí céanna pá agus a fhaigheann a gcomhghleacaithe sa tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Shláinte. Mar sin féin, aithnítear go bhfuil rátaí pá ball foirne áirithe íseal.

Faoi láthair tá mo Roinnse, i gcomhar lena macasamhail i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag, ag plé forbairt córas nua pá do bhaill foirne na SNS/SSPS leis na ceardchumann. Tabharfaidh a leithéid de chóras, má tá comhaontú air, faill iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar phá bhall foirne saotharlann lena chinntiú go bhfuil siad ag fáil pá atá ag cur go cothrom leis na freagrachtaí atá orthu.

### Cancer Services

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if her Department will implement, as a matter of urgency, the recommendations contained in the Ulster Cancer Foundation document 'Invest Now'. (AQW 526/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I am committed to the development of high-quality cancer services, in line with the Campbell Report 'Cancer Services – Investing for the Future'. I fully empathise with the Ulster Cancer Foundation's wish to see adequate resources allocated to take this work forward. This year a further £8 million has been provided for cancer services, on top of the additional £7 million allocated last year.

Funding is not the only factor in the development of our cancer services. The availability of key specialist staff will dictate how fast we can make improvements. It will take some time to have in place suitably qualified specialist staff, such as clinical oncologists and specialist nurses, particularly when these are in short supply in the NHS and elsewhere.

Tá mé tiomanta ar scoth seirbhísí aille a fhorbairt ar aon dhul lena bhfuil leagtha amach i dTuarascáil Campbell, 'Cancer Services – Investing in the Future'. Tuigim do Fhondúireacht Ailse Uladh agus í a iarraidh go mbeidh go leor acmhainní á solathar leis an obair seo a chur chun tosaigh. I mbliana cuireadh £8 milliún breise ar fáil do sheirbhísí aille ar bharr an £7 milliún breise a tugadh anuraidh.

Ní hé an maoiniú an t-aon fhachtóir amháin i bhforbairt na seirbhísí aille againn. Tá luas feabhsaithe na seirbhísí ag brath ar bhaill áirithe sainfhoirne a bheith ar fáil.

Bainfidh sé tamall asainn na baill sainfhoirne, mar oinceolaithe cliniciúla agus sainbhanaltraí a bhfuil na

cáilíochtaí cearta acu, a fháil – go háirithe nuair atá siad gann sa SSN agus i áiteanna eile.

## HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

### McCann Erickson: Department Contracts

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 500/99)

**The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren):** During the periods mentioned the Department awarded no such contracts.

### Employment Action Zones

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment if he will detail those areas which are earmarked to become employment action zones. (AQW 484/99)

**Dr Farren:** The Training and Employment Agency (T and EA) has been the point of contact for Northern Ireland with the Department for Education and Employment in Great Britain, which has the responsibility for employment zones (EZs). Since 1998, when the first five prototype zones were initiated in Great Britain, T and EA has maintained contact with its counterparts about this policy initiative. Northern Ireland, like very many areas of England, Scotland and Wales, is not part of this testing phase because national policy had determined that locations where New Deal for 25-plus was introduced should not overlap in the trialing of the EZ concept. All of Northern Ireland is a 25-plus pilot area.

In April 2000 a further 12 employment zones were created in Great Britain, and T and EA will be closely monitoring their operation. Evaluations of the New Deal pilots and employment zones, in the context of the broader welfare reforms and modernization programme, will

ultimately determine the future shape of welfare-to-work provision for the long-term unemployed. At this point in time there are no areas in Northern Ireland earmarked to become employment action zones.

### **Higher and Further Education: College Governing Bodies**

**Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment what plans the Department has to ensure that the governing bodies of higher and further education institutes are fully representative of the community. (AQW 511/99)

**Dr Farren:** The constitution of each governing body is laid down in schedule 3 to the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. A minimum of 50% of members are drawn from the business, industry and professions category. Either one or two members are elected by the staff of the college, and one member is elected by the student body. Two members are nominated by the education and library board for the area in which the college is situated, and no more than two members may be co-opted by the other members of the governing body. The principal of the college has automatic membership of the governing body.

While the appointment of governors does not fall within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, the Department complies with its guidance throughout the appointment process, including widespread advertisement of vacancies and use of independent panellists for the selection process.

## **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **McCann Erickson: Department Contracts**

**Mr O'Neill** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 1 April 1999 to 2 December 1999 and currently extant; (b) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 2 December 1999 to 11 February 2000 and currently extant; (c) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department from 11 February 2000 to 30 May 2000 and currently extant; and (d) the number and value of contracts awarded to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd by the Department which are still extant; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 499/99)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr P Robinson):** Contracts awarded by my Department

to McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd during the periods specified do not remain extant.

The Water Service awarded McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd a contract in January 2000 for the production of an awareness training video. The value of the contract was £14,526.53 (including VAT), but it is not currently extant.

If the implication is that those associated with McCann Erickson (Belfast) Ltd have expounded political views the Department wants to make clear that its criteria for awarding contracts, currently and in the future, are not and will not be influenced by whether those associated with a company have any or no political views.

### **Cullybackey Bypass**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans the Department has to provide a bypass around Cullybackey, and if he will detail the expenditure required for such a bypass and a proposed starting date. (AQW 468/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** A scheme to provide a throughpass in Cullybackey has been proposed for some considerable time and is included in the current Ballymena area plan 1986-2001. The scheme is estimated to cost some £1.4 million, but, because of the level of funding available to the roads programme over the years and the relative low priority of the scheme, it remains a desirable long-term proposal. At present the scheme is included in the Roads Service six- to 15-year forward planning schedule, where it will have to compete for funding with many other worthwhile schemes across the country.

### **Ballymoney-Belfast Railway Services**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to increase the provision of rail services from Ballymoney to Belfast. (AQW 469/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** There are currently no plans to increase the provision of rail services from Ballymoney to Belfast as resources are not available to meet the additional running cost subsidy that Northern Ireland Railways would need. In any case, Northern Ireland Railways does not have sufficient rolling stock available to increase services.

### **Toome Bypass**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development what funding will be made available for financing the Toome bypass by toll charges. (AQW 470/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I have no plans to finance the proposed Toome bypass by toll charges.

### Road Tolls

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he intends to introduce toll-charging on any roads in Northern Ireland. (AQW 471/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I have no immediate plans to introduce road tolls. Congestion charges and road tolls will, however, be among the options to be explored in the longer term to help in reducing the growth in car usage in town centres and in financing improvements to the road network and public transport.

### Traffic Volumes

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide statistics for average daily traffic volumes during 1999 on: (a) the A26 southbound from Ballymoney to Antrim; (b) the A6 southbound from Dungiven to Toome; (c) the A6 from Toome to the M2. (AQW 472/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The latest available average daily traffic volumes on these routes are detailed in the table below.

Route /Location	Average number of vehicles per day	Date of latest available figures
<b>A26 southbound from Ballymoney to Antrim</b>		
- southern end of Ballymoney Bypass	5,490	1998
- north of Ballymena	7,970	1997
- near Dunsilly junction with M2	10,358	1998
<b>A6 southbound from Dungiven to Toome</b>		
- north of Castledawson Roundabout	4,500	1997
- Castledawson Bypass	7,020	1998
- on Toome Bridge	9,016	1998
<b>A6 southbound from Toome to the M2</b>		
- south of Toome	7,193	1999

### Road Schemes: Funding

**Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the current allocation of capital for road schemes west of the River Bann and to detail what plans the Department has to ensure parity in budget allocations for future road schemes in all areas of Northern Ireland, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 10/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** As this is a matter for the Department for Regional Development, I am replying.

The criteria for the allocation of resources in the roads budget for major capital schemes west of the

Bann are those that apply throughout Northern Ireland. Schemes are assessed against a broad range of criteria, such as strategic planning policy, traffic flows, numbers of accidents, potential travel-time savings, environmental impact and value for money. As part of the Department's action plan under the New Targeting Social Need initiative, consultants have been appointed to audit the framework for assessing major works.

The resources available for minor capital works (for example, accident remedial, traffic calming, street lighting, car parking) are apportioned to each of the four Roads Service divisions on a needs-based priority approach, using criteria which take account of the length of roads, road conditions, traffic flows, number of accidents, and so on. This ensures, so far as possible, an equitable distribution of resources across the country.

### Bleach Green Railway Line

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will outline the proposed timetable for the introduction of passenger services on the Bleach Green railway line. (AQW 515/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** Translink has advised that the reinstatement of the Antrim to Bleach Green railway line is due for completion in November 2000. Once all the necessary tests and trials have been satisfactorily completed, scheduled passenger services could commence in early 2001.

### Road Congestion

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment he has made of the contribution by poor roads to the problem of road congestion in Northern Ireland. (AQW 548/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** My Department's Roads Service is constantly assessing road provision, road capacity and traffic congestion in its endeavours to provide a high-quality service to road users. In the past the focus of capital investment in the roads programme has been on building new roads. However, it is acknowledged that new roads can lead to more traffic — adding to the congestion problem rather than reducing it — and that building more roads is not always the right answer.

In urban situations, where traffic congestion is a major problem, top priority is therefore being given to improving the maintenance and management of the existing network before any new roads are considered. Better use can be made of existing roads by investing in network control, traffic management and minor works schemes. Traffic calming and measures to reduce traffic are also being implemented. There are, of course, circumstances



where a new road in an urban area can relieve congestion and take traffic out of residential areas.

In the inter-urban situation, improvements to the network are being targeted on key strategic routes with the provision of bypasses and the dualling of single carriageways. This approach is compatible with the draft regional strategic framework for Northern Ireland, 'Shaping Our Future'. These improvements will further facilitate the movement of goods and people and will provide better access to the external gateways and major markets.

### Bike to Work Day

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he can indicate how many people commute by bicycle and what steps the Department has taken to promote "Bike to Work" day on 20 June 2000.

(AQW 549/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** Information is not available on the number of people who commute by bicycle.

Steps taken by the Department to promote "Bike to Work" day are as follows.

On 7 April 2000 the Department, in conjunction with the Lord Mayor of Belfast, officially launched "Bike to Work" day at the city hall.

Employers and employees throughout Northern Ireland were encouraged to organise or participate in events on the day and also during national bike week (19-23 June 2000).

In Londonderry, the Mayor officially launched Pedal Power's cycling festival for the city on 13 April 2000, the main event being "Bike to Work" day. The events organised for the festival are being supported by the Department.

In Belfast, the Department is working in partnership with the Belfast City Council and the Health Promotion Agency to promote the initiative. On 20 June 2000 free secure cycle parking will be available at the front of the City Hall, with an offer of a free healthy breakfast at the Cecil Ward Building, Linenhall Street, for everyone who participates. Also, a free prize draw for bikes and cycling equipment, supplied by local cycle suppliers supporting this initiative, will be carried out by the Lord Mayor. One local cycle supplier will carry out free safety bike checks at the City Hall.

Government offices and businesses throughout Northern Ireland have been encouraged to take part. Posters/leaflets promoting this initiative have been widely distributed.

### Passenger Transport

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development what percentages of passengers in Northern Ireland travelled (a) by private vehicle and (b) by public transport in each of the last five years. (AQW 555/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** Information on the number of passenger journeys travelled in private vehicles is not currently available. The Northern Ireland travel survey has been designed to capture this information, and results will be available in 2002.

Information on the number of passenger journeys made by public transport in each of the last five years is given in the table below.

	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00
Public Transport Passenger Journeys (millions) *	87.2m	84.4m	81.1m	77.1m	75.5m

\* Comprises journeys on Northern Ireland Railways, Citybus and Ulsterbus.

### Omagh Wastewater Treatment Works

**Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Regional Development if the Department intends to approve the proposals for the construction of a new sewage treatment works for Omagh on an out-of-town site, and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 559/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The Water Service commissioned consultants to conduct an environmental and economic appraisal of the siting of the proposed Omagh waste water treatment works.

The consultants' recommendations have been received and are currently being assessed. I wish to consider all the issues very carefully as I am aware of the concerns expressed by public representatives about the siting of the proposed works. I hope to be in a position to make an announcement in the near future.

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Housing Associations: Equality Obligations

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister for Social Development whether housing associations will be considered as public authorities for the purposes of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. (AQW 527/99)

**The Minister for Social Development (Mr Dodds):** At present registered housing associations are not public authorities for the purposes of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. However, consideration is being given to adding them to schedule 2 of the Commissioner of Complaints (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. This will

have the effect of bringing them within the remit of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

### Social Fund (South Down)

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have applied for money from the social fund at each social security office in South Down, and how much money was issued in loans through the social fund offices in each of the last three years.

(AQW 528/99)

**Mr Dodds:** Figures of individual applications to the social fund are not kept for each office. It is therefore not possible to supply figures of applications for each of the offices in South Down.

However, it is possible to give the total number of applications made to the social fund in the east and south Down districts for each of the last three years.

#### East Down

- 1997/1998 - 22,726 (this figure excludes Kilkeel SSO which only transferred into the District in April 1998)
- 1998/1999 - 26,350
- 1999/2000 - 31,543

#### South Down

- 1997/1998 - 27,201
- 1998/1999 - 25,601
- 1999/2000 - 29,913

### LOANS EXPENDITURE

Again, it is not possible to supply expenditure figures for each individual office; the loans expenditure for east Down and south districts for each of the last three years was as follows:-

#### East Down

- 1997/1998 - £4,639,043.2  
(this figure excludes Kilkeel SSO, which only transferred into the district in April 1998)
- 1998/1999 - £4,841,934.90
- 1999/2000 - £5,027,035.36

#### South Down

- 1997/1998 - £4,640,041.55
- 1998/1999 - £4,440,952.28
- 1999/2000 - £4,316,256.38

### Disability Living Allowance

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister for Social Development if he will establish an independent review of the workings of the appeals system against the refusal

and downgrading of disability living allowance applications; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 529/99)

**Mr Dodds:** The legislation relating to appeals in Northern Ireland is identical to that in Great Britain.

A full evaluation exercise is currently being carried out by the Department of Social Security in Great Britain following the changes to the decision-making and appeals procedures introduced last year. All areas affected by the changes are being monitored, and if, as a result, any further changes are to be made in the appeals system, corresponding changes will be introduced in Northern Ireland.

The Social Security Agency is experiencing some problems in dealing with appeals on disability living allowance, and these are being addressed separately.

### Housing Associations

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister for Social Development what is the membership of each of the registered and unregistered housing associations in Northern Ireland, how they are appointed, and what is the duration of each appointment.

(AQW 530/99)

**Mr Dodds:** All the housing associations registered with and regulated by my Department have shareholding members and committees or boards of management.

Committee members, apart from a few who are co-opted, are not appointed but are elected from the shareholding membership.

One third of committee members are required to retire each year.

The total number of members of the 40 housing associations registered with the Department at 31 March 2000 was 1904. The total number of committee members at the same date was 433.

My Department does not hold information on unregistered Housing Associations.

### Pensioners: Low Incomes

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Social Development (a) how many pensioners in Northern Ireland are estimated to have income below the guaranteed minimum level; (b) how many pensioners in Northern Ireland have responded to the Government's campaign to encourage take-up of the guaranteed minimum income; (c) what further steps will be taken to make pensioners aware of the minimum income level; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 547/99)

**Mr Dodds:** There are no reliable estimates of the number of pensioners in Northern Ireland who have an income below the guaranteed minimum level.

At 9 June 2000 a total of 1,609 pensioners in Northern Ireland had contacted the national Freephone claim line

number or their local social security offices to obtain a claim form for the minimum income guarantee.

The Social Security Agency is writing to 40,000 pensioners inviting a claim to minimum income guarantee. The issue of these mailshots will be in three stages, commencing on 29 May 2000, with the second stage in July 2000 and third stage in September 2000.

In addition, a national TV advertising campaign (including Northern Ireland) began on 30 May 2000 and will run in conjunction with the mailshots. The Social Security Agency is also working closely with voluntary groups such as Age Concern and Help the Aged to ensure the maximum take-up of the minimum income guarantee.



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 23 June 2000

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Ex-Prisoners Information Centre

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister how much money has been allocated by the Peace and Reconciliation Scheme to the Ex-Prisoners Information Centre and if it will initiate an inquiry into money allocated to this Centre in Ballymoney which has not yet been paid. (AQW 577/99)

**Reply:** Under the Peace and Reconciliation Programme the Ex-Prisoners Interpretative Centre (EPIC) has been allocated funding of £700,000 for ex-prisoners projects. A joint investigation into the funding allocated to the EPIC North Ulster Group (Ballymoney) will be undertaken urgently by the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Northern Ireland Office and the European Commission.

#### Economic Policy

**Mr McGrady** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what discussions have taken place across Government Departments and with relevant public and private agencies concerning the development of a coherent and meaningful economic policy, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 268/99)

**Reply:** The Executive Committee is taking forward the development of a programme for government, as is required by Strand 1 of the Belfast Agreement. This will outline the Executive's strategic aims and objectives, including the aims and objectives of economic policy. In this way a coherent strategic approach to the development of this important policy can be developed, demonstrating the important linkages to other key policy areas. The programme will also incorporate an agreed budget linked to policies and programmes.

The preparation of the programme for government has been considered by the Executive Committee on

two occasions, and the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have met with a number of Ministers to discuss their initial ideas on their Departments' priorities. The Executive Committee has now agreed how the initial drafting of the programme should be taken forward, and officials are proceeding with this work, reporting back regularly to Ministers.

Once initial material has been prepared, it is hoped to take the views of the Assembly Committees and others on the nature of the programme. This will help in the final drafting prior to the formal scrutiny role of the Committees and request for approval by the Assembly. This will take place in the autumn.

### AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

#### Beef Categorisation

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will confirm that current European Union proposals on the categorisation of beef will increase the cost of beef processing by approximately 8p per kg, and if she will make it her policy to oppose these proposals. (AQW 552/99)

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers)** [*holding answer 16 June 2000*]: I am aware that the EU proposals on beef labelling will lead to increased costs for the industry and that some industry representatives have suggested that the extra cost could be as much as 8p per kg.

The main factor leading to extra cost is the requirement to categorise animals and beef derived from them. I am aware that MEPs throughout the UK have been lobbied by industry and officials to seek some easement in this requirement when the proposals are debated in the European Parliament. In addition, I can assure the Member that officials will seek to achieve some relaxation when the detailed implementing rules are being discussed in Brussels.

#### Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the spending of the £431,000 allocated to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC). (AQW 571/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** This is the Estimates provision for 2000-01 and represents my Department's contribution to the running costs of the Loughs Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission during that

period. Running costs include salaries (inclusive of pensions), insurance fees, legal fees, bank interest, vehicle expenses, computer expenses, travel, repairs and renewals and payments to board members.

The Commission deducts all income received from licence fees and other sources from its total needs, to establish the balancing of its needs, which are met by both my Department and the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources in Dublin, which is a joint sponsor of FCILC.

The Estimates provision covers the Loughs Agency's need to increase staffing resources to ensure that the agency is able to fulfil its extended functions and remit as detailed in the Implementation Bodies Order and the British/Irish Agreement. It will be appreciated that, in addition to acquiring responsibility for the Carlingford area, the agency is now responsible for aquaculture, promoting the development of both loughs and marine tourism in both loughs. This amounts to a considerable expansion in the agency's workload.

The operation of the agency will be monitored by the sponsoring Departments to ensure the effective and efficient use of resources.

### **Agricultural Produce: Processing and Marketing**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to explain how the increase in resources to process and market listed in extra receipts payable to the Consolidated Fund (Northern Ireland Estimates 2000-01) will be allocated. (AQW 575/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The increase in receipts in 2000-01 compared with 1999-2000 relates to the draw-down of EU funds to support processing and marketing of agricultural produce. The additional money will be paid in the form of grant aid for capital investments in new or improved facilities. I am enclosing a copy of the press release which announced the last round of awards under the 1994-99 scheme and provides examples of the types of projects supported. Most of the increased funds in 2000-01 will be paid to recipients of awards prior to 31 December 1999. It is planned that a new scheme will be launched later this year.

### **Fisheries**

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will bring forward a Bill to regulate intertidal fisheries in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to Strangford Lough special protection area/special area of conservation, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 613/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** A Fisheries Bill will be introduced in the Assembly on 26 June. It will include a power to enable the Department to regulate the fisheries in the intertidal zone. In my absence on that day Mr McGimpsey will make a statement introducing the Bill. If, as is likely, the Bill does not proceed through the other Assembly stages before the recess, a motion to carry it forward to the next session will be tabled.

Since the Bill proposes to confer a regulatory power on the Department, further subordinate legislation defining the areas and types of harvesting to be regulated will be made by the Department. Work is under way in preparing this.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Department Publications: Irish**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education to detail the purpose, extent and cost of the use of Irish in departmental papers and forms, and whether the public are given a choice of language, and to state the legal authority for this policy. (AQW 479/99)

**The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):** I believe that it is entirely appropriate that departmental documents are available in the Irish language for those who wish to read and communicate in Irish. Several publications for the attention of parents of children and governors of Irish-medium schools have been published by the Department's education and training inspectorate, having been translated at no extra cost by the specialist inspector of Irish. One advertisement to invite tenders for a research project was also published in Irish, at an additional cost of £1,249. Departmental press releases are also provided to seven specific media outlets in Irish and are available generally on request, and additional translation costs since devolution began have been £712. The printing of new notepaper, et cetera, which is also bilingual, cost £1,351.

The authority for the use of Irish is derived from the Belfast Agreement.

### **Premature Retirement of Teachers: Funding**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education if he has made an assessment of the impact of the allocation of £2.7million to fund premature retirement of teachers on funding available for retraining of teachers, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 576/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I am satisfied that there is a need to provide funding for the employing authorities to meet the costs of the premature retirement of teachers

on redundancy and other grounds. This has no direct impact on the resources available for the training and development of teachers.

## ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### West Tyrone: Energy

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans he has to ensure the availability of energy resources for the West Tyrone rural constituency; if he intends to introduce any measures to compensate for disadvantage due to rurality in this area; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 579/99)

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey):** Northern Ireland Electricity plc (NIE) has a statutory duty to make available an electricity supply and, on request, will provide a potential customer, anywhere in Northern Ireland, with a cost estimate for a connection, based on charges approved by the independent regulator. NIE is unaware of any specific problems with the provision of electricity supplies in the West Tyrone rural constituency.

The availability of other forms of energy resources is also primarily a matter for the private sector and will be determined by the commercial viability of individual projects.

### Textile Industry

**Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what action has been taken to assist Northern Ireland's textile industry, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 597/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** While international market forces present formidable challenges to the textile industry in Northern Ireland, there are positive signs that a number of companies are responding well to the new growth opportunities in the knowledge-based areas of the industry, such as design, branding and marketing. My Department offers a range of incentive schemes to assist companies to become more competitive, diversify into higher-value and growth areas, and address innovation and new technologies. It also works closely with industrial bodies to help the industry to adapt and meet the global changes in the sector.

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action will be taken to promote the

retention of a textile industry in Northern Ireland; whether the Minister is aware that closure of the Courtaulds factory in Plumbridge would result in the loss of 120 jobs; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 628/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** The textile and clothing industry in Northern Ireland is continuing to face significant competitive pressures, and my Department and its agencies are liaising with the main sectoral bodies on responses to these pressures. Government support for the sector is being directed towards necessary restructuring away from commodity production to value-added and knowledge-based activities.

The loss of the 120 jobs at the Courtaulds factory in Plumbridge and the other closures and redundancies announced recently are very regrettable but were as a result of commercial decisions taken by the companies involved.

### Economic Development Forum

**Dr Birnie** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) the cost to date of the Economic Development Forum; (b) how often it has met; and (c) what record of its deliberations is publicly available. (AQW 632/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:**

- The Forum has incurred expenditure of £5,022 on members' fees, expenses and the costs of meetings.
- The Forum has met on four occasions. The next meeting will be on 28 June 2000.
- Economic Development Forum meetings are conducted in private. Press releases have been issued on each occasion.

### IDB and LEDU Grant Aid

**Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of grant aid from the Industrial Development Board and LEDU to companies in the Foyle constituency and in each of the other 17 constituencies for each of the last five years. (AQW 657/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** The grant aid offered by the Industrial Development Board is provided in the attached annex A.

The grant aid offered by the Local Enterprise Development Unit is provided in the attached annex B.

## ANNEX A

CONSTITUENCY	SFA £'000				
	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00
Belfast East	6,842	1,386	28,407	5,285	15,139
Belfast North	1,081	5,233	6,906	7,549	907
Belfast South	482	1,777	7,806	5,452	22,415
Belfast West	11,176	32,538	7,068	701	6,325
East Antrim	189	11,030	9,331	3,912	4,267
North Antrim	2,096	13,483	7,031	395	622
South Antrim	85	13,402	1,695	4,599	3,312
East Londonderry	330	34,593	868	3,147	9,500
Foyle	20,833	8,118	51,675	3,947	5,674
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	7,960	9,152	15,538	7,955	9,200
Lagan Valley	62,367	10,442	2,678	4,747	275
Mid Ulster	15,043	2,321	1,328	1,293	-
Newry & Armagh	6,009	1,090	-	1,225	456
North Down	183	950	1,518	-	2,455
South Down	2,268	2,969	2,920	420	150
Strangford	-	1,488	1,476	167	989
Upper Bann	11,863	7,953	8,051	9,603	2,839
West Tyrone	2,787	-	1,025	4,925	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>151,594</b>	<b>157,925</b>	<b>155,321</b>	<b>65,322</b>	<b>84,525</b>

NOTE: Companies have still to determine the precise location of 1 project secured during 1998/99 and 2 projects secured during 1999/2000. Consequently the assistance related to these 3 projects is omitted from the above table.

## ANNEX B: LEDU LETTER OF OFFER COMMITMENT BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

CONSTITUENCY	AMOUNT OF LETTERS OF OFFER											
	1995/96	% OF NI	1996/97	% OF NI	1997/98	% OF NI	1998/99	% OF NI	1999/2000	% OF NI	TOTAL OVER 5 YEARS	% OF NI
Belfast East	404,771	2%	445,941	2%	573,715	3%	377,054	2%	317,286	1%	2, 118,767	2%
Belfast North	1, 594,014	7%	3,505,944	13%	1,347,381	6%	1,251,925	7%	1,831,908	8%	9,531,172	8%
Belfast South	774,927	4%	1, 317,335	5%	784,587	3%	636,259	3%	1, 068,432	5%	4,581,540	4%
Belfast West	936,506	4%	1, 017,500	4%	739,430	3%	400,684	2%	734,442	3%	3, 828,562	3%
East Antrim	731,736	3%	453,655	2%	624,174	3%	432,088	2%	530,957	2%	2, 772,610	2%
East Londonderry	540,111	2%	690,928	3%	1, 066,599	5%	1,118,369	6%	1,015,905	5%	4,431,912	4%
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	1,541,719	7%	1,745,322	7%	1,563,842	7%	1,671,911	9%	1,234,109	6%	7,756,903	7%
Foyle	1, 433,023	7%	1,796,428	7%	1,479,358	7%	1,593,191	8%	1,426,066	7%	7,728,066	7%
Lagan Valley	1,790,562	8%	2,070,216	8%	2,426,020	11%	1,218,663	6%	1,752,261	8%	9,257,722	8%
Mid Ulster	2,079,547	10%	3,293,564	12%	2,477,342	11%	2,161,416	11%	2,604,397	12%	12,616,266	11%
Newry & Armagh	1,638,667	8%	1,803,931	7%	1,826,974	8%	2,275,907	12%	1,456,579	7%	9,002,058	9%
North Antrim	1,214,655	6%	850,257	3%	1, 014,739	4%	858,701	4%	890,317	4%	4, 828,669	4%
North Down	1,035,896	5%	825,069	3%	1, 389,670	6%	507,130	3%	1, 169,048	5%	4,926,813	4%
South Antrim	1,154,950	5%	1,410,325	5%	1,169,065	5%	1,237,141	6%	1,803,726	8%	6,775,207	6%
South Down	1,541,795	7%	1,236,941	5%	930,674	4%	990,665	5%	1, 216,850	6%	5,916,925	5%
Strangford	949,919	4%	1, 326,646	5%	1,025,325	5%	374,883	2%	654,840	3%	4, 331,613	4%
Upper Bann	1,211,323	6%	2,133,105	8%	1,104,367	5%	896,539	5%	1, 224,462	6%	6,569,796	6%
West Tyrone	1,240,390	6%	839,974	3%	1, 138,584	5%	1,110,747	6%	874,649	4%	5, 204,344	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,814,511</b>		<b>26,763,081</b>		<b>22,681,846</b>		<b>19,113,273</b>		<b>21,806,234</b>		<b>112,178,945</b>	



## Tourism

**Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail funding allocated by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to each of the 18 constituencies over the past six years. (AQW 658/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board administers a number of schemes on behalf of the European Union, the International Fund for Ireland, and central government. From 1994 to 1999 the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has provided selective financial assistance totalling £65.9 million to tourism projects through these schemes. A breakdown of this figure by parliamentary constituency is contained in the attached annex. £5.3 million has also been provided for the marketing of key tourism products throughout Northern Ireland. The marketing budget is not broken down by parliamentary constituency.

### SELECTIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO TOURISM PROJECTS (1994/1999)

Belfast East	£37,800.00
Belfast North	£476,500.00
Belfast South	£11,010,162.06
Belfast West	£732,300.00
East Antrim	£1,975,081.00
East Londonderry	£5,662,487.34
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	£7,454,975.00
Foyle	£7,154,996.00
Lagan Valley	£127,137.00
Mid Ulster	£2,193,172.00
Newry and Armagh	£5,615,328.68
North Antrim	£4,926,605.00
North Down	£1,051,861.00
South Antrim	£4,868,928.00
South Down	£8,812,748.49
Strangford	£1,203,207.00
Upper Bann	£925,326.00
West Tyrone	£1,697,472.50
TOTAL	£65,926,087.07

## THE ENVIRONMENT

### Waste Incineration

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of the Environment to introduce a moratorium on the construction of incinerators pending the availability of authoritative evidence on the environmental impact of such facilities; to undertake to examine options adopted in other states to achieve 100% no waste; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 563/99)

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster):** I do not believe that it is appropriate to introduce a moratorium. A final report on risks from dioxins from incineration of waste by the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States is expected to issue this summer. It follows from a draft paper issued for consultation in 1994 on which the UK provided detailed comments. In addition, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is currently drafting a UK position paper on dioxins, which will assess the effectiveness of abatement measures already taken or planned to reduce releases of dioxins to the environment and the impact on human exposure. My Department will give careful consideration to the findings of these studies and any recommendations which flow from them.

My Department is always willing to examine options adopted elsewhere to achieve a higher level of recovery of wastes. The recently published waste management strategy for Northern Ireland contains challenging targets for the recovery and recycling of wastes. These will be reviewed periodically. The level of recovery achievable is, of course, dependent upon establishing an integrated network of treatment facilities and the development of markets for products containing recycled material.

### Area Plans

**Mr A Doherty** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline what steps are being taken to ensure that those areas which have not yet benefited from area development plans will not suffer disadvantage in comparison with those areas for which plans are well advanced.

(AQW 566/99)

**Mr Foster:** The Department's objective is to meet the development planning needs of all district council areas. Where an area plan is beyond its notional end date, its policies and proposals, so long as they are still relevant, remain a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

### Energy Recovery

**Mr A Doherty** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what steps are to be taken to ensure that energy recovery methods, introduced as part of a waste management strategy, will be in line with schedule 3 to the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and will offer no threat to the environment or to human health.

(AQW 567/99)

**Mr Foster:** At present, any proposal to recover energy through incineration would be subject to that plant's meeting stringent conditions on emissions. The conditions would be set and monitored by my Department in accordance with national law and European or international standards. Certain processes would require authorisation under the

Industrial Pollution Control (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. This would require the operator to demonstrate that the most appropriate techniques for pollution control were being applied and that the environmental impact of the process was acceptable. Concerns for human health relate, in the main, to dioxins from the incineration of waste. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is currently drafting a position paper on dioxins, which will assess the effectiveness of abatement measures already taken or planned to reduce releases of dioxins to the environment and the impact on human exposure. My Department will give careful consideration to the findings of these studies and any recommendations which flow from them.

### Dangerous Wild Animals

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline a timetable of legislation for the registration and control of dangerous wild animals. (AQW 582/99)

**Mr Foster:** I intend to consult the Assembly's Environment Committee about the policy proposals in the autumn and hope to bring a Bill before the Assembly shortly thereafter with a view to enactment by July 2001. The timing of the introduction of a Bill will, of course, be subject to the legislative priorities agreed by the Executive Committee and to the availability of legislative time in the Assembly.

### Rural Communities: Planning Policy

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to ensure that Islandmagee is not disadvantaged by overdevelopment; if he will contemplate changes in legislation to provide protection for this and similar rural communities; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 588/99)

**Mr Foster:** Current planning policy and legislation already ensures that rural communities such as Islandmagee are not disadvantaged by overdevelopment. Responsibility for future planning policy for housing in rural settlements and the countryside now rests with the Department for Regional Development. However, my Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development would have important contributions to make, as might others.

### North Down and Ards: Area Plans

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that the necessary resources have been allocated to the Department of the Environment Planning Service to complete the North Down and Ards area plans, and to give a completion date for those plans. (AQW 594/99)

**Mr Foster:** The resources to undertake the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 are in place, and the plan is scheduled for adoption during 2002-03. A replacement plan for the North Down Borough Council area will be subsumed into the Belfast metropolitan area plan, work on which is scheduled to commence in the current business year.

### Comber Riverside Development

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps have been taken to expedite the planning application for the riverside development in Comber, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 629/99)

**Mr Foster:** There are a number of complex issues associated with this application, and my Department is not yet in a position to make a decision. I can give an assurance, however, that the chief executive of the Planning Service is personally endeavouring to have the processing of the application completed as soon as possible.

### OSPAR Commission

**Mr E McGrady** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to make a contribution to the OSPAR Commission in Copenhagen on Monday 26 June 2000, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 665/99)

**Mr Foster:** The obligations of the UK as a signatory to the OSPAR Convention are an excepted matter, and Ministers from the devolved administrations do not attend meetings of the OSPAR Commission. My officials are kept informed by their counterparts in UK Government Departments on OSPAR matters.

### Access to the Countryside: Occupiers Liability Legislation

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to remove third-party liability from landowners who wish to facilitate greater access to the countryside. (AQW 669/99)

**Mr Foster:** My Department carried out a public consultation last year on providing for access to the Northern Ireland countryside. Analysis of responses to that consultation should be completed by the autumn. Occupiers' liability is one of the key issues, and my Department will be carrying out a review of the existing occupiers' liability legislation as part of its deliberations.

### Third-Party Planning Appeals

**Ms McWilliams** asked the Minister of the Environment if he has given consideration to the introduction of third-party planning appeals, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 312/99)

**Mr Foster:** This subject was considered on a number of occasions prior to the current devolution. The conclusion was that third-party appeals would add delay and uncertainty to the planning process, would have significant resource implications and should not be introduced in Northern Ireland. I am advised that third-party appeals might add up to £1million per annum to the costs of the Planning Service and Planning Appeals Commission. This would need to be found from within the Northern Ireland budget. I am, however, aware of current interest in the subject and will keep policy under review.

### Farmers: Retirement Homes (Planning Approval)

**Mr Poots** asked the Minister of the Environment to undertake to relax the criteria for planning approval applied to farmers seeking retirement homes. (AQO 290/99)

**Mr Foster:** In the first instance this is a matter for the Department for Regional Development. However, my Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development would also have important contributions to make to the consideration of this policy.

### Raloo Village: Conservation

**Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of the Environment when he proposes to designate Raloo village in the East Antrim constituency as a conservation area, as proposed in the Larne area plan. (AQO 288/99)

**Mr Foster:** The Department's resources for this area of work are already fully committed, and I cannot at this stage give an indication of when work on this project might start.

### Belfast Green Belt

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of the Environment if it is his policy to encourage the retention of the green belt around Belfast. (AQO 289/99)

**Mr Foster:** The green belt around Belfast was designated in the Belfast urban area plan 2001. In addition, the draft regional strategic framework being prepared by the Department for Regional Development makes provision for the definition of a strategic green belt around the Belfast metropolitan area. The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan will need to review the limits of that green belt.

### Cairndhu Hospital

**Mr R Hutchinson** asked the Minister of the Environment to comment on the computed loss to the Larne ratepayer of £844,683 arising from the purchase and sale of Cairndhu Hospital and grounds by Larne Borough Council, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 262/99)

**Mr Foster:** I understand that an appeal has been made to the courts, under section 82 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, in relation to the local government auditor's decision in this case. As the matter is now sub judice, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

### Armoyle Landfill Site

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm when the Armoyle refuse collection site will close. (AQO 297/99)

**Mr Foster:** Closure of the Armoyle landfill site is a matter for the operator, Moyle District Council. However, I can confirm that a planning application for a time extension to the site, until 31 December 2000, is being considered by my Department.

### Geddes Site (Helen's Bay)

**Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of the Environment if he will ensure that prompt action is taken to stop illegal/unapproved dumps such as the Geddes site in Helen's Bay. (AQO 287/99)

**Mr Foster:** The Department endeavours to act promptly in all such cases within the constraints of current planning enforcement powers. The Department is currently monitoring activities at the Geddes site in Helen's Bay and will pursue any illegal dumping on the site.

### Local Government

**Mr Carrick** asked the Minister of the Environment to indicate whether he has any plans for the reorganisation of local government and over what timescale. (AQO 305/99)

**Mr Foster:** There are no plans at present to reorganise local government. Any review of local government is likely to be part of a wider review of the public sector in Northern Ireland.

### Environmental Protection

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of the Environment what further steps have been taken to establish an

Environmental Protection Agency in Northern Ireland, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 266/99)

**Mr Foster:** There are no plans at present to establish an Environmental Protection Agency for Northern Ireland. Operational responsibility for environmental matters lies with the Environment and Heritage Service, an agency within my Department. I will want to evaluate the effectiveness of these arrangements before considering whether any structural change is necessary.

## FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### EU Funding Programmes

**Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the current position in relation to finalisation of the next round of European Union funding programmes — in particular, Peace II, given the importance of such funding to community groups in Northern Ireland — and if he will make a statement. (AQW 574/99)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** Negotiations with the European Commission on a community support framework (CSF), which contains the broad strategy and priorities for action under the structural funds, have been under way since 29 March 2000 and are expected to be concluded by July. However, the agreement of the CSF is only one stage in the process of finalising the next round of EU funding, as the operational programmes (including Peace II), which set out in more detail the priorities and allocations of expenditure, must then be negotiated with the Commission and a programme complement agreed by the Programme Monitoring Committee. When the programme complement has been agreed, setting out details regarding selection criteria and beneficiaries of assistance, calls for projects will be issued, and funds will begin to flow to groups on the ground.

### Regional Rate

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what element of subtractionality he expects in next year's block grant as a result of his proposal to increase the regional rate by 8% this year, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 595/99)

**Mr Durkan:** The 8% increase in the domestic regional rate for 2000-01 is consistent with the increases allowed for in the 1998 comprehensive spending review allocations announced by the Treasury in July 1998. There will therefore be no adjustment to the assigned Northern Ireland budget in respect of regional rate increases.

## HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Health and Social Services: Legal Services

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to name the solicitors' firms engaged to act on behalf of (a) each individual health and social services board and (b) each individual health and social services trust in Northern Ireland from 1995 to the present; to confirm that legal services are properly tendered for; and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 565/99)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** The names of solicitors' firms engaged to act on behalf of (a) each individual health and social services board and (b) each individual health and social services trust from 1995 to the present are attached.

I can confirm that legal services are properly tendered for. I can further advise that during 1999 the Government Purchasing Agency (GPA) carried out an independent review of legal services provided to health and personal social services (HPSS) bodies. The GPA report concluded that the framework established for the supply of legal services has facilitated value-for-money improvements in the provision of legal services to HPSS bodies. However, the report also highlighted a number of recommendations to help to achieve further improvements. These recommendations were forwarded to HPSS bodies for their attention and action, where appropriate, on 14 February 2000.

I gceangal leis seo gheofar na comhlachtaí aturnaetha atá fostaithe le gníomhú ar son (a) gach Boird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta ar leith agus (b) gach Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta ar leith ó 1995 go nuiqe seo.

Thig liom a dhearbhu go lorgtar tairiscintí ar sheirbhísí dlí go cóir. Fosta is féidir liom a inse go ndearna Gníomhaireacht Cheannaigh an Rialtais (GCR) athbhreithniú neamhspleách ar na seirbhísí dlí a cuireadh ar fáil do chomhlachtaí Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta Pearsanta (SSSP). Ba é an tuairim a bhí ag GCR ina tuarascáil gur chuidigh an chreatlach a bunaíodh chun seirbhísí dlí a chur ar fáil le feabhsuithe ab fhiú ó thaobh costais iad maidir le seirbhísí dlí a sholáthar do chomhlachtaí SSSP. Mar sin féin, tharraing an tuarascáil aird ar roinnt moltaí a chuideodh lena thuilleadh feabhsuithe a bhaint amach. Ar an 14 Feabhra 2000 cuireadh na moltaí seo ar aghaidh chuig na comhlachtaí SSSP go n-amharcfadh siad orthu agus go ngníomhódh siad dá mba chuí leo in áit ar bith.



### Department: Bilingual Stationery

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain what happened to all the stationery used by the Department before the design of stationery was altered to include printing in Irish, the cost of this change, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 572/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Stationery used by the former Department of Health and Social Services had to be discarded when the title was changed, on devolution, to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). In addition, a small supply of stationery with the DHSSPS title was also discarded when I decided, on taking up my appointment, that the Department's title should appear in both English and Irish.

Since my appointment, the Department has spent a total of £4,336 on headed notepaper and other stationery in the bilingual format.

The additional cost of including Irish and English on departmental stationery is not significant when set against the overall departmental expenditure.

B'éigean réiteach a fháil den seanpháipéarachas a d'úsáid an tsean-Roinn Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta nuair a athraíodh an teideal go dtí an Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí (RSSSP) le linn cineachadh na chumachta. Chomh maith leis sin fuarthas réiteach de bheagán eile páipéarachais nuair a chinn mé féin, i ndiaidh domh dul i gceann mo chuid dualgas mar Aire, gur cheart go mbeadh teideal na Roinne i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge.

Ó ceapadh mé tá an Roinn i ndiaidh £4,336 san iomlán a chaitheamh ar pháipéar comhfhreagrais le ceanteidil dhátheangacha agus ar phaipéarachas eile atá mar an gcéanna.

Níl mórán de chostas breise i gceist nuair a chuirtear Gaeilge agus Béarla ar phaipéarachas na Roinne taobh le caiteachas na Roinne ina iomláine.

### Department: Bilingual Advertising

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how much has been spent on advertising in both English and Irish by the Department since her appointment as Minister, what were the percentage increases on the same period in previous years, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 573/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Since my appointment as Minister, my Department has placed two newspaper advertisements in both English and Irish. The cost of placing these advertisements in daily and weekly newspapers was £19,808. In addition, a recruitment advertisement for a

senior post in DHSSPS appeared in the weekly Irish language newspaper 'Lá' at a cost of £222.

Advertising requirements vary from one year to the next, and it is not possible to make a direct comparison with previous years.

Ó ceapadh mé mar Aire chuir mo Roinnse dhá fhógra i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla sna nuachtáin. £19,808 a bhí ann mar chostas ar na fógraí a cuireadh sna nuachtáin laethúla agus seachtainiúla. Ar a bharr seo cuireadh fógra earcaíochta, £222 a luach, faoi phost sinsearach sa RSSSP i Lá, nuachtán seachtainiúil Gaeilge.

Athraítear na riachtanais fógraíochta ó bhliain go bliain agus ní féidir comparáid dhíreach a dhéanamh leis na blianta a chuaigh thart.

### Fluoride and Calcium: Human-Body Levels

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that as fluoride levels in the body increase, calcium levels decrease.

(AQW 593/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Very high intakes of fluoride, sufficient to produce acute toxicity, cause low serum calcium levels. Fluoride in physiological doses has no effect on serum calcium or calcium balance.

Má ghlactar fíorchuid mhór fluairíde is leor sin le géarthocsaineacht a thabhairt do dhuine agus titfidh leibhéil an tséirim chailciam ann. Ní chuireann dáileoga físeolacha fluairíde isteach ar an séiream cailciam nó ar cothromaíocht an chailciam ar chor ar bith.

### Health Service: Low-Paid Staff

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is currently being done to raise the pay of those who are (a) low-paid, (b) underpaid; if she will conduct a review of those sectors in the Health Service receiving low rates of pay; what representations have been made to her on this; and if she will make a statement. (AQW 596/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Staff employed in the health and personal social services (HPSS) are paid at the same rates as their colleagues in the National Health Service (NHS) and in social services departments of local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. The British Government's proposals contained in 'Agenda for Change – Modernising the NHS Pay System' are currently being developed on a UK-wide basis. They include a new pay system that will offer staff a more attractive career, with the potential for better progression, greater use of skills, improved status and higher earnings for those who contribute most to the service. A job evaluation scheme will be used to evaluate every job in the HPSS and pay

will be awarded on the basis of the job's worth in fair comparison with other jobs in the HPSS. Officials of my Department and colleagues employed in the HPSS, are involved at all stages of the development of the new scheme, and I will be considering how the flexibility in the framework, when it is agreed, can best be applied to meet the needs of the HPSS.

Significant pay increases were awarded this year to nurses, midwives, health visitors and staff in the professions allied to medicine. It was recognised that certain grades of staff in these groups had been underpaid, and additional increases in the form of immediate increments were also awarded to those particular grades.

A number of representations have been made regarding several of issues relating to pay. Indeed, the Member herself has made previous representations to me in relation to a review of the low pay of HPSS staff.

In view of the current developments it would not be appropriate for me to conduct a review at this stage.

Faigheann na baill foirne sna Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsantas pá ar na rataí céanna agus a fhaigheann a gcomhghleacaithe sa tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Sláinte (SNS) agus i ranna seirbhísí sóisialta údarais áitiúla Shasana, na hAlban agus na Breataine Bige. Faoi láthair ar fud na Ríochta Aontaithe tá Rialtas na Breataine ag tabhairt chun cinn a chuid moltaí féin atá ar fáil in 'Agenda for Change – Modernising the NHS Pay System'. Tá an Rialtas ag moladh struchtúr nua pá a thabharfaidh gairmréim níos tarraingtí dóibh siúd a thugann an oiread is mó don tseirbhís. Beidh faill acu dul chun cinn a dhéanamh, úsáid níos fearr a bhaint as a gcuid scileanna, ardú stádais a fháil agus a thuilleadh pá a ghnóthú. Beidh scéim meastóireachta oibre ann agus bainfear úsáid aisti le gach cineál oibre sna SSSP a mheas agus bunófar an tuarastal ar luach na hoibre i gcomparáid chothrom le jabanna eile sna SSSP. Tá baint ag feidhmeannaigh de chuid mo Roinne agus ag a gcomhghleacaithe sna SSSP le forbairt na scéime nua céim ar chéim agus nuair a bheas comhaontú fúithi beidh mé ag cuimhneamh ar an dóigh is fearr ar féidir solúbthacht na creatlaí seo a úsáid le riar ar riachtanais na SSSP.

I mbliana fuair na daoine seo a leanas ardú suntasach pá: banaltraí, mná cabhrach, cuairteoirí sláinte agus baill foirne sna gairmeacha a bhaineann le míocháine. Aithníodh go rabh baill foirne ar ghraid áirithe sna grúpaí seo ar ghanphá agus tugadh arduithe breise i bhfoirm breisióchtaí láithreacha dóibh siúd.

Cuireadh roinnt tuairimí faoi mo bhráid maidir le ceisteanna pá agus leoga, tá an comhalta tionóil í féin i ndiaidh ábhar a chur faoi mo bhráid roimhe a bhain le athbhreithniú ar phá íseal bhaill foirne na SSSP. Mar gheall ar na forbairtí atá ag teacht chun cinn faoi láthair

ní bheadh sé oiriúnach agam athbhreithniú a chur sa tsiúl ag an phointe seo.

## Fluoride

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether fluoride is a cumulative poison. (AQW 598/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The potential for fluoride to accumulate in calcified tissue is widely recognised. Excessive fluoride intake over a period of years may cause clinical skeletal fluorosis. It is estimated that fluoride intakes of at least 10 to 20 mg daily for at least 10 to 20 years may cause this condition. Reviews of the evidence on fluoridation are currently under way in GB and in the Republic of Ireland, and I will be considering the findings once reports are available.

Aithnítear go forleathan gur féidir le fluairíd bailiú i bhfíocháin chailcithe. Má ghlacfar barraíocht fluairíde thar thréimshe de blianta féadfár fluaróis chnámharlaigh chliniciúil a fháil. Chun go mbeadh duine sa riocht seo meastar go mbeadh air 10-20 milleagram ar a laghad a ghlacadh sa lá go ceann 10-20 bliain ar a laghad. Táthar ag athbhreithniú na fianaise ar fhluaireidí faoi láthair sa Bhreatain Mhór agus i bPoblacht na hÉireann agus cuirfidh mé a bhfuil aimsithe acu san áireamh chomh luath agus bheas tuarascálacha ar fáil.

## Lead and Arsenic

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether lead and arsenic are cumulative poisons. (AQW 599/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The toxic potential of both arsenic and lead have always been recognised. The World Health Organisation/Food and Agriculture Organisation Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants has recommended that weekly intakes of lead from all sources should not exceed 0.025 mg per kg body weight, and 0.015 mg in the case of inorganic arsenic.

Aithníodh ariamh cumas tocsaineach arsanaice agus luaidhe araon. Mhol Comhchoiste Saineolaíoch Na hEagraíochta Domhanda Sláinte/Na hEagraíochta Bia agus Talmhaíochta um Bhreiseáin i mBia agus Ábhair Éilliúcháin nár cheart go nglacfadh duine níos mó ná 0.025 milleagram luaidhe an cileagram de mheáchan coirp sa tseachtain as gach foinse agus 0.015 milleagram i gcás na harsanaice neamhorgánaí.

## Arsenic (Infants)

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm what is the minimum

level of arsenic required to cause an adverse biological effect in an infant. (AQW 600/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The World Health Organisation/Food and Agriculture Organisation Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants has recommended that weekly intakes of inorganic arsenic from all sources should not exceed 0.015 mg per kg body weight.

Tá sé molta ag Comhchoiste Saineolaíoch Na hEagraíochta Domhanda Sláinte/Na hEagraíochta Bia agus Talmhaíochta um Breiseáin i mBia agus Ábhair Éilliúcháin nár cheart go nglacfadh duine níos mó ná 0.015 milleagram den arsanaic neamhorgánach an cileagram de mheáchan coirp sa tseachtain as gach foinse.

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm what is a toxic level of arsenic for an infant. (AQW 601/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The World Health Organisation/Food and Agriculture Organisation Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants has recommended that weekly intakes of inorganic arsenic from all sources should not exceed 0.015 mg per kg body weight.

Tá sé molta ag Comhchoiste Saineolaíoch Na hEagraíochta Domhanda Sláinte/Na hEagraíochta Bia agus Talmhaíochta um Breiseáin i mBia agus Ábhair Éilliúcháin nár cheart go nglacfadh duine níos mó ná 0.015 milleagram den arsanaic neamhorgánach an cileagram de mheáchan coirp sa tseachtain as gach foinse.

### Lead (Infants)

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm the minimum level of lead required to cause an adverse biological effect in an infant. (AQW 616/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The World Health Organisation/Food and Agriculture Organisation Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants has recommended that, for infants, weekly intakes of lead from all sources should not exceed 0.025 mg per kg body weight. This takes into account the fact that lead is a cumulative poison.

Tá sé molta ag Comhchoiste Saineolaíoch Na hEagraíochta Domhanda Sláinte/Na hEagraíochta Bia agus Talmhaíochta um Breiseáin i mBia agus Ábhair Éilliúcháin nár cheart go nglacfadh naíonáin níos mó ná 0.025 milleagram luaidhe an cileagram de mheáchan coirp sa tseachtain as gach foinse. Cuireann seo san áireamh gur nimh charnach luaidhe.

### Water Fluoridation

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to cite any laboratory studies

which show that one part per million of fluoride in drinking water has reduced tooth decay. (AQW 617/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Laboratory studies are not appropriate in demonstrating the effectiveness of fluoridation in reducing tooth decay. However, population studies have shown that water containing a concentration of fluoride about one part per million — either naturally present or adjusted — reduces tooth decay.

Ní staidéir i saotharlanna an bealach is cuí le héifeacht fluairídite a thaispeáint maidir le laghdú meath fiacla. Ach tá staidéir ar an daonra i ndiaidh a thaispeáint go laghdaíonn uisce a bhfuil páirt amháin fluairide an milliún ann — bíodh sí ann go nádúrtha nó socraithe — meath fiacla.

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to cite any “blind” or “double blind” studies with a human population which prove that fluoridation has reduced tooth decay. (AQW 618/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Several studies have been conducted under “blind” conditions. They have clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of fluoridation. These include the following:

Backer Dirks, O; Kwant, GW (1961): The results of six and a half years of artificial fluoridation of drinking water in the Netherlands. The Tiel-Culemborg experiment. Arch. Oral. Biol. 5, 284-300;

Hardwick, J.L., Teasdale, J., and Bloodworth, G (1982): Caries increments over four years in children aged 12 at the start of water fluoridation. British Dental Journal 153, 217-222;

Jackson, D., James, P.M., and Thomas, F.D. (1985): Fluoridation in Anglesey 1983: a clinical study of dental caries. British Dental Journal 158, 45-49;

Milsom, K, Mitropoulos, C M. (1990): Enamel defects in eight-year-old children in fluoridated and non-fluoridated parts of Cheshire. Caries Research 24, 286-289;

O'Mullane, DM (1982): The changing patterns of dental caries in Irish schoolchildren between 1961 and 1981. J. Dent. Res. 61, 1317-1320;

Thomas, F.D., and Kassab, J.Y. (1992): Fluoridation in Anglesey: a clinical study of dental caries in mothers at term. British Dental Journal 173, 136-140.

The “double blind” methodology is inappropriate for population studies such as those looking at the efficacy of water fluoridation

Rinneadh roinnt staidéar faoi thosca “dalla” agus thaispeáin siad go soileir éifeacht an fhlhuairídite, mar atá:

Backer Dirks, O; Kwant, GW (1961): The results of 6 1/2 years of artificial fluoridation of drinking water in the

Netherlands. The Tiel-Culemborg experiment. Arch. Oral. Biol. 5, 284-300;

Hardwick, J.L., Teasdale, J., and Bloodworth, G. (1982): Caries increments over 4 years in children aged 12 at the start of water fluoridation. British Dental Journal 153, 217-222;

Jackson, D., James, P.M., and Thomas, F.D. (1985): Fluoridation in Anglesey 1983: a clinical study of dental caries. British Dental Journal 158, 45-49;

Milsom, K., Mitropoulos, C.M. (1990): Enamel defects in 8-year-old children in fluoridated and non-fluoridated parts of Cheshire. Caries Research 24, 286-289;

O'Mullane, D.M. (1982): The changing patterns of dental caries in Irish schoolchildren between 1961 and 1981. J. Dent. Res. 61, 1317-1320;

Thomas, F.D., and Kassab, J.Y. (1992): Fluoridation in Anglesey: a clinical study of dental caries in mothers at term. British Dental Journal 173, 136-140.

Ní hé an cur chuige "dall faoi dhó" is cuí i gcás staidéar ar an daonra cosúil leis na cinn atá ag iniúchadh éifeacht fluairídiú uisce.

### Lead (Infants)

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm the toxic level of lead for an infant. (AQW 619/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The World Health Organisation/Food and Agriculture Organisation Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants has recommended that, for infants, weekly intakes of lead from all sources should not exceed 0.025 mg per kg body weight. This takes into account the fact that lead is a cumulative poison.

Tá sé molta ag Comhchoiste Saineolaíoch Na hEagraíochta Domhanda Sláinte/Na hEagraíochta Bia agus Talmhaíochta um Breiseáin i mBia agus Ábhair Éilliúcháin nár cheart go nglacadh naíonáin níos mó ná 0.025 milleagram luaidhe an cileagram de mheáchan coirp sa tseachtain as gach foinse. Cuireann seo san áireamh gur nimh charnach luaidhe.

### Social Services (Children)

**Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to introduce an initiative to help children in care equivalent to Quality Protects, to confirm the source and amounts of funding available, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 622/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I am aware that there is much concern regarding the present state of children's social services. A further £6.5 million is being made available this year, which will help the development of residential services

and the implementation of the Children Order. I will be considering how services can be further improved and will be giving careful consideration to bringing forward proposals for an initiative equivalent to Quality Protects, adapted to suit local circumstances.

Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil inní mhór ann faoin staid ina bhfuil seirbhísí sóisialta do pháistí faoi láthair. Cuirfear £6.5 mhilliún breise ar fáil i mbliana agus cuideoidh seo le seirbhísí cónaithe a fhorbairt do pháistí agus le hOrdú na Leanaí a chur i bhfeidhm. Beidh me ag cuimhneamh ar na dóigheanna ar féidir breis feabhais ar chur ar sheirbhísí agus smaoineoidh mé go cúramach ar mholtaí a thabhairt chun tosaigh gur cheart tionscnamh ar aon dul le "Is í an Cháilíocht ár gCosaint" a bheith ann ach é a bheith curtha in oiriúint do na dálaí áitiúla.

### Fluoride

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether drugs containing fluoride compounds were ever used to suppress thyroid activity. (AQW 623/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Fluoride has in the past been used in the treatment of exophthalmic goitre, but the therapeutic action was found to be uncertain and such medication is now obsolete.

San am a chuaigh thart baineadh úsáid as fluairíd le cóireáil a thabhairt don ainglis bholgshúileach ach fuarthas amach go raibh an ghníomhaíocht teiripeach éiginnte agus tá an cineál sin míochnithe anois as feidhm.

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether fluoride was formerly used to suppress thyroid activity. (AQW 626/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Fluoride has in the past been used in the treatment of exophthalmic goitre, but the therapeutic action was found to be uncertain and such medication is now obsolete.

San am a chuaigh thart baineadh úsáid as fluairíd le cóireáil a thabhairt don ainglis bholgshúileach ach fuarthas amach go raibh an ghníomhaíocht teiripeach éiginnte agus tá an cineál sin míochnithe anois as feidhm.

## HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

### Training and Employment Programmes

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment what plans



he has to address the training and employment needs of young Protestant males, and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 587/99)

**The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren):** I have no plans to introduce training or employment measures designed specifically for young people (either male or female) from a particular community background. My Department's various training and employment programmes are available to all who satisfy the programme's entry criteria, irrespective of gender, disability, race or community background. Our programmes are about enhancing opportunity and ensuring a more equal distribution of the benefits of economic growth through targeting, in particular, those individuals and areas in greatest need.

### Kinawley Integrated Teleworking Enterprise

**Dr Birnie** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the grants provided by his Department to Kinawley Teleworking Integrated Enterprise.

(AQW 630/99)

**Dr Farren:** Since 1993 my Department has paid European grants amounting to £1,400,936 to the Kinawley Integrated Teleworking Enterprise (KITE).

A further £76,000 of European grants have been paid to KITE by sectoral partners contracted to this Department.

### Cross-Border Students

**Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail (a) the number of students from the Republic of Ireland enrolled in full-time courses in further and higher education colleges in Northern Ireland and (b) the number of students from Northern Ireland who have enrolled in universities and further education institutes in the Republic of Ireland, in each of the last 10 years.

(AQW 637/99)

**Dr Farren:**

#### (A) STUDENTS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND ENROLLED ON FULL-TIME COURSES AT NI HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

	1990/ 91	1991/ 92	1992/ 93	1993/ 94	1994/ 95	1995/ 96	1996/ 97	1997/ 98	1998/ 99	1999/ 00
NI Higher Education Institutions <sup>1</sup>	1,586	1,806	2,106	2,437	2,673	3,188	3,244	3,455	3,018	2,543
NI Further Education Colleges <sup>2</sup>	n/a	804	1,023	1,139	1,190	1,115	1,065	945	720	828
Total	n/a	2,610	3,129	3,576	3,863	4,303	4,309	4,400	3,738	3,371

<sup>1</sup> Enrolments at the NI Higher Education Institutions are as at 1 December.

<sup>2</sup> Enrolments at the NI Further Education Colleges are as at 1 November.

#### (B) NI DOMICILED STUDENTS ENROLLED ON HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES AT INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

1990/ 91	1991/ 92	1992/ 93	1993/ 94	1994/ 95	1995/ 96	1996/ 97	1997/ 98	1998/ 99	1999/ 00
424	422	802	1,117	1,729	1,727	1,463	1,311	1,006	n/a

Information on Northern Irish students enrolled on Further Education courses at institutions in the Republic of Ireland is not available.

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Sewage Treatment (North Down and Ards)

**Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will give a date for the decision on the future of the sewage treatment works in the Donaghadee area.

(AQW 562/99)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr P Robinson):** The Water Service commissioned consultants to carry out detailed environmental assessments of two possible sites for the North Down and Ards wastewater treatment works. These assessments have been completed and are currently being considered. Proposals for the location of the marine outfall site and storm water handling are being finalised.

I wish to consider all the issues very carefully, as I am aware of the concerns expressed by public representatives and members of the public about the siting of the proposed works. I hope to be in a position to make an announcement in two to three months.

### Railway Network

**Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to increase funding for the Northern Ireland railway network and to indicate what steps he will take to ensure that the present level of services will not be further downgraded.

(AQW 569/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The future level of funding for the public transport system in Northern Ireland, including the railway network, is being considered as part of the 2000 spending review, which is currently under way. I expect that the recommendations of the Railways Task Force will have a significant influence on the decisions taken in the spending review. In any event, my Department is already pressing strongly for additional public expenditure resources to be allocated to railways. My Department has undertaken in the current year to subsidise the existing levels of service, but operational imperatives —

including safety considerations — may necessitate some reductions in service.

### Regional Strategic Framework

**Mr C Murphy** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail consultations that the Department has had with Irish Government officials in relation to the 'Shaping Our Future' document, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 570/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The draft regional strategic framework for Northern Ireland was published in December 1998 by the former Department of the Environment. During the course of its preparation, officials from that Department met with their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland on various occasions to discuss matters of potential mutual benefit. More recently, and since the establishment of the Department for Regional Development, an official from my Department has been appointed to serve on the expert advisory group which is monitoring and advising on the preparation of a national spatial strategy for the Republic of Ireland. I am satisfied with the arrangements which continue to be in place to discuss matters of mutual interest.

### Bleach Green-Antrim Railway

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to promote the development of the Bleach Green to Antrim railway line as a commuter link for south and east Antrim, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 583/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** Translink has advised that specific plans to promote the development of this line have not yet been finalised. However, Translink does intend to promote the line to potential commuters and others as the date for its reopening for passenger services, expected in early 2001, approaches.

### Larne-Belfast Railway

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to develop commuter rail travel between Larne and Belfast. (AQW 584/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I understand that Translink does not currently have any plans to develop commuter rail travel between Larne and Belfast. My Department does not at present have the resources available to meet the additional running cost subsidy that Translink would need to develop services on this line, and Translink does not have sufficient rolling stock available to increase services.

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps have been taken to ensure that

the Belfast to Larne railway line maintains its Trans-European network status. (AQW 585/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The European Commission is currently revising the Trans-European network (TEN) guidelines. However, there are no proposals to alter the Trans-European network in Northern Ireland, and the status of the Belfast to Larne railway is not due to change.

### Roads (West Tyrone)

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the current status of (a) the Newtownstewart bypass; (b) the next phase of the Omagh through-pass; (c) the next phase of the Strabane bypass. (AQW 592/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** My Department's Roads Service is currently progressing each of these schemes through the various statutory procedures. Notices of intention to make direction orders and environmental impact assessment notices have been published for the Newtownstewart bypass and the Strabane bypass stage 2 and will be published within the next few weeks for the Omagh throughpass stage 3. Subject to the successful completion of these statutory procedures and the availability of funds, work on site is scheduled to commence on all these schemes in April/May 2001.

The development of the schemes will ease the flow of through traffic on the Londonderry-Ballygawley route and will provide benefits to local communities through the removal of traffic from town centres.

### Tandragee Water Supply

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide statistics of the quantities of lead, arsenic and fluoride which have been introduced to the Tandragee watercourse over the past 25 years, including the amounts of lead and arsenic used in aluminium as a flocculating agent. (AQW 602/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I understand that this question relates to the Tandragee water supply.

Aluminium has not been used as a flocculating agent for the water supplied to Tandragee during the past 25 years. The water in the Tandragee area contains only trace amounts of lead. Random samples taken at consumers' taps may occasionally contain lead as a result of lead service pipes or internal plumbing in some older properties.

Until the early part of this year the Tandragee area was supplied from a local borewell. At the request of the local health authority, fluosilicic acid was added to the water to improve dental health. Approximately 8 litres of the acid was added each day, and over a 25-year period approximately 75,000 litres of the acid would

have been added to the water. Fluosilicic acid contains minute quantities of arsenic. On mixing in supply, the levels would have been well below the detection limit of one part per billion, which is one fiftieth of the concentration of arsenic permitted in the Water Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994. It is estimated that approximately 12g of arsenic was added to the water each year, which corresponds to a total of 300g over a 25-year period. Tandragee is now supplied from an alternative water source, and fluoridation has ceased.

### **Newtownards Southern Relief Road**

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development if finance has been allocated for the completion of the new road from the Flood Gates to the Comber Road in Newtownards and to confirm the completion date for this project. (AQW 620/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** A scheme to construct a new link road between the Flood Gates and Comber Road in Newtownards is phase 1 of the Newtownards southern relief road. This scheme is included in my Department's forward planning schedule. At present, finance has not been allocated for the scheme, and construction will depend on the future availability of funds for the roads programme and the priority of the scheme compared to other worthwhile schemes across Northern Ireland.

### **Tandragee Water Supply**

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm the quantities of (i) lead, (ii) arsenic, (iii) fluoride and (iv) lead and arsenic used in aluminium as a flocculating agent released into the waters of Tandragee in total over the past 25 years.

(AQW 624/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I am replying, as this is a matter for the Department for Regional Development.

I refer the Member to my answer of 22 June 2000 to his question AQW 602/99.

### **Mobile Phone Masts (Water Service Properties)**

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the current position in regard to the installation of mobile phone masts on Department of the Environment Water Service properties. (AQO 274/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I am replying as this is a matter for the Department for Regional Development. The Water Service has its own telecommunications system, which includes a large number of masts at strategic locations across Northern Ireland. These sites are serviced with

access roads and electricity and are thus attractive to cellular telephone companies.

Applications by cellular telephone companies to erect masts on Water Service sites or to erect dishes on existing Water Service masts are subject to rigorous assessment. This includes ensuring that the proposed installation does not affect Water Service operations, that all licensing requirements are met, and that the applicant has obtained planning approval from the Department of the Environment. Provided that an application meets these criteria, the Water Service is normally prepared to allow the installation and charge an appropriate rental. This approach helps to limit the overall impact of mast development.

### **'Shaping Our Future'**

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment he has made of the responses in the further consultation period on the 'Shaping our Future' document, and if he will make a statement.

(AQO 267/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** More than 80 responses were received in the consultation period to which the Member refers. I have been briefed on the main thrust of these responses, and have instructed officials to give them the fullest possible consideration in bringing forward a final version of the regional development strategy for further political direction. The relevant Assembly Committee has recently had presentations on the subject by both my officials and myself, and so I have no plans to make a further statement at this time.

**Mr McHugh** asked the Minister for Regional Development to undertake to act on responses to the final draft of 'Shaping our Future', in particular on submissions on infrastructure from the West rural region, and if he will make a statement. (AQO 303/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I have instructed my officials to take account of all the responses which were received in relation to the proposed regional development strategy. I welcome the fact that five district councils in the west of the region collaborated in making a very significant submission.

I can assure the Member that the points about infrastructure will be given the fullest possible consideration when the strategy is being finalised. Thereafter, I will be making every effort to secure the funds which will be necessary to implement it.

### **Public Transport: Finance**

**Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department has any plans to increase investment in the omnibus and rail services in Northern

Ireland in the light of the recent 3% to 4% cutback in these services. (AQO 301/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The future level of funding for the public transport system in Northern Ireland is being considered as part of the 2000 spending review that is currently under way. I am pressing strongly for additional public expenditure resources to be allocated to public transport.

**Mr Neeson** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that Northern Ireland will get a share of the money that has been made available from the Exchequer for public transport.

(AQO 275/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his Budget statement, announced an additional £280 million in 2000-01 for transport. Under the existing Treasury rules the Northern Ireland block has been allocated a proportional amount, as it has in relation to the additional funds announced for health and education. I am anxious that the additional funds should be allocated to public transport, and I have made strong representations to that end.

## M2 - Toome Bypass Link

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister for Regional Development to authorise a feasibility study to examine the cost of linking the proposed A6 Toome bypass with the M2 motorway. (AQO 307/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** A scheme for dualling the 4.1 mile section of the A6 between the end of the motorway and the start of the proposed Toome bypass has been proposed for some years. The scheme is estimated to cost some £15 million and is currently included in my Department's forward planning schedule, where it will have to compete for priority and funding in future roads programmes.

## Railways Task Force

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he expects to receive the report of the railways task force. (AQO 279/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I expect an interim report from the task force by late July this year.

## Programme of Government (Executive Committee Meetings)

**Mr Close** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline how he proposes to influence the programme of government in the light of his absence from meetings of the Executive Committee. (AQO 277/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** My party's position on sitting on the Executive Committee with those who represent an armed terrorist group is well known.

On my Department's input to the programme of government, I have already met with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to discuss my proposals. My Department has submitted detailed proposals, and I have outlined the Department's programme to the Assembly's Rural Development Committee.

The programme of government will have to be approved by the Assembly, and every Assembly Member will have an opportunity for input at the debate stage.

## A26 (Woodgreen-Ballee)

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will give a progress report on improvements made to the A26 from Woodgreen to Ballee. (AQO 296/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** Following the award of contract on 10 April 2000 for the dualling of the A26 road between Woodgreen and Ballee roundabout, site works commenced on 2 May 2000. At present, earth and drainage works are progressing on programme between Woodgreen and the Cromkill Road junction, with completion of the scheme scheduled for next summer (2001).

## Public Transport Operators: Grants

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister for Regional Development under what authority grants are paid to public transport operators. (AQW 732/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The payment of grants to public transport operators, in particular grants to cover the cost of concessionary fares, is provided for under the Transport (Northern Ireland) Order 1977. The relevant parts of this legislation were not transferred from the Department of the Environment to the Department for Regional Development on devolution. The approval of the Assembly to transfer responsibility for the relevant provisions in the 1977 Order will be sought in a forthcoming Transfer of Functions Order. Pending that approval, necessary expenditure in these areas will be met by repayable advances from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund.



## **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **House Purchase: Stamp Duty**

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister for Social Development to introduce a scheme through which first-time home buyers will be exempt from stamp duty.  
(AQW 705/99)

**The Minister for Social Development (Mr Dodds):** Stamp duty levied in Northern Ireland is an excepted matter under schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

### **House Purchase: VAT**

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister for Social Development to make funding available to enable first-time buyers of newly built properties in housing developments to recover the Value Added Tax. (AQW 729/99)

**Mr Dodds:** Taxation is an excepted matter under schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 30 June 2000

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### West Tyrone: Development (Equality)

**Mr Gibson** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what plans the Equality Unit has for testing the equality of provision in infrastructure to ensure that rural and industrial development in West Tyrone is not hindered, and if he will make a statement.  
(AQW 581/99)

**Reply:** The primary responsibility for such infrastructure provision lies with those Departments which deliver services relevant to rural and industrial development. These Departments have a statutory duty, in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in terms of a range of social categories. Relevant legislation does not refer to equality of opportunity between geographic areas, although the distribution of infrastructure can impact on equality of opportunity between some section 75 groups. Under the New Targeting Social Need policy, Departments should aim to focus available resources and efforts on areas, groups and people in the greatest social need. The Equality Unit provides central guidance, leadership and advice to Departments on the implementation of both the statutory equality of opportunity duty and New TSN, raising issues of concern, as necessary. It has no current plans to consider infrastructure provision in the West Tyrone area specifically.

#### Civic Forum

**Mr Bradley** asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to confirm that the Civic Forum will include representatives drawn from the farming community at a level which will reflect the importance of the industry to Northern Ireland.  
(AQW 642/99)

**Reply:** The two main representative bodies in farming in Northern Ireland — The Ulster Farmers Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association — have been invited to develop a process to select the two nominations from the agricultural sector to the Civic Forum. The proposed process will be submitted to the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister for consideration.

### OSPAR Commission

**Mr McGrady** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister if the Executive Committee will be represented at the OSPAR Commission in Copenhagen on Monday 26 June 2000, and to make a statement.  
(AQW 666/99)

**Reply:** No representative from the Executive Committee attended the OSPAR Commission meeting in Copenhagen on Monday 26 June 2000. However, the Minister of the Environment and his officials have ongoing contacts with their counterparts in Whitehall on OSPAR matters. They are kept informed of developments and contribute to the consideration of relevant issues in so far as they apply to Northern Ireland.

Officials of the Department of the Environment are kept informed by counterparts in UK Government Departments on OSPAR matters.

### AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

#### Agri-Food Steering Group

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the Department's working party on the farming industry will report, how widely the report will be disseminated, and if she will make a statement.  
(AQW 680/99)

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** The steering group set up to develop a "vision" for the agri-food sector, and to develop a strategy for achieving that vision, has been asked to report by the Autumn. I do not want to put a precise deadline on the steering group's work as it is more important to have a good-quality report than to have an artificially imposed deadline met.

As I indicated in my reply of 16 June to question AQW 560/99, the report will be made public.

## Pig Producers

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to implement a compensation scheme to alleviate the problems of local pig producers, similar to the current scheme in the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 682/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The aid scheme launched by the Republic of Ireland in January this year was aimed at pig producers in the border counties who had suffered financial difficulties as a direct result of the destruction by fire of the Lovell & Christmas pig slaughtering plant in Northern Ireland in June 1998. Approximately IR£1 million was made available as part of a debt restructuring/interest subsidy package operated through the commercial banking sector in the Irish Republic. Approximately 120 applicants have benefited from the scheme. The Government here had already responded to the adverse marketing effects of this fire by introducing the pig welfare slaughter compensation scheme in September 1998. Some 15,600 overweight and unmarketable pigs were purchased and disposed of at a cost of approximately £0.75 million.

However, in addition, one of the financial assistance measures announced at the Prime Minister's agriculture summit meeting on 30 March 2000 was a three-year UK pig industry restructuring scheme. The Scheme is designed to improve the long-term viability of the UK pig industry. Since then my Department has been co-operating with the other UK agriculture Departments in planning the operational aspects of this scheme.

The scheme will be in two parts — (a) aid to outgoers who wish to leave pig farming and (b) a restructuring or ongoers element for those who wish to remain in pig farming but want to restructure their business to make it viable in the longer term. This second element will be similar to the Republic's scheme referred to in the question.

The scheme must meet EU state aid rules, principal amongst which for this scheme is the need to permanently reduce UK capacity by at least 16% from that which existed in June 1998. An application has been made to the European Commission for approval of the scheme under state aid rules. EU Commission approval is still awaited, but as it is the type of scheme with which the Commission is familiar, the UK is reasonably optimistic that it will be approved. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Proposals, although not final, suggest that the outgoers element will be run centrally for the whole of the UK, using a sealed-bidding system. The UK agriculture Departments are currently consulting their respective industry representative bodies on this element of the scheme.

The outgoers element will be introduced as soon as possible after Commission approval is received. The Commission has posed a number of questions in response to the state aid notification, and the timetable is, of course, subject to when Commission approval is given. It is nonetheless planned to close the application period for this element in October and have approvals issued within one month, actual decommissioning completed by 31 January and payments made by 31 March or as soon as possible thereafter.

The ongoers element cannot proceed until and unless the required reduction in UK capacity is achieved. The ongoers scheme will involve producers' agreeing a loan to carry out a business plan with a bank or other lender institution and submitting an application for assistance based on that plan. The Government will pay the equivalent of a reduction of five percentage points on the interest charge over two years. We hope to reach the consultation stage on this element of the scheme by early autumn.

## EDUCATION

### Teacher Training

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to encourage local post-graduate trainee teachers to complete their studies in Northern Ireland, given the financial incentives currently available elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 586/99)

**The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):** I am replying to your question because intakes to initial teacher training courses are the responsibility of my Department.

Training salaries are being introduced in England from September 2000 to boost recruitment to teaching by attracting more applications from graduates for initial teacher training. Applications to the NI Higher Education Institutions for the 2000-01 academic year, however, exceed by 5:1 the total number of teacher training places required to meet expected vacancy levels in schools. The indications at this stage are that all places will be filled in all subjects. It is therefore too early to draw firm conclusions on any local impact of the financial incentives available in England, but the position will be kept under close review.

In giving this response I have consulted my colleague Dr Sean Farren, whose responsibilities include the funding of initial teacher training and the administration of the two local colleges of education. In reviewing the position I shall ensure that there is close liaison between the two Departments.



## Northern Ireland Teachers' Council

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education to detail how the Department intends to involve the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council in addressing the strategic educational issues which confront schools.

(AQW 589/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The Department of Education has frequent contact, through consultation exercises, correspondence and meetings, with the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) on matters covering the full range of the Department's functions. In addition, the Standing Conferences for Primary and Secondary Education enable representatives of the five member unions of the NITC to meet formally with the Department, the education and library boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools twice yearly, to discuss matters of interest and concern.

The Department also met last year with the NITC to discuss the development of the next strategic plan for education. In addition, INTO, NASUWT and UTU have commented on the consultation document 'Learning for Tomorrow's World', which sets out the issues that the Department considers relevant to the preparation of the plan. The process of consultation on planning issues will continue when the Department seeks the views of NITC and others in the course of setting the objectives in its corporate plan for the next three years.

## Primary and Secondary Sectors: Funding Differential

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education to confirm that the current funding differential between the secondary and primary education sectors is not detrimental to the latter in its efforts to deliver the curriculum and maintain educational standards, and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 590/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The differential in funding between the primary and secondary sectors arises mainly from the more subject-specific and differentiated curriculum in secondary schools. In the primary sector the arrangements provide for a pupil-centred approach to the curriculum, where pupils are taught normally in one class for all their subjects. In the secondary sector, pupils are taught normally by subject specialists, which increases the need for teachers and specialist facilities.

There is no evidence from inspection findings that schools in the primary sector are unable to deliver the curriculum or that educational standards are not being maintained.

The complex issue of funding differentials between the primary and secondary sectors will be considered in the context of ongoing work on the development of a

common LMS (local management of schools) formula to replace the seven existing formulae used to fund schools. It is intended to issue a consultation document to schools and other interests towards the end of the year, and we will welcome comments on all aspects of the proposed formula at that stage.

## Bullying in Schools

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education what practical help and resources he intends to make available to school principals to enable them adequately to address the growing problem of bullying in schools, and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 614/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Bullying behaviour is unacceptable, has no place in our schools and should be dealt with by a school within its discipline policy. Support in the development of a whole school discipline policy, which should address bullying, is available to schools through the behaviour support teams which are based in all education and library board areas. These teams were established as part of the strategy to promote and sustain good behaviour in schools, which was launched in February 1998, and additional resources of some £850,000 per annum have been made available to the boards to support this work. Advice and support for pupils who have been the victims of bullying and for their parents is available through the education welfare service. In addition, the Department and voluntary agencies regularly provide materials to schools, giving practical advice on how to tackle the problem, based on current best practice.

## Schools Budget

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education what steps will be taken to ensure that financial resources are released directly to schools and not ring-fenced at Department and board levels, and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 615/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** It is departmental policy to maximise the delivery of resources to the classroom, and boards are advised each year that they must continue to give priority, within their annual block grant allocations, to the funding delegated to schools. However, elements of the general schools budget are more appropriately handled centrally by education and library boards and the Department of Education (for example, home-to-school transport; milk and meals; centrally funded teacher substitution costs). Resources secured for specific initiatives, which are additional to the main schools budget, are earmarked to ensure that they are used for the purpose for which they were obtained.

The funding delegated to schools is being reviewed as part of the development of a common LMS (local management of schools) funding formula.

### School Support Staff

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Education what steps will be taken before 30 June 2000 to ensure the continued employment of support staff in schools beyond the end of term, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 635/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** This is a contractual matter for the education and library boards. I understand that negotiations between the parties are continuing and that the management side has made an offer to try to resolve the matter. This is a complex issue, but I am keen to see a resolution as soon as possible.

### Youth Clubs

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Education what steps will be taken to support youth clubs and their programmes throughout Northern Ireland, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 641/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** My Department, in association with the education and library boards and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, will continue to ensure that there is a fully developed system of support, training and development for all voluntary and statutory youth clubs which are registered with the boards.

I aim to ensure that the resources allocated to the Youth Service reflect the key contribution that it is making to the fundamental objective of helping young people to develop to their full potential. I will also actively pursue the implementation of key aspects of the major review of Youth Service policy, including the development of the Youth Service curriculum, the training of youth workers and the greater involvement of young people.

In addition to these areas, my Department is supporting the joined in equity, diversity and interdependence (JEDI) initiative, which brings together various parts of the youth sector in a creative partnership to promote change and development, and it is actively considering how the Youth Service can take advantage of the next round of EU structural funding.

### Teacher Welfare

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made in addressing issues of teacher welfare, particularly the problem of teacher stress, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 645/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The Department and the employing authorities recognise the importance of teacher welfare. In addition to the arrangements that employers have already put in place to give teachers access to welfare services, the Department has been seeking, through its bureaucratic burden initiative and dialogue with the teachers' unions, to identify and, where possible, alleviate the key areas of stress in schools. The employing authorities and my Department are also in the process of drawing up a specification for research to identify the work pressures that give rise to stress and to recommend strategies to improve the welfare of teachers and create a healthy working environment. Representatives of the Northern Ireland Teachers Council will be involved in overseeing this work.

### Teachers: Workload

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education what steps have been taken to address the problems of workload and bureaucracy for classroom teachers, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 646/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** My aim is to reduce bureaucracy to the minimum, consistent with supporting effective teaching in the context of the effective implementation of my Department's objectives. In 1998 my Department provided detailed advice and guidance to schools and partner bodies about reducing bureaucracy, and a working group is examining how the external demands on schools and teachers can be rationalised. A progress report was issued to schools on 18 January 2000. On 8 June my Department commissioned research about the impact of the 1998 advice and to seek teachers' views about what more needs to be done to further reduce bureaucracy. The findings of the research should be available towards the end of the year.

My officials also recently met representatives of the Northern Ireland Teachers Council to discuss teacher workload issues, and further meetings will be arranged to discuss concerns about specific initiatives.

### Irish-Medium Education:

**Mr Elduff** asked the Minister of Education what steps will be taken to promote recognition and funding of independent Irish-language-medium schools and units, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 659/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** A new body for the promotion of Irish-medium education — Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta — will be established in the near future and will be funded by the Department of Education.

The Department has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education. In fulfilling this

duty the Department responds to parental demand, and funds Irish-medium schools which are robust do not involve unreasonable public expenditure and meet specified criteria. Where demand is insufficient for a new free-standing school an Irish-medium unit attached to and under the management of a host English-medium school can be established. A review of the viability criteria for new Irish-medium (and integrated) schools is currently under way.

### Primary-Secondary Transfer Procedure

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education to detail the form, process and timetable of the Department's consultation on the future of the transfer procedure.  
(AQW 660/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I refer the Member to the answer given to AQO 340/99 on Monday 26 June.

### Department's Equality Scheme

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education to confirm that the Education Committee's comments on the Department's draft equality scheme have been taken into account in the scheme issued to the Equality Commission.  
(AQW 661/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I am most grateful to the Education Committee for its helpful comments on my Department's draft equality scheme. I can give an assurance that I have considered these carefully, and I can confirm that they will be reflected in the revised scheme, which I will be submitting to the Equality Commission shortly.

### Grammar School Places (West Tyrone)

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education what steps will be taken to ensure that intake quotas allocated to grammar schools in West Tyrone will meet the demand from all pupils eligible for places in all areas of the constituency, and if he will make a statement.  
(AQW 663/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** No pupil is guaranteed a grammar school place. The number of pupils admitted to grammar schools depends on the physical capacity of school accommodation. I am satisfied that there are sufficient grammar school places for pupils from the West Tyrone constituency.

### School Curriculum: Technology

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education what steps have been taken to ensure that the school

curriculum reflects the importance of technology and to make a statement.  
(AQW 670/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I regard technology as a very important subject, seeking to enable young people to develop and apply a range of skills in the design and manufacture of products and providing a wealth of learning experiences with a direct application to the world of work.

Technology is a compulsory subject for all pupils up to the end of key stage 3 (age 14). In key stages 1 and 2 (the primary years) it forms part of the science curriculum, but in key stage 3 there is a separate programme of study for technology and design. This was revised last year to increase its practical element and make it more accessible and relevant to pupils of all abilities.

Technology and design remains an optional subject for pupils in key stage 4 (age 15-16), and since 1990 some 680 technology and design rooms, either new or refurbished, have been provided in secondary schools, with the result that our facilities for the delivery of the subject are among the best in the world. Almost 6,000 young people, annually, take a GCSE in the subject, reflecting its continued popularity.

The Northern Ireland Science and Technology Regional Organisation (NISTRO), which my Department core funds, also works closely with CCEA, the education and library boards and many major local and national companies to encourage children and young people to develop an interest in science, engineering and technology and to promote better understanding between schools and the world of work. This year NISTRO is working with some 15,000 young people in 625 schools.

### Minister's Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils he has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed.  
(AQW 693/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I have not visited any District Councils.

### Children: Cultural and Linguistic Rights

**Dr Adamson** asked the Minister of Education to confirm that all children in Northern Ireland receive cultural and linguistic rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child./R/  
(AQW 696/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** One of the key principles underpinning education is that children shall be

educated in accordance with their parents' wishes, so far as this is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure. This right puts added onus on schools to comply with parents' wishes as regards education in relation to their children's cultural and linguistic background.

The statutory Northern Ireland curriculum also affords opportunities for schools to ensure that all children receive an education which complies with these rights, mainly through the compulsory cross-curricular educational themes of education for mutual understanding and cultural heritage.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has also issued guidance on personal and social education to ensure that pupils have knowledge and understanding of their own and others' beliefs, values and cultural traditions. The council is currently undertaking a review of the curriculum and will soon be developing work on a programme covering education for democracy and citizenship.

### Hillsborough Primary School

**Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Education what plans the Department has to make permanent classroom provision for Hillsborough Primary School.  
(AQO 335/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Accommodation provision for Hillsborough Primary School is a matter for the South Eastern Education and Library Board. The board is currently carrying out an economic appraisal which considers options for addressing the school's accommodation problems. Any proposed replacement of the existing accommodation will depend on the future availability of capital resources.

### Bullying in Schools

**Mr McHugh** asked the Minister of Education what steps will be taken to tackle bullying in schools, and if he will make a statement.  
(AQO 343/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Bullying behaviour is unacceptable, has no place in our schools and as such should be dealt with by a school within its discipline policy. Support in the development of a whole school discipline policy, which should address bullying, is available to schools through the behaviour support teams which are based in each education and library board. These teams were established as part of the 'Strategy to Promote and Sustain Good Behaviour in Schools', launched in February 1998, and additional resources of some £850,000 per annum have been made available to the boards to support this work. Advice and support for pupils who have been the victims of bullying and for their parents is available

through the Education Welfare Service. In addition, the Department and other voluntary agencies regularly provide materials to schools giving practical advice on how to tackle the problem, based on current best practice.

### Educational Links with the United States

**Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Education what steps will be taken to develop educational links with the United States following the recent visit of Mr Riley, the United States Education Secretary.  
(AQO 347/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** One key outcome of the links being established is access to expertise in the form of research reports, direct contact with US experts and access to major international conferences on major educational issues.

I am also considering the option of formalising our links with the United States through a memorandum of understanding similar to the one recently agreed between my counterpart in the South, Dr Woods, and Secretary Riley.

### Teacher Redundancies

**Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education to review funding arrangements for schools to reduce the number of teacher redundancies, and if he will make a statement.  
(AQO 330/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The general uplift in recurrent spending on schools in 2000-01 is 4.6%, which I believe is sufficient to meet general pay and price increases. Decisions on redundancies are a matter for individual boards of governors in the light of their individual school circumstances, particularly changes in enrolment.

### Sexual Abuse of Children: Awareness Education

**Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Education what steps have been taken to raise public awareness and to make provision for the education of children regarding sexual abuse, and if he will make a statement.  
(AQO 362/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** In the education sector for which I am responsible a number of major steps have been taken recently by my Department to heighten awareness among school staff of child abuse and to provide comprehensive guidance to schools on child protection. These measures include:

- the issue in March 1999 of circular 1999/10 and a new booklet entitled 'Pastoral Care in Schools — Child Protection', which gave all schools comprehensive



guidance on a wide range of child protection matters, including what to do if abuse is suspected;

- a major training programme for designated teachers, their deputies and school governors, which is nearing completion;
- the introduction of revised school inspection procedures on pastoral care and child protection; and
- the launch, earlier this month, of a child protection training pack, including a video, to help designated teachers responsible for child protection in schools to get across the child protection message to colleagues in their school.

While the issue of child protection, including protection against sexual abuse, is not a compulsory element of the curriculum, my Department's guidance encourages schools that wish to do so to cover it within their sex education or personal and social education programmes, by means of personal protection programmes such as "Kidscape" and "Teenscape". New curricular guidance on relationships and sexuality education for all schools is due to be issued to all schools next term. This will cover issues such as relationships, behaviour and personal safety.

Finally, it is only right that I should also place on record the valuable child awareness initiatives being undertaken by voluntary organisations, such as the NSPCC through its "Full Stop" campaign, aimed at ending cruelty to children, and its "Take Care" resource pack, which has been produced for primary schools.

### Education Management

**Mr Close** asked the Minister of Education what consideration he has given to a review of education management structure and the relationship between the Department and the five education and library boards.

(AQO 349/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I have not reached any conclusion on this matter. It needs to be taken in the wider context of a review of local administrative structures, which the Executive Committee will consider in due course.

### Department's Equality Scheme

**Mr S Wilson** asked the Minister of Education whether the Department will have its equality scheme ready for presentation to the Equality Commission by 30 June 2000.

(AQO 324/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The revision of my Department's equality scheme, in the light of comments received on the draft, which was published in April, is currently under way. Although this is a major task which we have to undertake in a very short timescale, I plan to submit the scheme to the Equality Commission on 30 June 2000.

### Mobile Telephone Masts on School Property

**Mr O'Neill** asked the Minister of Education how many mobile telephone masts there are on school property, what steps have been taken to relocate them, and if he will make a statement.

(AQO 321/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** There are eight mobile telephone masts on school property, five of which are on premises owned by education and library boards. I understand that the boards and schools concerned are negotiating with the providers of the masts about their removal.

### Youth Clubs

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Education to finance a programme by youth club management committees to engage fully qualified tutors for courses deemed necessary by management committees and acceptable to the Department.

(AQO 331/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The Department of Education does not directly finance any specific programmes in youth clubs. Rather, finance is made available to the education and library boards, which have responsibility for funding controlled youth clubs and assisting voluntary youth organisations, and this would include provision for training and development of staff.

### Free School Meals

**Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister of Education what is the percentage of schoolchildren with free school meals entitlement in each of the five education board areas.

(AQO 341/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The information provided by the boards is as follows:

Belfast Education and Library Board	31.9%
Western Education and Library Board	31.0%
North Eastern Education and Library Board	17.2%
South Eastern Education and Library Board	17.6%
Southern Education and Library Board	23.2%
All boards	23.9%

### Excluded Pupils: Education Arrangements

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Education what steps will be taken to ensure that pupils who are excluded from school are given proper access to the Northern Ireland curriculum.

(AQO 348/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Pupils are only considered to be legally out of school if they have been suspended or expelled. Suspended pupils remain on the school roll, and during their period of suspension the school is

normally responsible for ensuring that they receive a suitable education.

The education and library boards are responsible for making alternative education arrangements for pupils who are expelled from school. These include home or group tuition, a short-term placement in a pupil referral unit, or, for the most disruptive 14-16-year-olds, for whom mainstream education is not suitable, placement in alternative education provision.

Schools and education and library boards are expected to make every effort to offer as broad a curriculum as possible to suspended or expelled pupils, but it may not always be practicable, or indeed, appropriate to provide the full Northern Ireland curriculum.

### Victoria Primary School (Newtownards)

**Mr Benson** asked the Minister of Education to confirm that plans for the Victoria Primary School, Newtownards recently announced include provision for nursery education. (AQO 323/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The replacement school for Victoria Primary, Newtownards, does not include nursery provision. The need for additional pre-school provision in the Newtownards area will be kept under review by the Pre-school Education Advisory Group for the South Eastern Education and Library Board area.

## ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### Textile and Clothing Industry

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much of the £10 million of the recently announced initiative for the textile industry will come to Northern Ireland. (AQW 672/99)

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey):** Where Northern Ireland can benefit from the Department of Trade and Industry action plan for the textile and clothing industry, support under the aid package will be available. The precise level of support has yet to be determined, but my officials are taking discussions forward.

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) the total number of people employed in the textile/clothing sector, (b) the number of jobs lost and (c) the number of jobs created in this sector over the last 12 months, and to make a statement. (AQW 673/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** At year end March 2000, there were an estimated 18,180 employee jobs in the textiles and clothing industries in Northern Ireland. Between March 1999 and March 2000, the number of employee jobs has fallen by 2,010. Over the year to March 2000, there were 1,249 redundancies in the textiles and clothing industry confirmed to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. There is no information available on the number of jobs created in the sector over this period, but, as the above figures show, employment levels continue to decline. My Department and the industry bodies, the Northern Ireland Textiles and Apparel Association and Northern Ireland Growth Challenge, continue to work together to assist the industry through a difficult restructuring process to focus on value-added activities which offer the best future prospects for the industry.

### ‘Strategy 2010’

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to report progress on ‘Strategy 2010’ and to indicate when it will be implemented. (AQW 674/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** Implementation of ‘Strategy 2010’, involving close co-operation with DHFETE and DRD, has included the establishment of the Economic Development Forum and the Information Age Initiative, actions to improve business education links and to promote innovation, and the publication of an energy statement, ‘Vision 2010’.

The Information Age Initiative published its strategic framework and action plan, ‘Leapfrog to the Information Age’, on 4 April 2000.

I am considering, with advice from the EDF, future priorities for the economic development of Northern Ireland, which will be included in the programme for government. This will also be informed by the outcome of the ETI Committee’s inquiry into ‘Strategy 2010’.

### Textile and Clothing Industry

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps have been taken to realise the national strategy for the United Kingdom textile and clothing industry in Northern Ireland. (AQW 675/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** My Department is considering carefully the recent report on a national strategy for the UK textile and clothing industry. DETI officials will work closely with the industry bodies to apply the strategy, as appropriate, to enhance the existing incentive scheme and existing initiatives, which are

designed to help the industry in Northern Ireland to adapt to meet the global changes in the sector.

### Industrial Development Board: House of Commons PAC Report

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps will be taken by the Industrial Development Board in the light of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report 'Industrial Development Board: Inward Investment' (HC66).

(AQW 679/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** In accordance with the procedures relating to Reports by the Committee of Public Accounts, a Department of Finance and Personnel memorandum of reply to this report on inward investment will be issued within two months of the publication of the report. Parliamentary convention precludes me from making any comments until that memorandum of reply has been laid before Parliament.

### Industrial Development Board Assistance (Strangford)

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the amount and percentage of total Industrial Development Board investment awarded to businesses in the Strangford constituency in each of the last 10 years.

(AQW 681/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** The information requested is set out below.

#### SELECTIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OFFERED TO BUSINESSES IN STRANGFORD CONSTITUENCY, 1990-2000

Year	Assistance (£'000)	As percentage of total SFA Offered in each year
1990/91	269	0.3
1991/92	1,579	2.5
1992/93	1,298	1.4
1993/94	1,768	1.4
1994/95	288	0.3
1995/96	-	-
1996/97	1,488	0.9
1997/98	1,476	1.0
1998/99	167	0.3
1999/00	989	1.2

### Minister: Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail for the period since

devolution (i) the district councils he has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed.

(AQW 711/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** Since devolution (including the period prior to suspension) I have visited the following councils:

Council	Date	Subject of discussion
Belfast City Council Executive	10 Jan 2000	Courtesy call with Lord Mayor and Chief
Ards Borough Council	12 Jan 2000	Job losses in Ards area
Armagh District Council	2 Feb 2000	Reception at Council offices following ground breaking ceremony for new hotel
Ards Borough Council	3 Feb 2000	Economic issues
Moyle District Council	7 June 2000	Giant's Causeway Visitors Centre
Belfast City Council	12 June 2000	Harland & Wolff

I have also met with representatives of the following Councils at my office in Netherleigh:

Council	Date	Subject of discussion
Omagh District Council	14 Dec 1999	Petrol retail issues
Craigavon Borough Council	11 Jan 2000	Economic activity in the Lurgan area
Fermanagh District Council	25 Jan 2000	Unipork
Newry & Mourne District Council	8 Feb 2000	Petrol retail issues
Derry City Council	5 June 2000	Coolkeeragh Power Station

I also made a keynote speech to Strabane District Council/Partnership conference at Ballymagorry, Strabane on 21 January 2000.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

### Road Safety

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment has been made of reasons for the recent increase in the numbers of road injuries and fatalities and what steps will be taken to make the roads infrastructure safer.

(AQW 662/99)

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster):** I deplore the high numbers of deaths and serious injuries on our roads. The principal causes remain excessive speed and drink-driving. Significant improvement depends critically on changing the attitudes and behaviour of road users. My Department will continue to target its education and publicity efforts at the main

causes of road casualties. The Department is also co-ordinating the preparation of a new road safety plan for the period to 2010. The plan will align the activities of DOE, the Roads Service of DRD, the RUC and others in pursuit of a new road safety target for that period. I expect to publish the plan for consultation later in the year.

I have been advised by the Minister for Regional Development that, while human error is the main contributing factor in driver accident rates on the roads, that Department's Roads Service endeavours to minimise the margin for human error and considers casualty reduction in the design of all road schemes. Furthermore, through its accident remedial and traffic calming programmes, the Roads Service undertakes specific engineering measures to reduce the number of road traffic accidents at locations where accidents have previously been recorded.

### Dog Fouling

**Mr Davis** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of prosecutions for dog-fouling in each district council area during each of the last three years. (AQW 686/99)

**Mr Foster:** Information obtained by my Department from district councils shows that in the last three years eight district councils have taken prosecutions under the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 for permitting dog fouling in prescribed areas, as set out below:

COUNCIL	PROSECUTIONS 97/98	PROSECUTIONS 98/99	PROSECUTIONS 99/00
Antrim	0	1	0
Ards	N/A	1	1
Ballymena	N/A	11	19
Banbridge	2	1	0
Belfast	1	1	0
Castlereagh	0	0	2
Newtownabbey	5	3	2
North Down	1	3	0

### Minister: Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils he has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed. (AQW 712/99)

**Mr Foster:** I visited Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council on 8 December 1999, in connection with the award of borough status to the council. On 19 January 2000 I visited Belfast City Council to meet with the Lord Mayor. On 13 June 2000 I visited Newtownabbey Borough Council's new offices.

In addition to these visits, I held a reception for the Mayors/Chairmen of all 26 district councils on 27 January 2000 and have met delegations from the following councils: Craigavon Borough (10/1/00 – planning issues); Newtownabbey Borough (14/6/00 – waste management / environmental issues); and Lisburn Borough (21/6/00 – planning issues). I have also agreed a forward programme of contact with all district councils.

### Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the members of the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission and the input of Northern Ireland representatives to the Commission and to confirm if the Minister was consulted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions before appointments were made to this body.

(AQW 728/99)

**Mr Foster:** Within Northern Ireland, matters to do with the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC) are the responsibility of the Department of the Environment.

Membership of the commission, which has a UK-wide remit, is set out below.

The Northern Ireland representative on the commission is Mr John Gilliland, a Londonderry farmer. His application for membership was supported by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and I signed his letter of appointment on 14 January 2000.

Dr Mowlam, Minister for the Cabinet Office, consulted both me and, during suspension, George Howarth about commission matters, including appointments.

Prof Malcolm Grant (Chair) - Professor of Land Economy at the University of Cambridge;

Ms Julie Hill (Deputy Chair) - Programme Adviser and former Director of Green Alliance

Prof Michael Banner - Professor of Moral and Social Theology at King's College, London;

Ms Anna Bradley - Director of the National Consumer Council;

Ms Helen Browning OBE - Tenant Farmer, Eastbrook Farm; Founder and Director of Eastbrook Farm Organic Meats Ltd;

Dr David Carmichael - Managing Director of Battle and Pears Ltd, an arable farm concentrating on seed production from combinable crops;

Dr Philip Dale - Leader of the Genetic Modification and Biosafety Research Group at the John Innes Centre, Norwich;



Dr Ed Dart - Chairman of Plant Bioscience Ltd;

Dr Matthew Freeman - Senior Researcher at the Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology;

Mr John Gilliland - Arable farmer with a particular interest in sustainable production systems and the pioneering of non food crops;

Professor Robin Grove-White - Professor of Environment & Society, and Director of the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change, Lancaster University;

Dr Rosemary Hails - Ecologist, and Principal Scientific Officer, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology Oxford and lecturer at St Annes College Oxford;

Ms Judith Hann - A Freelance broadcaster and writer who presented Tomorrow's World for 20 years;

Ms Edith Iweajunwa - Member of executive evaluation group for NHS Direct, and member of Partners Council for NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence);

Dr Derek Langslow - Scientist specialising in nature conservation/biodiversity;

Professor Jeff Maxwell - Director, Macaulay Land Use Research Institute;

Dr Sue Mayer - Executive Director and Board Member of Genewatch UK;

Dr Ben Mapham - Director of the Centre for Applied Bioethics at the University of Nottingham and Executive Director of the Food Ethics Council;

Ms Justine Thornton - Barrister specialising in environmental law

Dr Roger Turner - Chief Executive Officer, British Society of Plant Breeders.

### Planning Service/Performance Targets

**Mr J Wilson** asked the Minister of the Environment what performance targets have been set for the Planning Service for the year 2000-01. (AQW 776/99)

**Mr Foster:** The following performance targets have been set for the Planning Service for the year 2000/01:

#### Volume of Output

- To publish the following Area Plans in draft form by 31 March 2001
  - Craigavon 2010
  - Dungannon 2010
  - Derry Airport Local Plan
- To adopt the following plans by 31 March 2001
  - Derry 2011
  - Lisburn 2001
  - Armagh Countryside Proposals

#### Quality of Service

- To achieve a customer satisfaction level of 80% in relation to the determination of planning applications
- To take 65% of minor applications to District Council within 8 weeks
- To take 60% of major applications to District Council within 8 weeks
- To issue 65% of all planning decisions within 14 working days of final District Council consultation
- To reduce the proportion of invalid planning applications received to 20% overall
- To reduce the percentage of planning appeals upheld by 5% to 42% overall
- To issue responses to 93% of property enquiries within 10 working days

#### Efficiency

- To reduce Property Certificate Unit costs by 10%
- To achieve an average Unit Cost for planning applications not exceeding £2,500

#### Financial Performance

- To maintain expenditure within cash limits and to approved budget plans
- To maintain full recovery of the costs of determining planning applications
- To maintain full recovery of the costs of responding to property enquiries

### Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency: Performance Targets

**Mr J Wilson** asked the Minister of the Environment what performance targets have been set for the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency for the period 2000-01.

(AQW 777/99)

**Mr Foster:** The targets set for the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency for 2000-01 are as follows:

	Target 2000-2001
Vehicle test – average appointment waiting time	19 days
Driving test – average appointment waiting time	28 days
Customer satisfaction with booking arrangements (+/-2% within sampling error range)	At least 92%
Customer satisfaction with test procedures (+/-2% within sampling error range)	At least 94%
Compliance by contractor with theory test service standards	At least 92%
Composite unit cost*	n/a
Standard hour cost*	£42.62
Aggregated cost efficiency (ACE index)	1.56%
Return on capital employed	6%

\* Standard hour costs replace composite unit costs from 1 April 2000.

### Environment and Heritage Service: Performance Targets

**Mr J Wilson** asked the Minister of the Environment what performance targets have been set for the Environment and Heritage Service in 2000-01. (AQW 778/99)

**Mr Foster:** For 2000-01 the following performance targets have been set for the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS):

1. Progress the waste management strategy by producing an agreed action plan by 30 June 2000 and achieving the first-year commitments, including facilitating the formation of district council partnerships and the preparation of subregional waste management plans by 31 January 2001.
2. Achieve a 10% improvement in 95 percentile trade effluent consent compliance levels, using the 1997 baseline.
3. Issue 85% of authorisations for emissions from minerals/tar and bitumen/cement plant under the Industrial Pollution Control (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 by 31 December 2000.
4. Evaluate applications for IPC authorisations for the next tranche of industry — glass, ceramics, timber and animal and vegetable processes under the Industrial Pollution Control (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and draft authorisations.
5. Extend protection for habitats and species by establishing at least 20 additional candidate special areas of conservation (SACs).
6. Contribute to UK and Northern Ireland biodiversity conservation by activating eight species and habitat action plans for which EHS has a lead role.
7. Extend protection for monuments by scheduling 50 historic monuments to bring the total to 1,485.
8. Ensure preservation of state-care monuments by publishing a five-year plan for their conservation.
9. Extend protection for historic buildings by completing the second survey of historic buildings in 20 wards, bringing the total number of surveyed wards to 98.
10. Inform the future deployment of protection resources by conducting a pilot condition survey of monuments (CSM) for 200 archaeological sites in eight major land use types of Northern Ireland landscape.
11. Agree an EHS plan for external communications, including extended use of the EHS web site, and carry out the elements relevant to 2000-01.
12. Promote awareness of the state of the countryside by publishing the findings of the Northern Ireland countryside survey 2000.
13. Promote awareness of historic buildings by publishing information on the second survey (12 wards) through the monuments and buildings record and the Internet.
14. Provide an effective service to at least 1,650 enquirers in the monuments and buildings record.

15. Respond to 90% of written enquiries or requests for information within 15 working days.
16. Determine 85% of applications for Water Act consents and wildlife licences within timescales published in our customer service guides.
17. Agree and implement Investors in People action plan and achieve reaccreditation.
18. Develop and adopt a revised policy on the management of our properties.
19. Control expenditure within the departmental running costs and programme limits voted by Parliament.
20. Establish the average cost of making a payment to a supplier and benchmark the cost with other service providers.

## FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Ministerial Cars

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give a breakdown by Department of the running costs of chauffeur-driven ministerial cars.

(AQW 689/99)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** The running costs of chauffeured ministerial cars for those Departments for which the Department of Finance and Personnel is responsible are as follows:

	£
Office of the First and Deputy First Minister	24,532
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	7,735
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	17,617
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	8,772
Department of the Environment	17,236
Department of Finance and Personnel	15,646
Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment	13,080
Department for Social Development	21,603

These figures relate to the initial period (29 November 1999 to 14 February 2000) during which the Executive functioned. Data relating to services provided from 29 May are not yet available.

### Minister: Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils he has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed. (AQW 713/99)

**Mr Durkan:** No visits have been made to district councils in the period since devolution.

## Public Spending Priorities

**Mr B Bell** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his priorities for public spending in Northern Ireland. (AQO 356/99)

**Mr Durkan:** The public expenditure allocations for 2000-01 as set out in my 15 December 1999 Budget were based on the plans inherited at devolution. The programme of government to be agreed by the Executive Committee will set out the public expenditure priorities for the spending review period 2001-02 to 2003-04.

## End-of-Year Financial Flexibility

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made in the assessment of end-of-year financial flexibility and to detail the proposed redistribution of any funds available. (AQO 325/99)

**Mr Durkan:** End-year flexibility returns from Departments have been collated by the Department of Finance and Personnel. These are currently being assessed by the Executive Committee with a view to putting them to best use in the light of emerging pressures and expenditure priorities.

## Health Service Expenditure

**Mr Close** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of gross domestic product is spent on health in Northern Ireland and how this compares to the European average. (AQO 345/99)

**Mr Durkan:** Expenditure on health in Northern Ireland amounted to approximately £1.3 billion in 1997-98, accounting for 8.4% of gross domestic product. This compares with the EU15, where health expenditure represents 7.9% of the gross domestic product (1997).

## HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### National Health Service: Public Consultation

**Dr Birnie** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the nature of the Department's participation in the recent public consultation exercise on the future of the National Health Service. (AQW 631/99)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** The exercise referred to was carried out on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health in England in the context of the development of a national plan for England. My Department was not involved.

I will be developing my own proposals for the strategic direction in the health and personal social services and the mechanisms to ensure community participation in shaping these.

Cuireadh an beart seo i bhfeidhm ar son an Stát-Rúnaí Sláinte i Sasain i gcomhair plean forbartha náisiúnta do Shasana. Ní raibh baint ar bith ag an roinn s'agam leis.

Tá mé le mo chuid pleananna féin a fhorbairt don bhealach chun tosaigh don RSSSPS, lena chinntiú go mbíonn an pobal páirteach i gcur i gcrích an plean.

## Small Acute Hospitals

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policy will be pursued in relation to the future of small acute hospitals in Northern Ireland, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 644/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I am now considering how our hospital services can be developed in a way which ensures high-quality care for all those who need it. I want to look at all the options involved before coming to any conclusions. I am very aware of how important hospital services are to local communities in particular, and before any changes are made I shall want to ensure that decisions about the future of services are based on the fullest possible information.

Anois tá mé ag cuimhneamh ar an dóigh a bhféadfaí ár seirbhísí ospidéal a fhorbairt lena chinntiú go gcuirfí scoth cúraim ar fáil dóibh siúd a bhfuil sé de dhíth orthu. Ba mhaith liom amharc ar na roghanna atá ann sula ndéanfaidh mé cinneadh ar bith. Tuigim go maith a thabhairt atá na seirbhísí ospidéal don phobal áitiúil go háirithe, agus sula ndéanfar athruithe ar bith, ba mhaith liom a chinntiú go bhfuil gach cinneadh faoi na seirbhísí sa todhchaí bunaithe ar an eolas is iomláine.

## Prescription Fraud

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps have been taken to ensure that pharmaceutical services are strictly monitored with a view to eliminating prescription abuse, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 647/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Department is committed to tackling the abuse of public funds wherever it occurs.

Prescription exemption fraud is a major problem here, resulting in some £12 million lost to the health budget in 1998-99. These are funds that would otherwise have been available for the provision of health care.

The Department has been working closely with health and social services boards, the Central Services Agency (CSA) and the pharmaceutical profession, and a range of measures have been introduced to tackle exemption fraud.

With regard to point-of-dispensing checks, since 1 July 1999 patients who claim to be exempt from paying the statutory prescription charge, currently £6, are asked to produce evidence of entitlement when presenting their prescriptions to the community pharmacist for dispensing. Where no evidence is produced, individual scripts are marked accordingly and can be checked subsequently by the CSA.

A dedicated counter-fraud unit is currently being set up. The unit, which will be based in the CSA, will have a dual remit — tackling exemption fraud and undertaking investigations into cases of potential fraud involving practitioners.

On proposed additional counter fraud, proposed new legislation which is to come before the Assembly shortly will include two key provisions for tackling exemption fraud — the introduction of fixed penalty charges, which will be levied on those who are proven to have claimed an exemption to which they are not entitled, and the creation of a specific criminal offence of evading family health service charges. This offence would be brought into operation to tackle serial abuse by individuals.

Then there is the electronic prescribing and eligibility system (EPES). Work is under way to deliver a major IT system, which will produce current prescription data in electronic format. This will greatly enhance the process for validating exemptions claimed by patients.

I look forward to the support of the Assembly and the community at large in our ongoing efforts in this area to safeguard public funds and ensure that the maximum resources are available for the provision of health care.

Tá ceangal ar an Roinn déileáil le mí-úsaid cistí poiblí cibé áit a dtarlaíonn sí. Tá an chalaois díolúine oideas ina fadhb mhór anseo. Cailleadh faoi thuairim £12 milliún ar bhuiséad sláinte 1998/1999 dá barr. Murach sin, bheadh an t-airgead seo ar fáil le cúram sláinte a sholáthar.

Tá an Roinn i ndiaidh bheith ag obair go dlúth i gcomhar leis na Boird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta, le Gníomhaireacht na Lársheirbhísí (GL) agus le poitigéirí agus thángthas ar roinnt seifteanna le déileáil le calaois díolúine:-

Seiceáil Aonaid Dáileacháin: Ón 1 Iúil iarrfar ar othair a deireann go bhfuil siad díolmhaite ar táille reachtúil oidias (a bhfuil £6 anois air) sin a chruthú nuair atá siad ag tabhairt na n-oideas don phoitigéir. Mura bhfuil aon chruthúnas acu, marcáiltear na hoidis aonair dá réir agus féadfaidh an GL iad a scrúdú níos moille.

Aonad Frithchalaoise: Faoi láthair tá Sainaonad Frithchalaoise a bhunú. Beidh an tAonad suite sa GL agus beidh dhá dhualgas air. Beidh sé ag tabhairt faoi chalaois díolúine agus beidh sé ag déanamh fiosrúchán ar chásanna a bhféadfadh calaois a bheith ann a bhaineann le dochtúirí.

Breis Reachtaíochta Frithchalaoise: Leagfar ábhar nua reachtaíochta faoi bhráid an Tionóil ar ball ina mbeidh dhá phríomhfhóráil a bhaineann le tabhairt faoi chalaois díolúine, is é sin: táillí pionóis socraithe a thabhairt isteach a ghearrfar orthu siúd ar féidir a chruthú gur iarr siad díolúine nuair nach raibh sí de cheart acu; agus fógairt gur coir ar leith í nuair a sheachnaíonn duine táillí Seirbhíse Sláinte Teaghlach. Cuirfear an fhóráil seo in úsáid le tabhairt fúthu siúd atá ag dul don choir seo go leanúnach.

Ríomhchóras um Soláthar Oideas agus Deimhniú Cáilitheachta: Tá obair ar siúl le córas mór TÉ a chur ar fáil a sholáthróidh sonraí oideas i bhformáid leictreonach. Cuideoidh seo go mór leis an phróiseas a bhaineann le bailíocht a thabhairt do na díolúintí a iarrann othair.

Tá mé ag tnúth go mór le tacaíocht a fháil ón Tionól agus ón phobal go ginearálta sna hiarrachtaí atáimid a dhéanamh sa réimse seo le cistí poiblí a chosaint agus lena chinntiú go mbeidh an oiread acmhainní is féidir ar fáil chun cúram sláinte a sholáthar.

## GP Fundholding

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policy will be pursued in relation to replacement of general practitioners' fundholding, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 648/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I propose to introduce a Health and Personal Social Services Bill which, subject to Assembly approval, will include provision to bring to an end to the general practitioners' fundholding scheme. Before bringing forward proposals on what arrangements should be put in place for the development of primary care following the ending of the scheme, I wish to meet with those most closely involved in the planning and provision of primary care services and other interested parties. I shall also want the Assembly's Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee to consider the matter.



Tá sé de rún agam Acht Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsanta a thabhairt isteach, le tacaíocht ón Tionól, a thabharfaidh chun deireadh an scéim fundóireacht doctúirí. Sula gcuirtear chun tosaigh moltaí ar cé na socraithe a nglacfar leo chun aire bunúsach a forbairt i ndiaidh deireadh a chuir leis an scéim fundóireachta, ba mhaith liom cruinniú a bheith agam leis na daoine atá ag pleanáil agus ag cur ar fáil seirbhísí aire bunasach agus páirtithe leasmhara eile. Ba mhaith liom Coiste RSS&SP an Tionóil plé a dhéanamh ar na moltaí.

### Ulster Hospital

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps will be taken to meet the capital needs of the Ulster Hospital, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 649/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I recognise that the Ulster Hospital needs significant upgrading to meet modern hospital standards. This has been reinforced by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board proposals aimed at improving the organisation of hospital services, issued recently for consultation. My officials are already working closely with the Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust to meet the most pressing priorities. However, I believe there is a need for strategic development of the hospital, and I have asked my officials to work with the trust over the coming months to determine the overall requirements of the hospital and the best way to meet those requirements.

Aithním go bhfuil feabhsú suntasach de dhíth ar Ospidéal Uladh má tá sé le caighdeán nua-aimseartha ospidéal a bhaint amach. Tá moltaí Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir ag cur leis seo. Eisíodh iad seo ar na mallaibh, mar chuid de phróiseas comhairliúcháin, le feabhas a chur ar eagrú na seirbhísí ospidéal. Tá feidhmeannaigh de mo chuid ag obair go dlúth cheana i gcomhar le hIontaobhas SSS Phobal agus Ospidéal Uladh leis na tosaíochtaí is práinní a réiteach. Ach creidim gur gá an t-ospidéal a fhorbairt go straitéiseach agus chuige sin tá mé i ndiaidh a iarraidh ar fheidhmeannaigh de mo chuid bheith ag obair i bpáirt leis an Iontaobhas chun riachtanais iomlána an ospidéil a shocrú agus an bealach is fearr le freastal ar na riachtanais sin a réiteach.

### Downpatrick Hospital

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policy will be pursued in relation to the future of Downpatrick Hospital, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 650/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Eastern Health and Social Services Board is currently carrying out a consultation exercise

with regard to acute services in its area, which will impinge on services at the Downe Hospital, Downpatrick. I am separately arranging to meet a wide range of local interests to hear their views on the issues involved.

I am very aware of how important hospital services are to local communities. I shall want to ensure that decisions about the future of such services are based on the fullest possible information.

In this context, I will be interested in any recommendations emerging from the EHSSB's consultation process and from my meetings with local interests.

Faoi láthair tá Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir i mbun próiseas comhairliúcháin maidir le seirbhísí géarmhíochaine ina a cheantar féin a rachaidh i bhfeidhm ar na seirbhísí in Óspidéal an Dúin, Dún Pádraig. Taobh amuigh de sin tá mé féin ag iarraidh bualadh le cuid mhór de na páirtithe leasmhara áitiúla lena mbarúlacha a fháil ar na nithe atá i gceist.

Tá fhios agam go maith a thábhachtáil atá na seirbhísí ospidéil don phobal áitiúil. Ba mhaith liom a chinntiú go mbeidh na socruithe a dhéanfar faoi na seirbhísí sin sa todhchaí bunaithe ar an eolas is iomláine.

Sa chomthéacs seo cuirfidh mé suim i moltaí ar bith a thagann ón phróiseas comhairliúcháin de chuid BSSSO agus ó na cruinnithe a bheas agam leis na páirtithe leasmhara áitiúla..

### Stewart Report

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that the recommendations of the Stewart Report will be implemented, to give a timescale for this implementation, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 651/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I and my ministerial colleagues are considering the findings and recommendations of this report and will decide in due course what action is necessary.

Tá mise agus mo chomh-Airí ag scrúdú na bhforas a aimsíodh agus na moltaí sa tuarascáil seo agus déanfaimid cinneadh faoin bheart a bheas riachtanach in am is i dtráth.

### Fluoride

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if it is established that fluoride in drinking water can cause non-ulcer dyspeptic complaints. (AQW 652/99)

**Ms de Brún:** There is no evidence that, in a temperate climate, drinking water containing fluoride at

the levels normally associated with fluoridation schemes, naturally present or adjusted, causes non-ulcer dyspepsia. Reviews of the evidence on fluoridation are currently under way in England and in the South of Ireland, and I will be considering their findings once reports are available.

Níl fianaise ar bith ann go mbíonn dispeipse neamhothrais ar dhaoine in aeráid mheasartha de bharr uisce óil a bhfuil na leibhéil fhluaríde ann, bíodh sí ann go nadúrtha nó curtha isteach san uisce, a bhaineann le gnáthscéimeanna fluairídíthe. Táthar ag athbhreithniú na fianaise ar fhluarídiú faoi láthair i Sasana agus i nDeisceart na hÉireann agus scrúdóidh mé na fíorais atá aimsithe a luaite a bheas tuarascálacha ar fáil.

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if only tooth cells are affected by the fluoride ion. (AQW 654/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Most fluoride in the body is associated with calcified tissue — the teeth and bone.

Baineann bunús na fluairíde sa chorp leis na fíocháin chailcíte, is é sin, na fiacla agus na cnámha

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the amount of fluoride inhibits enzymes and the individual enzymes inhibited by fluoride, citing supportive references. (AQW 655/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Fluoride in high, non-physiological concentrations can inhibit or enhance the action of many enzymes. Detailed information is freely available in many published reviews and scientific papers, which may be consulted in the usual ways.

Féadfaidh fluairíd, más ann di i gcomhchruinnithe móra neamhfhiiseolaíocha, gníomhaíocht cuid mhór einsímí a laghdú nó a mhéadú. Tá mioneoas faoi seo ar fáil go saor in a lán irisí agus páipéar eolaíocha is féidir a léamh ar na gnáthdhóigeanna.

### Acute Hospital Services

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made of the documents 'Regional Strategy for Health and Social Well-Being 1997/2002' and 'Well into 2000' in relation to the provision of acute hospital services in Northern Ireland. (AQW 664/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I am now considering how our hospital services can be developed in a way which ensures high-quality care for all those who need it. I want to look at all the options involved, including the approach set out in the 'Regional Strategy' and 'Well into 2000' before coming to any conclusions. I am very aware of how important hospital services are to local communities in particular, and before any changes are made I shall want to ensure that decisions about the

future of services are based on the fullest possible information.

Anois tá mé ag meabhrú ar an dóigh ar féidir na seirbhísí ospidéal s'againn a fhorbairt lena chinntiú go mbeidh scoth cúraim ar fáil dóibh uile a bhfuil sé uathu. Ba mhaith liom amharc ar na roghanna uile atá againn, agus cur chuige na Straitéise Réigiúnaí agus *Well into 2000* san áireamh, sula ndéanfaidh mé cinneadh ar bith. Tuigim go maith a thábhachtaí atá seirbhísí ospidéal don mhuintir áitiúil go háirithe, agus sula ndéanfar athruithe ar bith ba mhaith liom a chinntiú go bhfuil na socruithe faoi na seirbhísí sa todhchaí bunaithe ar an eolas is iomláine is féidir a fháil.

### Drug Addiction

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what estimate has been made of the cost to the Health Service of treatment for addiction to hard drugs and regarding the effectiveness of drugs action teams supported by the Department. (AQW 668/99)

**Ms de Brún:** It is not possible to separate the estimated cost to the Health Service of treatment for (a) drug addiction as distinct from other drug-related health problems and (b) the misuse of different categories of drugs. An independent group of consultants has undertaken an analysis of expenditure on drug misuse here. Their findings, contained in 'Drug Strategy for Northern Ireland', published in August 1999, show that £1.025 million was spent on treatment and rehabilitation by health and social services trusts in 1998.

The four drug co-ordination teams make a valuable contribution in tackling the drug problem by ensuring co-ordination and co-operation at local level between the various statutory, voluntary and community bodies with a part to play in implementing the drug strategy.

Ní féidir na costais mheasta seo ar an tSeirbhís Sláinte a dhéalú óna cheile: (a) cóireáil andúil i ndrugaí; (b) cóireáil fadhbanna sláinte eile a bhaineann le drugaí; agus (c) cóireáil mí-úsáid drugaí de chineálacha éagsúla. Tá anailís déanta ag grúpa neamhspleách de chomhairligh ar an chaiteachas ar mhí-úsáid drugaí anseo. Taispeánann na fíorais, a d'aimsigh siad agus a foilsíodh in "Drug Strategy for Northern Ireland" i Lúnasa 1999, gur chaith na hÍontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta £1.025m ar chóireáil agus ar athshlánú i 1998.

Tá na ceithre Fhoireann Comhordaithe Straitéise Drugaí ag cuidiú go mór linn tabhairt faoi fhadhb na ndrugaí agus iad ag cinntiú go bhfuil comhordú agus comhoibriú ann ag an leibhéal áitiúil idir na comhlachtaí reachtúla, deonacha agus pobail a bhfuil pairt acu i gcur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise Drugaí.

### South Tyrone Hospital

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services have been transferred from the South Tyrone Hospital to Craigavon Hospital. (AQW 676/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Obstetrics and gynaecology in-patient services were transferred from South Tyrone Hospital to Craigavon Area Hospital in February 1999; accident and emergency services were transferred in September 1999; and acute and emergency surgery services were transferred in November 1999. All the transfers are temporary measures, pending a decision on the long-term future of South Tyrone Hospital.

Aistríodh na seirbhísí Cnáimhseachais agus Gíniceolaíochta d'othair chónaitheacha ó Ospidéal Dheisceart Thír Eoghain chuig Ospidéal Cheantair Craigavon i bhFeabhra 1999. Aistríodh na Seirbhísí Taisme agus Éigeandála i Meán Fómhair 1999, agus aistríodh na Seirbhísí Géarmháinliachta agus Máinliachta Éigeandála i Samhain 1999. Níl iontu seo uile ach bearta sealadacha go dtí go ndéanfar cinneadh ar stádas Ospidéal Dheisceart Thír Eoghain sa todhchaí.

### Craigavon Area Hospital

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps have been taken to alleviate the increasing waiting times at the Casualty Department of Craigavon Hospital. (AQW 677/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Southern Health and Social services Board recently received an additional £3.895 million to improve hospital services. It is a matter for the board to determine how best to use this additional funding, taking into account the competing pressures on resources.

Fuair Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Deiscirt £3.895m ar na mallaibh le feabhas a chur ar sheirbhísí ospidéal. Caithfidh an Bord a shocrú cad é an dóigh is fearr leis an mhaoiniú breise seo a úsáid agus é ag cur na mbrúnna san áireamh atá i gcomórtas lena chéile.

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there has been an increase in staff at Craigavon Hospital since services were transferred there from South Tyrone Hospital. (AQW 678/99)

**Ms de Brún:** An additional 161.52 whole-time-equivalent staff across the full range of disciplines have been employed by Craigavon Area Hospital Group Trust to accommodate the transfer of services from South Tyrone Hospital. This figure includes 69.09 whole-time-equivalent staff who transferred on a secondment basis from South Tyrone Hospital. These

staff remain employees of Armagh and Dungannon Health and Social Services Trust pending final decisions on the future role of South Tyrone Hospital.

D'fhostaigh Iontaobhas Grúpa Ospidéal Cheantar Craigavon coibhéis 161.52 ball foirne lánaimseartha breise thar an speictream iomlán de dhisciplíní le freastal ar na seirbhísí a aistríodh ó Ospidéal Dheisceart Thír Eoghain. Bhí coibhéis 69.09 ball foirne lánaimseartha san áireamh a d'aistrigh ar iasacht ó ospidéal Dheisceart Thír Eoghain. Is fostaithe de chuid Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Ard Mhacha agus Dhún Geanainn na baill foirne seo go dtí ndéanfar na socruithe deireanacha faoi ról Ospidéal Dheisceart Thír Eoghain sa todhchaí.

### Mental Health (Children)

**Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the issue of the provision of care for children with mental health and trauma problems has been included in the general review of the Northern Ireland Health Service.

(AQO 353/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The provision of care for children with mental health problems has already been reviewed. A departmental policy statement on child and adolescent mental health services was issued in January 1999. As required by the statement, boards have reviewed existing provision and identified unmet need.

An additional £1 million has been earmarked this year, towards the development of child and adolescent mental health services, in meeting these needs.

Rinneadh athbhreithniú cheana ar sholáthar cúraim do pháistí a bhfuil fadhbanna sláinte meabhrach agus tráma acu. Eisíodh Ráiteas Roinne ar Sheirbhísí Sláinte Meabhrach do Pháistí agus d'Ógánaigh in Eanáir 1999. Mar a iarradh orthu sa Ráiteas, rinne na Boird athbhreithniú ar an soláthar a bhí ann agus d'aimsigh siad riachtanais nach ndearnadh freastal orthu.

Chun freastal ar na riachtanais seo tá £1 mhilliún breise curtha i leataobh i mbliana i leith forbairt na seirbhísí sláinte meabhrach do pháistí agus d'ógánaigh.

### Pensioners' Houses: Improvements

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are plans to reinstate the service of painting and decorating of pensioners' houses lost with the end of the Action for Community Employment scheme. (AQW 683/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The painting and decorating of pensioners' houses does not come within the statutory responsibilities of health and social services boards or

trusts. There are no plans for boards and trusts to assume responsibility for this service.

Ní cuid de fhreagrachtaí reachtúla na mBord ná na nÍontaobhas Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta tithe pinsinéirí a phéinteáil agus a mhaisiú. Níl pleananna ar bith ann go nglacfaidh na Boird agus na hÍontaobhais freagracht na seirbhíse seo orthu féin.

### Drinking Water (Aluminium)

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is any medical evidence to suggest a link between aluminium and Alzheimer's disease, Down's syndrome and Parkinson's disease, with respect to the chemical content of drinking water.

(AQW 684/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The results of some of the many studies of the biological effects of aluminium have led some scientists to suggest that it may play a part in the development or progress of Alzheimer's disease and possibly Parkinson's disease.

However, the evidence is inconsistent, and there is no persuasive evidence to support a primary causative role for aluminium in either Alzheimer's disease or Parkinson's disease. People with Down's syndrome invariably develop the brain changes of Alzheimer's disease in their 30s or 40s, but there is no evidence that aluminium is a cause of Down's syndrome.

Mar gheall ar thorthaí cuid den iomad staidéar ar éifeachtaí bitheolaíocha alúmanaim tá roinnt eolaithe ag maíomh go bhféadfadh sé tionchar éigin a imirt ar fhorbairt nó ar fhás ghalar Alzheimer, nó ghalar Parkinson b'fhéidir.

Ach níl an fhianaise comhsheasmhach agus níl fianaise áititheach ann a thaispeánann go bhfuil an t-alúmanam ar na príomhchúiseanna taobh thiar de ghalar Alzheimer nó de ghalar Parkinson. Is fíor go dtarlaíonn sé gan teip go dtagann athruithe inchinne ghalar Alzheimer ar lucht siondróm Down nuair atá siad sna 30í nó sna 40í, ach níl fianaise ar bith ann gur alúmanam is cúis le siondróm Down.

### Diabetes

**Mr Davis** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail plans to initiate a screening programme to establish the total number of patients in Northern Ireland with diabetes.

(AQW 687/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The National Screening Committee, which advises Health Ministers on all aspects of screening policy, is assessing the case for a targeted screening programme for people at high risk of type 2

diabetes. I expect to receive further advice from the Committee this winter.

Tá an Coiste Náisiúnta Scátha ag déanamh meastúchán le fáil amach an féidir scéim scatha a thoiseacht do dhaoine a bhfuil an chontúirt ann go dtógfaidh siad diabaetas a 2, tugann an Coiste comhairle don Aire Sláinte maidir le ceisteanna scátha. Tá mé ag súil le tuilleadh comhairle a fháil ón Choiste an geimhreadh seo atá ag teacht.

### Health Service: Additional Resources

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proportion of the additional resources allocated to the National Health Service has been devoted to the accumulated deficits and debts of health trusts.

(AQW 700/99)

**Ms de Brún:** None of the additional £53 million made available for the health and personal social services as a result of the Budget announcement has been devoted to the accumulated deficits and debts of health trusts. In April, George Howarth proposed that £38 million of the £53 million be allocated to the four health and social services boards for specific services. Boards' proposals on how these resources are to be applied are currently being scrutinised by the Department.

Níor baineadh úsáid ar bith as na £53 milliún breise a cuireadh ar fáil de bharr ar fógraíodh sa cháinaisnéis leis na heasnamh agus na fiacha carntha de chuid na nÍontaobhas Sláinte a laghdú. In Aibreán mhol George Howarth gur cheart £38 milliún den £53 milliún a tabhairt do na ceithre Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí i leith seirbhísí áirithe. Faoi láthair tá an Roinn ag iniúchadh na moltaí a fuarthas ó na Boird faoi na dóigheanna ar cheart na hacmhainní seo a úsáid.

### Cardiac Surgery

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the rate of cancellation of appointments for cardiac surgery at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

(AQW 708/99)

**Ms de Brún:** In the last two quarters of 1999-2000 cardiac operations at the Royal Victoria Hospital were cancelled as follows:

In the period 1 October to 31 December 1999, 109 operations were cancelled — a cancellation rate of approximately 39%.

In the period 1 January to 31 March 2000, 84 operations were cancelled — a rate of 26%.



Sa dá cheathrú dheireanach de 1999 / 2000 cuireadh obráid mháinliacht chroí ar ceal san Ospidéal Ríoga Victoria mar a leanas:

Sa tréimhse 1 Deireadh Fómhair go dtí 31 Mí na Nollag 1999, cuireadh 109 obráid ar ceal, a léiríonn ráta cealaithe de 39% a bheag nó a mhór.

Sa tréimhse 1 Eanáir go dtí 31 Márta 2000, cuireadh 84 obráid ar ceal, i.e. ráta de 26%.

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the current waiting times for cardiac surgery in Northern Ireland Hospitals and what steps have been taken to reduce waiting times.

(AQW 709/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The waiting times for cardiac surgery at 31 March 2000 are set out in the table below.

Time waiting for treatment (months)	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18-20	21-23	24+	Total
Nos waiting	167	114	80	68	58	29	10	17	17	560

It is not acceptable to me that so many people are waiting more than 12 months for heart operations. There have been particular problems in the past year at the Royal Victoria Hospital, where all the cardiac surgery is performed, and the health and social services boards are working with the Royal Victoria to find ways of overcoming the present difficulties.

Sa tábla seo thíos tá na tréimhsí feithimh le haghaidh obráidí croí leagtha amach mar a bhí siad ar an 31 Márta 2000.

Tréimhsí feithimh le haghaidh cóireála (míonna)	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18-20	21-23	24+	Total
lón ag fanacht	167	114	80	68	58	29	10	17	17	560

Nil sé inghlactha agam go bhfuil an oiread sin daoine ag fanacht breis agus 12 mhí le hobraidí croí a fháil. I rith na bliana seo caite bhí fadhbanna áirithe in Ospidéal Ríoga Victoria áit a ndéantar na hobraidí croí uile agus tá na Boird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta ag obair i gcomhar le hOspidéal Ríoga Victoria le teacht ar réiteach na ndeacrachtaí atá anois ann.

### Minister: Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils she has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed.

(AQW 714/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I have not visited any district councils since devolution. However, I have visited a number of organisations governed by the various trusts and boards.

Ní dheachaigh mé ar cuairt ar chomhairle cheantair ar bith ó cineachadh cumhacht orainn. Ach thug mé cuairt ar roinnt eagraíochtaí atá á rialú ag Iontaobhais agus ag Boird éagsúla.

### Sure Start: Funding

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that any funding allocated to the Sure Start programme will be ring-fenced.

(AQW 739/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I can confirm that the funding allocated to the Sure Start programme is earmarked for that purpose. The funding will be shared across the four childcare partnerships, which will allocate it to the Sure Start projects operating in their areas.

Is féidir liom cinntiú go caithfear an maoiniú a tugadh don chlár 'Sure Start' ar an chlár sin amháin. Beidh an maoiniú roinnte thar na 4 Pháirtíocht Chúram Leanai a dháileoidh an t-airgead ar na tionscadail 'Sure Start' ag feidhmiú ina gceantar.

### Nursing Vacancies

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of nursing vacancies in Northern Ireland hospitals, and indicate whether additional students are being trained to meet current demand.

(AQW 746/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Health and social services trusts recently reported that at 31 January 2000 there were a total of 141 unfilled vacancies (equivalent to 105 whole-time posts) for qualified nursing staff in hospitals. This represents a vacancy level of 2% of the permanent nursing establishment in adult acute nursing.

A total of 350 student nurses are expected to qualify and become available for employment in September this year. The composition is expected to be as follows:

Adult nursing	266
Mental health nursing	41
Learning disability	16
Children's nursing	27

The Department is currently reviewing the number of nurse training places.

Ar an 31 Eanáir 2000 d'fhógair na hIontaobhais SSS go raibh 141 jabanna do bhanaltraí cailithe gan lionadh sna otharlanna (ionann agus 105 postanna lánaimseartha). Seo 2% den fhoireann bhanaltrachta buan atá i ngéarbhanaltracht aosach.

Tá 350 ábhar banaltraí le beith cáilithe agus réidh le hobair a dhéanamh ó Mheán Fómhair na bliana seo. Seo a leanas mar a bheas:

Banaltracht aosach	266
Banaltracht mheabhairghalar	41
Fadhbanna foghlam	16
Banaltracht pháistí	27

Tá athbhreithniú á dhéanamh ag an Roinn ar líon na n-áiteanna traenála do bhanaltraí.

### Disabled People: Access to Health Service Premises

**Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans the Department has to increase accessibility for disabled people.  
(AQO 337/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Department has issued guidance for the health and personal social services on implementing section 21 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which imposes a duty on service providers to take reasonable steps to make their services accessible to disabled people. It has also issued 'Access to Health Service Premises Audit Checklist', a tool to help service providers to audit premises for accessibility to disabled people. For its part, the Department will be assessing over the next 12 months its arrangements for providing information, taking account of the statutory requirements of the Act.

Tá an Roinn i ndiaidh treoir a eisiúint do na seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta faoi fheidhmiú Alt 21 den Acht um Leithcheal ar bhonn Míchumais 1995, rud a leagann dualgas ar sholáthróirí seirbhísí céimeanna réasúnta a ghlacadh lena chinntiú gur féidir le daoine faoi mhíchumas teacht ar na seirbhísí. Fosta tá sí i ndiaidh "Access to Health Services Audit Checklist" a eisiúint. Is gléas é seo le cuidiú le soláthróirí seirbhísí foirgnimh a iniúchadh lena chinntiú go bhfuil sé furasta ag daoine faoi mhíchumas teacht isteach iontu. Thar 12 mí beidh an Roinn ag déanamh staidéir ar na na socraithe atá ann le eolais a cuir ar fáil, ag glacadh san ámhreadh an Aict.

### Alcohol or Drug Abuse (Young Persons)

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many persons aged 16 or under have been treated for alcohol or drug abuse in the Northern Board area this year.  
(AQO 359/99)

**Ms de Brún:** During the period January-December 1999

- there were 17 acute hospital admissions related to alcohol misuse;

- there were fewer than five psychiatric hospital admissions due to either alcohol or drug misuse;
- there were 14 referrals to child and adolescent mental health services as a direct result of alcohol and/or drug misuse (five of them for solvent misuse).

These figures do not include all young people who receive treatment as a result of drug or alcohol misuse. For example, those reporting to accident and emergency units but who are not subsequently admitted for further treatment will not be included.

I rith na tréimhse Eanáir – Nollaig 1999:

- Glacadh isteach sna hospidéal 17 agus iad in an-drochdhóigh de bharr mí-úsáid alcóil
- Glacadh níos lú ná 5 chás síciatrach isteach sna hospidéal de bharr mí-úsáid alcóil nó mí-úsáid drugaí
- Atreoraíodh 14 chuig seirbhísí sláinte intinne do pháistí agus d'ógánaigh go díreach de bharr mí-úsáid alcóil agus/nó mí-úsáid drugaí – atreoraíodh 5 dóibh de bharr mí-úsáid tuaslagán

Ní uimhir iomlán é seo de na daoine óga atá ag fáil cuidithe de dheasca mí-úsáid drugaí agus dí. Mar shampla níl na daoine atá ag freastal ar rannóg A&E, ach nach bhfuil ag fáil tuilleadh cuidithe san aimhriu.

### Health Service Facilities (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)

**Mr McHugh** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps will be taken to upgrade services at the Erne and Omagh Hospitals and other Health Service facilities in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and if she will make a statement.  
(AQO 350/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I am very aware of the importance that local communities in Fermanagh and the Omagh area attach to their acute hospital services. I want to be as open-minded as possible about how hospitals such as the Erne and the Tyrone County should be developed in future, taking on board the concerns of local people as well as the issues of clinical standards. The future of hospital services is one of my top priorities.

Tuigim go fiormhaith gur tábhachtach le muintir áitiuil Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí na seirbhísí géarmhíochaine ospidéal atá acu. Ba mhaith liom a bheith chomh saorbhreathach agus is féidir maidir leis an dóigh ar cheart ospidéal cosúil le hOspidéal na hÉirne agus Ospidéal Chontae Thír Eoghain a fhorbairt sa todhchaí, agus mé ag cur inní na ndaoine áitiúla san áireamh chomh maith leis na ceisteanna faoi chaighdeán chliniciúla. Is é todhchaí seirbhísí na n-ospidéal ceann de na hardtosaíochtaí atá agam.

### Hospital Services (South-West Area)

**Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to endorse the Western Health and Social Services Board's recommendation to establish a new hospital in the south-west, to maintain acute-services provision in the area at their present level in the interim, and if she will make a statement.

(AQO 315/99)

**Ms de Brún:** It would not be appropriate for me to offer any comment on the Western Board's recommendation for a new acute hospital as this matter is currently the subject of judicial review. I can, however, give an assurance that decisions will be taken as necessary to ensure the provision of safe and effective hospital services pending long-term decisions on the future of hospital services. The future of hospital services is one of my top priorities.

Ní bheadh sé cuí agam tuairim a thabhairt ar mholadh Bhord an Iarthair faoi ospidéal nua géarmhíochaine mar tá an t-ábhar seo faoi athbhreithniú breithiúnach faoi láthair. Mar sin féin, thig liom a dhearbhu duit go ndéanfar cinntí mar is gá lena dheimhniú go mbeidh seirbhísí sábháilte éifeachtacha ospidéil á soláthar go dtí go ndéanfar cinntí fadtéarmacha faoi sheirbhísí ospidéal sa todhchaí. Is é todhchaí seirbhísí na n-ospidéal ceann de na hardtosaíochtaí atá agam.

### Cancer Services

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all expenditures on services for cancer patients in Northern Ireland, and if she will make a statement.

(AQO 333/99)

**Ms de Brún:** It is not possible to disaggregate all expenditure related to the care and treatment of cancer patients. I can, however, say that an extra £8 million has been provided for cancer services this year, on top of the additional £7 million allocated last year. This new funding will make a substantial contribution to improving our cancer services.

I should say also that funding is not the only factor in developing services. The availability of key specialist staff will dictate how fast we can make those improvements. It takes time to put in place suitably qualified specialist staff, such as clinical oncologists and specialist nurses, particularly when these are in short supply in the NHS and elsewhere.

Ní féidir gach costas maidir le cúram agus cóireáil othar le hailse a dhealú ón iomlán. Ach thig liom a rá gur cuireadh £8 milliún breise ar fáil do sheirbhísí ailse i mbliana ar bharr na £7 milliún a cuireadh ar fáil

anuraidh. Cuideoidh an maoiniú nua seo go substaintiúil le feabhas a chur ar ár seirbhísí ailse.

Ba mhaith liom a rá nach é an maoiniú an t-aon fhachtóir amháin i bhforbairt seirbhísí. Beidh luas feabhsaithe na seirbhísí ag brath ar bhaill áirithe sainfhoirne a bheith ar fáil. Bainfidh sé tamall asainn na baill sainfhoirne, mar oinceolaithe clínicíúla agus sainbhanaltraí a bhfuil na cáilíochtaí cearta acu, a fháil – go háirithe nuair atá siad gann sa SSN agus in áiteanna eile.

### Hospital Services (South-West Area)

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps have been taken towards the provision of a new acute services hospital in the south-west of Northern Ireland, whether an announcement can be expected before the summer recess, and if she will make a statement. (AQO 320/99)

**Ms de Brún:** It would not be appropriate for me to offer any comment on the Western Board's recommendation for a new acute hospital as this matter is currently the subject of judicial review. I can, however, give an assurance that decisions will be taken as necessary to ensure the provision of safe and effective hospital services pending long-term decisions on the future of hospital services. The future of hospital services is one of my top priorities.

Ní bheadh sé cuí agam tuairim a thabhairt ar mholadh Bhord an Iarthair faoi ospidéal nua géarmhíochaine mar tá an t-ábhar seo faoi athbhreithniú breithiúnach faoi láthair. Mar sin féin, thig liom a dhearbhu duit go ndéanfar cinntí mar is gá lena dheimhniú go mbeidh seirbhísí sábháilte éifeachtacha ospidéil á soláthar go dtí go ndéanfar cinntí fadtéarmacha faoi sheirbhísí ospidéal sa todhchaí. Is é todhchaí seirbhísí na n-ospidéal ceann de na hardtosaíochtaí atá agam.

### Drug Abuse (Deaths)

**Mr Leslie** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to indicate the number of people deemed to have died in Northern Ireland as a result of drug abuse over the last four years.

(AQO 332/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The available figures relate to deaths due to poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances and will include deaths caused by abuse of both legal and illegal drugs. During the years 1995-98, 166 deaths were recorded here.

Is bais nimhiú drugaí, míochaine agus substaint bitheolais atá i gceist san uimhreacha atá ar fáil, chomh maith le bais ó drugaí dleathach agus mí-dleathach. Bhí cuntas ar 166 bais san blianta 1995-1998.

## Acute Hospital Services (Winter)

**Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps will be taken to ensure that acute hospital services do not break down next winter. (AQO 355/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Health and social services came under severe pressure last winter as a result of an unprecedented number of hospital admissions due to flu and flu-related illnesses. A comprehensive programme of action is under way at the moment to build on the lessons learned. This includes providing extra intensive-care and high-dependency beds, extending flu vaccinations to the over-65s and reviewing the effectiveness of existing winter pressures schemes. The additional £53 million allocated to the services this year will also directly contribute to improving health and social services capacity to deal effectively with pressures of that sort that arise during the winter period.

Bhí brú iontach ar na seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta sa gheimhreadh seo caite mar gheall ar an uimhir mór daoine sna hotharlanna le fliú agus tinnis eile a bhaineas leis. Faoi láthair tá clár cuimsitheach gníomhaíochta ar siúl le buntáiste a bhaint as na ceachtanna tá foghlamtha againn. Mar chuid de sin tá leapacha breise géarchúraim agus ardspleáchais a soláthar; tá an vacsaíniú in éadan fliú á thabhairt feasta do dhaoine thar 65 bliana d'aois agus táthar ag athbhreithniú éifeacht na scéimeanna reatha a bheas ag déileáil le brúnna an gheimhridh. Fosta cuideoidh an £53 milliún breise a bheas ar fáil ag na seirbhísí go díreach le feabhas a chuir ar chumas na seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta le déileáil go héifeachtach leis na brúnna a d'fhéadfadh teacht i rith an gheimhridh.

## Disposal of Clinical Waste

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how clinical waste is disposed of at present, and if she will make a statement. (AQO 316/99)

**Ms de Brún:** A joint waste management board representing the then Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Health and Children, Dublin, signed a 10-year principal agreement with Sterile Technologies Ireland Limited on 4 August 1998 for the disposal of all clinical waste in the island.

An interim service commenced here on 29 March 2000.

At present, while the new disposal plant is being installed and commissioned on the Antrim Hospital site, the majority of the clinical waste generated by the health and personal social services (HPSS) is being incinerated at HPSS incinerators here, with the surplus being transported to Scotland for incineration.

Ar an 4 Lúnasa 1998 shínigh Bord Comhbhainistíochta Dramhaíola, a bhí ag feidhmiú ar son na sean-Roinne Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus na Roinne Sláinte agus Leanaí, Baile Átha Cliath, Príomhchomhaontú le Sterile Technologies Ireland Limited faoi dhiúscairt na dramhaíola clínicíúla uile atá ar an oileán.

Thosaigh seirbhís shealadach anseo ar an 29 Márta 2000.

Faoi láthar tá fearais nua dhiúscairtha á suiteáil agus á gcoimisiúnú ar shuíomh Ospidéal Aontroma. Tá bunús na dramhaíola clínicíúla atá á cruthú ag na SSSP á loscadh ag loisceoirí de chuid na SSSP anseo agus seoltar an fuilleach go hAlbain lena loscadh ansin.

## Acute Hospitals

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment she has made in relation to the acute hospitals review, and if she will make a statement. (AQO 354/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I am now considering how our hospital services can be developed in a way which ensures high-quality care for all those who need it. I want to look at all the options involved before coming to any conclusions. I am very aware of how important hospital services are to local communities in particular, and before any changes are made I shall want to ensure that decisions about the future of services are based on the fullest possible information.

Anois tá mé ag cuimhneamh ar an dóigh a bhféadfaí ár seirbhísí ospidéal a fhorbairt lena chinntiú go gcuirfí scoth cúraim ar fáil dóibh siúd a bhfuil sé de dhíth orthu. Ba mhaith liom amharc ar na roghanna atá ann sula ndéanfaidh mé cinneadh ar bith. Tuigim go maith a thabhairt ar na seirbhísí ospidéal don phobal áitiúil go háirithe, agus sula ndéanfar athruithe ar bith, ba mhaith liom a chinntiú go bhfuil gach cinneadh faoi na seirbhísí sa todhchaí bunaithe ar an eolas is iomláine.

## HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

### Lecturers' Salaries

**Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to comment on the findings of the Horisk Report on the pay of lecturers in further education colleges; what finance the Department will make available to colleges in this financial year to fund salaries for further education lecturers; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 638/99)



**The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren):** The terms and conditions of service, including salaries, of lecturers in further education colleges are a matter for the colleges. It is therefore for Colleges to decide if they wish to take forward the recommendations in the Horisk Report and to consider the funding implications of doing so.

The block grant to colleges for 2000-01 is £97 million. This includes provision for lecturers' salaries.

### **Minister: Visits to District Councils**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils he has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed. (AQW 715/99)

**Dr Farren:** I visited Omagh District Council on 10 December 1999 and met with the Chief Executive, John McKinney, to discuss New Deal.

## **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Fluoridation (Tandragee)**

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development to give a full breakdown of all known contaminants in the fluoride used artificially to fluoridate the drinking water in Tandragee. (AQW 625/99)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr P Robinson):** I am replying as this is a matter for the Department for Regional Development.

The public water supply in Tandragee is no longer fluoridated.

### **Comber Bypass**

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the current position in regard to financial provision for the Comber bypass, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 636/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The Comber bypass scheme is included in my departmental spending plans which are currently under consideration as part of the Government 'Spending Review 2000' for the period 2001-04.

Currently the design of the scheme has been completed and the preparatory work is advanced, with clearance being given to the commencement of land vesting early next year. Following determination within

the next few weeks by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the level of funding for the Northern Ireland block, allocations to Northern Ireland Departments will be determined by the Executive Committee later this year.

Subject to a favourable outcome to this process, I hope that funding will be available to enable the Comber bypass to begin no later than 2003-04.

## **Cross-Border Roads**

**Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what plans he has to promote practical co-operation between the Department's Roads Service and the National Roads Authority in the Irish Republic to improve the standard of cross-border roads, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 656/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** Senior officials from my Department's Roads Service have regular meetings with their counterparts from the National Roads Authority through the Roads Cross-Border Steering Group. I am satisfied that these meetings, together with the ongoing dialogue between staff from Roads Service divisions, the National Roads Authority and appropriate county councils in the Republic of Ireland, provide the necessary practical co-operation to improve the standard of cross-border roads.

## **Drinking Water**

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a chemical breakdown for the drinking water currently found in the Newry and Mourne, Banbridge, North Down and Ards council areas. (AQW 685/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The Water Service publishes each June a comprehensive report on the quality of drinking water supplied to the public during the preceding year. It also provides each district council with a report giving details of the quality of drinking water supplied in the council area.

The 1999 drinking water quality report has been published today. Copies of the report and the reports for all district council areas have been placed in the Assembly Library.

## **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Pensioners: Income Support**

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister for Social Development to indicate the take-up rates of income support by pensioners. (AQW 701/99)

**The Minister for Social Development (Mr Dodds):**

At 31 March 2000, approximately 73,000 pensioners in Northern Ireland were receiving income support (minimum income guarantee).

At 23 June 2000, a total of 2,579 pensioners in Northern Ireland had contacted the national freephone claim line number, or their local social security offices, to obtain a claim form for the minimum income guarantee.

The Social Security Agency is writing to 40,000 pensioners inviting a claim to minimum income guarantee. The issue of these mailshots is in three stages. It commenced on 29 May 2000, with the second stage July 2000 and third stage September 2000.

In addition, a national TV advertising campaign (including Northern Ireland) began on 30 May 2000 and will run in conjunction with the mailshots. The Social Security Agency is also working closely with voluntary groups, such as Age Concern and Help the Aged, to ensure the maximum take-up of the minimum income guarantee.

**Housing Executive: Supervision of Contracts**

**Mr Kane** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the arrangements for supervision of ongoing contracts in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 716/99)

**Mr Dodds:** For capital and planned revenue contract work, the executive employs 21 consultants to design and supervise work on site in the five Housing Executive areas. These consultants, together with the in-house practice groups in each area, are responsible for all such work. Each Consultant has a contract with the Executive that requires it to attend sites and to manage contracts in terms of quality, timeliness and costs.

A professional client team monitors these consultants monthly, through the provision of written returns, including site minutes. The executive also employs clerks of works and mechanical and electrical inspectors to inspect contract work on its behalf.

With regard to response maintenance contract work, the executive supervises this directly through its district offices.

**Minister:  
Visits to District Councils**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils he has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed. (AQW 727/99)

**Mr Dodds:** I have made a number of visits to district council areas across Northern Ireland since devolution. However, none of these visits were to district council headquarters.

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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 7 July 2000

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Ministers: Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils visited by each Minister; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed. (AQW 690/99)

**Reply:** On 29 June Mr Haughey visited Omagh District Council. He spoke at a seminar on civic leadership, with 'Councils Serving Communities' as the theme.

#### Devolution: Information (Languages)

**Dr Adamson** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister why public information about the devolution of powers to Northern Ireland, available in English and Gaelic, has not been made available in the Ulster-Scots language and in the languages of the ethnic minorities. (AQW 698/99)

**Reply:** Information about the devolution of powers to Northern Ireland was published at the time of devolution and repeated at the reinstatement of devolution to describe and explain to the public the new institutions arising directly from the agreement. The

information was printed only in English and Irish, following the format used for the agreement.

### AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

#### Minister: Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils she has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed. (AQW 691/99)

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** During the period in question one district council area was visited.

On 27 January 2000 I met with the chairman and members of Strabane District Council to see, at first hand, sites bordering on the River Mourne that had been affected by flooding due to the exceptional heavy rainfall during December 1999.

#### Sheep Scab

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if an evaluation of alternative approaches to eradicating sheep scab has been undertaken. (AQW 706/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** No, but the Government are funding a major programme of research, costing £1.6 million, into alternative strategies to control sheep scab. These projects include basic studies on the biology of the scab mite and aim to identify aspects of the mite's physiology which might be targets for alternative control methods. These might include vaccines, fungi pathogenic to the mites, means of altering the allergic response of the sheep, or means of interfering with the feeding process of the mite. My Department will be advised of the findings in due course.

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the Department has considered an alternative strategy in the event of a major outbreak of sheep scab during the period when farmers are without organophosphates. (AQW 707/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** No. The Government's decision to suspend the marketing of OP sheep dips is a temporary measure whilst companies improve container design. Advice from the expert scientific Veterinary Products Committee is expected shortly, following which the position will be urgently reviewed. Also, there are alternative, effective treatments available for the

treatment of sheep scab, including synthetic pyrethroid dips, pour-ons and injectable products.

### Organophosphate Sheep Dips

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm the economic cost to farmers of the withdrawal of organophosphate sheep dips. (AQW 710/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The cost of dipping sheep is estimated at 30p per animal (product cost only). To achieve the same breadth of protection using an injectable and pour-on would cost about 80p per animal. Whilst the Government recognise that this is an added cost, current OP containers present a safety hazard to users, and the Government are doing all they can to assist in the return of OP dips as soon as proposals for improved containers have been found to be acceptable.

### Less-Favoured Areas

**Mr Kane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps will be taken to ensure that imbalances do not occur when less-favoured areas payments are made on a land area basis. (AQW 717/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The Commission has challenged the Department's proposed LFA compensatory allowances scheme in the way it is targeted at suckler cow and sheep producers and with the indirect link to production levels within the scheme. Both these elements served to limit the payments imbalances likely to occur in the switch from the headage-based HLCA scheme to the new area-based scheme. As negotiations with the commission proceed, I am hopeful that targeting will be accepted, though it seems clear that a headage link will not.

Since the scheme must fit within the legislative framework, it is inevitable that there will be some redistribution of funds. The extent will depend on what we can agree with the commission, and the Department will be looking for the best scheme for Northern Ireland that we can get. To ease redistribution the Department will be seeking to include some provision in the revised scheme for phasing in the new payments arrangements, possibly over the first three years.

### Pig Restructuring Scheme

**Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm that Northern Ireland will receive a share of the funding available for the United Kingdom's pig restructuring scheme, based on its proportion of the United Kingdom sow population in June 1998, irrespective of the uptake in Northern Ireland of the outgoers element of the scheme. (AQW 723/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** It is not possible to give the assurance that the Member seeks. The scheme will be operated on a UK-wide basis, and our share will ultimately be determined by the quantity and quality of Northern Ireland applications accepted for aid under it. I and my officials will endeavour to ensure that the scheme operates on a level playing field throughout the UK so that Northern Ireland pig producers receive a fair proportion of the available funding.

EU Commission approval for the introduction of the proposed scheme is still awaited. It should also be borne in mind that a 16% reduction in UK capacity will have to be achieved during the outgoers phase of the scheme to enable the ongoers element to proceed.

### Less-Favoured Areas

**Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the current position in regard to the rejection by the European Union Commission of the plan for future less-favoured areas support; whether she will act to ensure that the redistribution of funds with the less-favoured areas is minimised; and if she will make a statement. (AQW 724/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The situation regarding the new less-favoured areas compensatory allowances scheme is that the Commission has sought clarification regarding targeting the allowances at suckler cow and sheep producers and with the link to production levels that exists within the scheme. The Commission views these as possibly incompatible with the legislation. My Department, along with the other UK Agriculture Departments, has continued to negotiate with the Commission and is now hopeful that targeting will be permitted where the need can be objectively demonstrated. It is, however, unlikely that any link to production levels will be permitted.

The degree of redistribution of funds between the old and new schemes will depend on the nature of the scheme finally agreed. I want this to be as good a scheme as we can get for Northern Ireland, but it has to fit within the regulatory framework. As it seems inevitable that there will be some redistribution of funds, we will be seeking to include some provision for phasing in the new payment arrangements, possibly over the first three years.

### LEADER+

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the current position in regard to proposals for a new LEADER plan initiative (2000-06); whether there are plans to mainstream this type of rural development; and if decisions will be made locally. (AQW 725/99)



**Ms Rodgers:** Work has begun on preparing the Northern Ireland proposals. A consultation document was issued by the Department on 8 March 2000, with a closing date for responses of 21 April. A total of 44 submissions have been received. I have written to all those who received a copy of the consultation document to advise them of the outcome of the consultation exercise. However, I want the consultation to be an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. Therefore on 28 June I invited prospective local action groups to submit summaries of their proposed strategies for their areas. This will allow me to consider how the aims, objectives and criteria of LEADER+ in Northern Ireland should be drafted to avoid excluding good proposals brought forward by local groups.

LEADER+ will form an integral part of the Northern Ireland rural development programme. As such, it will be mainstreamed into the Department's work in rural areas.

All LEADER+ funding will be delivered by local action groups made up of representatives from local public-sector, private-sector and community organisations. These groups will have responsibility for drawing up and delivering development strategies in their areas. Therefore decisions on LEADER+ will be made locally by these groups.

### Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if farmers not affiliated to farming unions will be consulted as part of the Government's action plan on the designation of nitrogen vulnerable zones. (AQW 737/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The designation of three nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZs) in Northern Ireland took place in January 1999 following a detailed scientific survey of nitrate levels in both ground and surface waters. This is fully in accordance with the provisions of the EU Nitrate Directive. While these NVZ designations will remain, the results of that survey produced no information which would justify the designation of any further NVZs in Northern Ireland. Consequently, there are no plans to designate further NVZs in Northern Ireland, and therefore the question of further consultation does not arise.

I understand that before the Environment and Heritage Service designated the existing NVZs, all known landowners in each zone were contacted, irrespective of their affiliation to the farming unions. However, these operational questions are matters for the Department of the Environment, and any further questions in regard to this should be addressed to my ministerial colleague Sam Foster.

The Member should be aware that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has prepared an information pack for farmers in the existing NVZs and has provided them with the opportunity to receive a farm visit to help them understand what is required in practical terms. I suggest that the Member advise any of his constituents who may be concerned to approach my Department's county agricultural development office to avail themselves of this assistance.

### IT Training for Farmers

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to describe what plans exist for an information technology training programme specifically designed for the farming community. (AQO 388/99)

**Ms Rodgers:**

1. The Department, through Greenmount College and Enniskillen College, provides tailored IT training for farmers and growers. To date over 2,000 farmers and growers have received basic IT skills training, mainly at introductory and intermediate level, with some progressing to advanced level.
2. It is planned to expand the training programme with courses being offered at DARD's Colleges and at various other locations throughout the province. A priority will be for more people to achieve a higher level qualification – the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).
3. In addition, under the Agenda for Government I have secured new funding of £800,000 for an Information and Communication Technology Initiative. This will improve access to information technology equipment and skills particularly for farmers with small businesses and in the west. There will be new access points to use information technology at a range of venues, and we will support these with training and high speed links.
4. Following a pilot seminar this year, a series of 'hands on' E-commerce workshops for farmers and growers will commence in Autumn 2000. It is also proposed to expand the level of training and support for the adoption of ICT by the farming community under the CSF.

### Less-Favoured Areas

**Mr Close** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps will be taken to mitigate the financial, social and environmental consequences of the Department's current revised proposals for a new less-favoured area scheme, which could involve losses for over 10,000 marginal beef and sheep farmers.

(AQO 377/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The Department is endeavouring to devise a scheme that meets the requirements of Council Regulation 1257/1999 while at the same time minimising the redistribution of funds across beneficiaries. The proposals put to the EU Commission achieved this with a good measure of success, but unfortunately the Commission had difficulty with the targeting of specific enterprises and with the link to headage levels. The Department, along with the other UK Agriculture Departments, has continued to negotiate with the Commission and is now hopeful that targeting the key enterprises will be permitted. It is, however, unlikely that any link to headage levels will be permitted.

The new LFA scheme will have more environmental conditions attached to it than its predecessor, the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances Scheme. Payment rates will take into account TSN (Targeting Social Need) considerations.

Work on the revised scheme is ongoing.

### Colleges of Agriculture

**Mr Leslie** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assessment she has made of the standard of skills teaching in colleges of agriculture in Northern Ireland. (AQO 391/99)

**Ms Rodgers:**

1. All courses at the colleges of agriculture are accredited by national awarding organisations and, as such, are subject to their quality-assurance systems. For both full-time and part-time courses, external examiners/verifiers visit each college several times per academic year to monitor the standard of teaching and assessment and give feedback.
2. Each college has a course advisory board, which includes representatives from industry. These boards give an overall direction and assure the quality of the college courses.
3. DARD has an agreement with DHFETE whereby the education and training inspectorate, supplemented by specialist expertise from GB, carries out regular inspections at the DARD colleges.

### Flood Alleviation

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the progress and priority status of each of the projects to alleviate flooding problems in Northern Ireland. (AQO 369/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** I have seen at first hand the problem in the Member's own constituency and understand the urgency of seeking solutions. The Rivers Agency of my Department has prioritised and is taking forward an extensive flood-alleviation programme costing some £8

million in the current financial year. As this programme covers a large number of separate locations throughout Northern Ireland too numerous to list here, I have arranged for full details to be placed in the Assembly Library. I would mention, however, that high-priority, high-investment flood-alleviation schemes protecting major urban centres are under way in Newry, Newtownards, Belfast, Ballymena and Limavady. Other substantial flood-alleviation projects, for Kells and Ballymurphy, will commence this summer.

### Livestock Compensatory Allowances

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to clarify the position in regard to the policy of the European Commission towards future arrangements for the payment of hill livestock compensatory allowances; and if she will make a statement.

(AQO 379/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The Department is endeavouring to devise an area-based scheme to replace the hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme that meets the requirements of Council Regulation 1257/1999 while at the same time minimising the redistribution of funds across beneficiaries. The proposals put to the EU Commission achieved this with a good measure of success, but unfortunately the Commission had difficulty with the targeting of specific enterprises and with the link to headage levels. The Department, along with the other UK Agriculture Departments, has continued to negotiate with the Commission and is now hopeful that targeting the key enterprises will be permitted. It is, however, unlikely that any link to headage levels will be permitted as this is not consistent with the desired move to an area-based scheme. Work is ongoing.

### EU Sheepmeat Regime

**Mr McFarland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide information on the European Union's intentions to review its Sheepmeat Regime. (AQO 390/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** We do not know the EU Commission's intentions in detail, but we understand that it is in the process of reviewing the sheepmeat regime. It is not clear the extent of any change which might emerge or find agreement because of the differing agendas of the various member states. If and when any firm proposals are brought forward, the views of the industry and of the Assembly's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee will be sought as appropriate.

## Farming: Youth Career Guidance

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what initiatives will be taken to attract young people into farming as a full-time career. (AQO 371/99)

### Ms Rodgers:

1. My Department has trained schools liaison officers who visit schools and attend careers conventions throughout the province to offer guidance to potential young entrants, thus helping young people and/or their parents to assess future prospects and identify the most suitable course for career needs.
2. The agricultural colleges provide high-quality full-time and part-time courses in agriculture, horticulture and equine studies. The courses provided are continually updated to meet industry's evolving needs.
3. The Department, in partnership with others, also offers a multi-skilling programme which gives young people the opportunity to train in agriculture and another discipline, thus providing the necessary skills to farm part-time and also secure employment off the farm.
4. While there are no specific initiatives planned for young farmers under the next round of structural funds, I am confident that they will benefit from the proposals which are being negotiated with the European Commission.

## Fish Quotas

**Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline what discussions have taken place, or are planned, at a North/South Ministerial Council meeting concerning a permanent quota swap arrangement for cod and whiting between fishermen in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and if she will make a statement. (AQO 368/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** I have not had, nor do I plan to have, any discussion at a North/South Ministerial Council concerning a permanent swap arrangement for cod and whiting. Issues of international quota swaps fall outwith the remit of the North/South Ministerial Council. However, I am in continual contact with colleagues in MAFF and SERAD on a wide range of fisheries issues, including the application of the Hague preference arrangements, which I know is a matter of considerable interest to local fishermen. When the TACs for 2001 are being negotiated in December I will ensure that the effects of the Hague preference on local fishermen are minimised.

## CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

### Minister: Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils he has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed. (AQW 692/99)

**The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey):** In the period since devolution I have made two visits to district councils.

At the invitation of the mayor of Ballymoney, I visited the council on Wednesday 14 June 2000 to attend a civic reception in honour of Joey Dunlop's notable achievement in this year's Isle of Man Tourist Trophy races. The purpose of this visit was to show my support for Joey Dunlop and the significant contribution he has made to the world of motorcycle racing. No business meeting took place on this visit.

On Friday 23 June 2000 I went to Strabane District Council, visiting the site of the proposed new library in the town, and afterwards attending an informal lunch hosted by the council. During this visit I announced details of my Department's first capital project — a new £1 million purpose-built library for Strabane. Although the purpose of the visit was to make this announcement, no formal business meeting took place.

### Library Service Review

**Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action has been taken to review the Library Service in Northern Ireland. (AQO 383/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** The Department indicated its intention to carry out a review of the Library Service in April. Discussions are ongoing about the terms of reference and methodology for taking this forward.

We will aim to begin the review in the autumn. The first step will be to examine the scope, purpose and value of the public library services in Northern Ireland, building upon work already done on behalf of library services in the Irish Republic and England. I will expect to receive initial proposals within six months. Over the following year I will want to see the development of a more detailed strategy, taking account of the work already achieved by the electronic libraries project for ensuring that library services remain relevant and responsive to the needs of the Northern Ireland people in the information age.

Libraries need to become community information hubs, to open up new ways of lifelong learning, using the new technologies to ensure that even those from the

most socially disadvantaged backgrounds do not lose out in this information age.

### **Lower Lough Erne: Trout and Salmon Fishing**

**Mr J Wilson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he intends to take to restore Lower Lough Erne as a prime trout and salmon fishery.

(AQO 372/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** The Department is participating with the authorities in the Republic of Ireland in an EU-funded Erne salmon management programme. The objective of this programme is to reintroduce a self-sustaining population of wild salmon to the Erne to support a quality salmon rod fishery. Information from the work carried out to date indicates that there is good habitat on the Erne tributaries to produce salmon, but the study has identified problems with fish passage downstream of Belleek. I will be addressing this with my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland as a matter of priority.

Trout stocks have not declined to the same extent as salmon. There is good trout fishing on Lower Lough Erne, and I am keen to maintain this as a premier wild trout fishery. A number of measures are in place to sustain and improve trout stocks. A brown trout and coarse fish hatchery has recently been established by the Erne and Melvin Enhancement Company to produce indigenous Lough Erne trout fry for stocking out into the feeder rivers. Prior to this the Department had stocked the lough from the fish farm at Movinagher.

Local angling clubs have received around £131,000 of grant aid from the salmonid enhancement programme for the rehabilitation of trout and salmon spawning and nursery habitats. This should also assist in the improvement of stocks throughout the lower lough. I have bid for further funds for an angling development programme in the next round of EU structural funds, which will be available to clubs and other organisations for further enhancement and stock improvement works.

Electro fishing surveys carried out during last winter on the main rivers flowing into the lough indicated large stocks of juvenile trout. This increase in trout productivity has been confirmed by the number of small trout caught in the lough during the season so far. This is an early indicator of the success of the rehabilitation works.

I am committed to improving salmon and trout stocks in Lough Erne, and the measures outlined above should help to achieve this. I am not, however, complacent, and I recognise that there are problem areas such as the impacts on salmon migration, water quality issues and

the effects of zebra mussels, all of which will need to be addressed. I am looking at what can be achieved.

### **European City of Culture: Belfast Bid**

**Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if the Department supports the call for Belfast to be made a European City of Culture and what action it will take to promote the issue.

(AQO 385/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** I am delighted to say that my Department fully supports the bid to have Belfast designated as European capital of culture in 2008. The experience of Glasgow, which was designated European city of culture in 1990, demonstrated clearly the enormous social and economic benefits we could expect, not only for Belfast but for the whole of Northern Ireland, if the Belfast bid were successful.

A Capital of Culture Steering Group was set up recently to take forward the task of developing the bid. My Department will play a full and positive role on this group.

### **MAGNI Corporate Plan**

**Mr Close** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action will be taken to ensure that the proposals set out in the recently published Museums and Galleries Northern Ireland (MAGNI) corporate plan will be delivered.

(AQO 384/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** My Department is working closely with the management of MAGNI to identify the support which they will require to deliver the programmes outlined in their first corporate plan.

I am fully behind the museums' new vision for the future. However, its realisation will require time and money and will call for creative and imaginative approaches to fund-raising.

### **Community Arts Funding**

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to indicate the nature and duration of support given to the community arts sector.

(AQO 364/99)

**Mr McGimpsey:** The Arts Council has operated a community arts budget since 1979 and in the current financial year will allocate £686,000 to community arts. The level of Arts Council revenue funding for community arts has risen by a third in the last six years. Since 1995 the council has also spent over £1.5 million of National Lottery funds on community arts and, through the Forum for Local Government and the Arts,



has encouraged district councils to increase their spending in this important area.

There have been many other streams of funding available to the community arts sector in recent years, including the Belfast community arts development fund — an initiative of the Belfast Regeneration Office (formerly Making Belfast Work), which provided £1 million over a four-year period—and £0.5 million of European peace and reconciliation money distributed by the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. Other funders, such as Co-operation Ireland, the Community Relations Council, the European Partnership Boards and the International Fund for Ireland, have contributed to the growth of the community arts sector. This commitment clearly demonstrates the value of community arts in tackling social and economic disadvantage on an inclusive and cross-community basis.

However, many of these initiatives were time-bounded and are now coming to an end, or have already finished. This leaves a question mark over whether the growth in the sector seen in recent years can be sustained. My Department will therefore commission an independent review of the community arts sector, as recommended in the recent review of Arts Council strategy by Professor Anthony Everitt. Such a review will provide, for the first time, a clear and comprehensive description of activity in the sector and its associated funding. It should also provide a realistic assessment of the sector's financial needs and a basis for establishing an agreed framework for its development and funding.

## EDUCATION

### Ulster-Scots in Schools

**Dr Adamson** asked the Minister of Education how the Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment intends to incorporate Ulster-Scots language and culture into the new curriculum. (AQW 697/99)

**The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):** While there are no current demands from within the schools system for Ulster-Scots to be taught as a language, there is already scope within the statutory Northern Ireland curriculum for schools to introduce aspects of Ulster-Scots language, literature and culture in the curriculum as part of the cultural heritage and education for mutual understanding cross-curricular themes. Any school can include this on a voluntary basis where there is demand. I understand that there was previous discussion between representatives of the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council and the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, and the staff of the latter are very willing to have further

discussions with the Heritage Council, and others, as part of their current review of the curriculum.

### Youth and Cultural Exchanges: Air Travel Tax

**Mr O'Neill** asked the Minister of Education to make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to secure the removal of the air travel tax of £35 per person for youth and cultural exchanges between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and to make a statement. (AQW 699/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** I have been asked to respond to this question as my Department has responsibility for the education and library boards and the Youth Council, through which the vast majority of youth exchanges are facilitated.

Taxation, including air travel taxes, is a reserved matter and not one for this Assembly. I am aware that there are a considerable number of exchanges between the youth sectors North and South, although I understand that most of the transport is undertaken through the use of minibuses. I will, however, make enquiries into the scale of the problem, and I will write to the Member again.

### Integrated Schools: Board of Governors

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Education if the Department has issued any guidelines on boards of governors within the integrated sector regarding their election and religious composition. (AQW 735/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** My Department issues guidance on the arrangements for the election of parent and teacher representatives to boards of governors of all grant-aided schools, as part of the four-yearly reconstitution exercise.

My Department has not issued any guidelines on the religious composition of boards of governors of integrated schools. The legislative framework for boards of governors of integrated schools is set out in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, and there are no specific requirements in relation to religious composition.

## ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

### Bombardier Aerospace Shorts

**Mr Adams** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all financial assistance committed to Bombardier Aerospace (in relation to Shorts) in the past 12 months; and what steps he has put in place to ensure that such funds will be used to redress the religious imbalances in the employment profile of the workforce.

(AQW 720/99)

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey):** My Department, through the IDB, has made two offers of selective financial assistance to Bombardier Aerospace Shorts in the 12 months to 30 June 2000, totalling £15,055,000, relating to the provision of 1,325 new jobs overall. The company operates a fair employment affirmative action programme and, like other companies in Northern Ireland, is required to recruit in accordance with employment legislation.

**Mr Adams** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what steps will be taken to ensure that young people from West Belfast can successfully access the new employment created at Shorts.

(AQW 721/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** It is a matter for Bombardier Aerospace Shorts to take forward its specific recruitment needs for the expansion announced recently. I understand that it is pursuing a number of initiatives to generate interest among young people in careers in aerospace.

### Employment (District Council Areas)

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the most recent estimates of the numbers in employment in district council areas.

(AQW 744/99)

**Sir Reg Empey:** Estimates of the number of employee jobs below Northern Ireland level are only available from the census of employment, and the most up to date figures relate to September 1997. Employee jobs estimates at this date for district council areas can be found in the table below.

TABLE 1 – NORTHERN IRELAND EMPLOYEE JOBS BY  
DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

District Council Area	Total Employee Jobs <sup>1</sup>
Antrim	19,219
Ards	16,976
Armagh	15,163
Ballymena	23,025
Ballymoney	7,105
Banbridge	8,512
Belfast	170,858
Carrickfergus	7,738
Castlereagh	20,501
Coleraine	19,093
Cookstown	7,381
Craigavon	32,753
Derry	37,327
Down	14,959
Dungannon	14,836
Fermanagh	17,185
Larne	8,143
Limavady	7,391
Lisburn	32,641
Magherafelt	10,835
Moyle	2,901
Newry And Mourne	23,544
Newtownabbey	24,789
North Down	19,026
Omagh	14,555
Strabane	9,002
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>585,458</b>

<sup>1</sup> Figures exclude Agriculture but include Animal Husbandry Service Activities and Hunting, Trapping and Game Propagation.

Source: NI Census of Employment 1997

## FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Civil Service Employment

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the numbers of people employed in the 10 Government Departments and to provide a breakdown of the location of these jobs.

(AQW 743/99)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** The information as at 1 January 2000, including a figure for the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers, is attached.

**NUMBER OF CIVIL SERVANTS EMPLOYED IN EACH DEPARTMENT BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA  
NON-INDUSTRIAL**

District Council Area	Department											Total
	DARD	DCAL	DE	DETI	DFP	DHFETE	DHSSPS	DOE	DRD	DSD	OFMDFM	
Antrim	183					17			17	89		306
Ards	44					17		21	8	58		148
Armagh	61	12		6		20		24	21	75		219
Ballymena	111			4	41	57		77	324	66		680
Ballymoney		3				14			8	42		67
Banbridge						10			8	33		51
Belfast	1441	205		892	1759	644	823	684	1253	4895	183	12779
Carrickfergus					12	15		1		27		55
Castlereagh	60	1		40	64	17			165	203		550
Coleraine	158	9			9	19		293	114	113		715
Cookstown	84			1		13		15	8	37		158
Craigavon	19				54	61		84	297	121		636
Derry	108	3	110	3	136	113	37	46	72	497		1125
Down	33	1			1	28		79	225	115		482
Dungannon	149					30		2	17	87		285
Fermanagh	102	11		2		46		40	48	81		330
Larne	37					15		12		49		113
Limavady	12					15		2	8	44		81
Lisburn	35			156	25	82		20	17	66		401
Magherafelt		8				14			9	64		95
Moyle		2										2
Newry Mourne	76	3				67		14	14	147		321
Newtownabbey						69		21	2	59		151
North Down		34	444		246	73		2	13	70		882
Omagh	144	12			43	41		74	143	96		553
Strabane						22			11	61		94
<b>Total</b>	<b>2857</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>1104</b>	<b>2390</b>	<b>1519</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>1511</b>	<b>2802</b>	<b>7195</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>21279</b>

**INDUSTRIAL**

District Council Area	Department											Total
	DARD	DCAL	DE	DETI	DFP	DHFETE	DHSSPS	DOE	DRD	DSD	OFMDFM	
Antrim	40								58			98
Ards	1							14	8			23
Armagh									94			94
Ballymena	36					4			115			155
Ballymoney		6							29			35
Banbridge									18			18
Belfast	76			3	36	2		2	388			507
Carrickfergus								6	25			31
Castlereagh					3	1			9			13
Coleraine	44							13	90			147
Cookstown	17							4	26			47
Craigavon	55					7			190			252
Derry						9		6	38			53
Down	78							14	193			285
Dungannon								3	47			50
Fermanagh	111	2				3		12	116			244
Larne									34			34
Limavady	36							6	25			67
Lisburn	86					6		18	67			177
Magherafelt									39			39
Moyle	1	4							26			31
Newry Mourne						5			103			108
Newtownabbey						7			11			18
North Down			1						94			95
Omagh	95					3			118			216
Strabane									45			45
<b>Total</b>	<b>676</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>47</b>		<b>98</b>	<b>2006</b>			<b>2882</b>

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants employed in each of the 18 Northern Ireland constituencies.

(AQW 748/99)

**Mr Durkan:** The information as at 1 January 2000 for Northern Ireland civil servants employed in Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office, including staff seconded to PANI/RUC and the Northern Ireland Assembly, is attached.

#### NUMBER OF CIVIL SERVANTS EMPLOYED BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA

	Non-industrial	Industrial	Total
Belfast East	5312	102	5414
Belfast North	2557	340	2897
Belfast South	7051	157	7208
Belfast West	1041	2	1043
East Antrim	403	114	517
East Londonderry	894	214	1108
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	709	301	1010
Foyle	1213	63	1276
Lagan Valley	561	177	738
Mid Ulster	289	86	375
Newry And Armagh	600	215	815
North Antrim	810	221	1031
North Down	901	95	996
South Antrim	438	109	547
South Down	550	299	849
Strangford	233	25	258
Upper Bann	797	257	1054
West Tyrone	706	261	967
<b>Total</b>	<b>25065</b>	<b>3038</b>	<b>28103</b>

#### Notes

- 1) Parliamentary constituency could not be determined for 188 staff.
- 2) Figures include both permanent and casual staff.

### Statistics and Research Agency

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what targets have been set for the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in 2000-01.

(AQW 829/99)

**Mr Durkan:** For 2000-01 the following key performance targets have been set for the agency:

- 95-100% of surveyed key public service users of the agency rating the service they received as satisfactory or better, with 55-60% rating it as very satisfactory;
- 95-100% of surveyed users of the agency outside the public service rating the service they received as satisfactory or better, with 55-60% rating it as very satisfactory;
- To produce no fewer than 65 statistical publications and 16 ad hoc research publications during 2000-01;

- 95-100% of NISRA readers rating key publications as satisfactory or better, with 50-55% rating them as very satisfactory;
- To process 98% of postal and personal applications for General Register Office certificates within eight and three working days respectively;
- To prepare for the 2001 census of population by laying the Census Order (Northern Ireland) 2000 and Regulations; to complete development of census field procedures by 28 February 2001; and to complete assurance testing of 2001 census services by 31 March 2001;
- To achieve a minimum 3% efficiency saving.

Full details are set out in the agency's corporate and business plans, copies of which have been placed in the Assembly Library.

### Business Development Agency: Performance Targets

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what targets have been set for the Business Development Service in 2000-01. (AQW 830/99)

**Mr Durkan:** For 2000-01 the following key performance targets have been set for the agency:

- to maintain a level of at least 95% of customers to be satisfied with the services that they have received;
- to maintain a level of at least 95% of customers to be satisfied with the way in which services were provided;
- to achieve levels of efficiency savings in total running costs of 3%;
- to demonstrate, on a notional basis and within the context of service level agreements (where these apply), that the agency would recover the full cost of its operations from its customers; and
- to maintain systems of people development consistent with good human resource practice.

Full details are set out in the agency's corporate and business plans, copies of which have been placed in the Assembly Library.

### HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

#### NHS Pay System: 'Agenda for Change'

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in implementing the proposals contained in the report 'Agenda for Change — Modernising the NHS Pay System'. (AQW 731/99)



**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** Proposals contained in ‘Agenda for Change – Modernising the NHS Pay System’ are currently being developed. They are far-reaching, and full implementation will take a number of years. Considerable technical work is ongoing in a number of working groups on which my Department and the health and personal social services (HPSS) are represented. This involves a great deal of analysis and exploration of the options in connection with the main proposals. Steady progress is being made, but an agreed package is not expected to emerge until later this year. I will then be considering how this is to be implemented in the best interests of the HPSS.

Tá na moltaí i ‘Agenda for Change – Modernising the NHS Pay System’ á gcur chun cinn faoi láthair. Tá siad forleathan agus ní chuirfear i gcrích go hiomlán iad go ceann roinnt blianta. Tá cuid mhór obair theicniúil ar siúl ag roinnt meithleacha agus tá ionadaithe ó mo Roinnse agus ó na SSSP orthu. Tá mionscrúdú agus iniúchadh mór á ndéanamh ar na roghanna a bhaineann leis na príomhmholtaí. Tá dul chun cinn cothrom á dhéanamh ach ní dócha go dtiocfar ar chomaontú iomlán go dtí níos moille i mbliana. Is ansin a bheas mé ag cuimhneamh ar an dóigh is fearr lena chur i bhfeidhm agus leas na SSSP mar chuspóir agam..

### ‘Children Matter’

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps have been taken to implement the 20 recommendations made in the 1998 publication ‘Children Matter’, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 738/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Since the publication of ‘Children Matter’ five new children’s homes have been opened — two in Derry, one in Newry, and two in Belfast. Business cases for a number of others have been received by the Department and are being scrutinised. A private-sector provider has also opened a facility at Killadeas, County Fermanagh.

The four boards have produced a joint plan — ‘Implementing Children Matter’ — for replacing some existing facilities which are considered unsuitable, including the regional centres, and establishing a range of about 28 new homes over a period of five years (2000-01 to 2004-05).

More work needs to be done to create new facilities, and, as I mentioned in the Assembly recently, a task force drawn from the Department and the health and social services boards has been established to ensure that proposals for the development of specific projects are processed as quickly as possible.

Ó foilsíodh “Tábhacht Páistí” osclaíodh cúig theach páistí nua, dhá cheann i nDoire, ceann amháin san Iúr agus dhá cheann i mBéal Feirste. Fuair an Roinn moltaí gnó do roinnt ceann eile agus tá sí á n-iniúchadh. D’oscail soláthraí ón earnáil phríobháideach áis i gCill Chéile Dé, Co. Fhear Manach fosta.

D’fhoilsigh na ceithre Bhord comhphlean “Ag Cur Tábhacht Páistí i bhFeidhm” d’athshuíomh roinnt áiseanna atá anois ann a shíltear mí-oiriúnach, ina measc na hIonaid Réigiúnacha, agus do bhunú thart fá 28 dteach nua thar tréimhse 5 bliana ó 2000-01 go dtí 2004-05.

Tá níos mó oibre de dhíth le háiseanna nua a dhéanamh agus, mar a luaigh mé sa Tionól ar an mallaibh, bunaíodh tascfhórsa de dhaoine ón Roinn agus ó na Boird Shláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh lena chinntiú go reachtaítear moltaí d’fhorbairt na dtionscadal sainiúil a ghaiste agus is féidir.

### Occupational Therapy

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current position in regard to waiting times for occupational therapy assessments, and to give an indication of the funding needed to implement the assessments. (AQW 740/99)

**Ms de Brún:** At the end of March 2000 there were almost 11,000 people waiting for an occupational therapy assessment. Of these, 56% were waiting more than three months. Funding of implementation of the assessments is a matter for the Department for Social Development and the Housing Executive.

Ag deireadh mí an Mhárta 2000 bhí beagnach 11,000 duine ag fanacht le measúnú Teiripe Saothair. Bhí 56% díobh seo ag fanacht le 3 mhí. Baineann maoiniú chur i bhfeidhm na measúnuithe leis an Roinn Forbartha Sóisialta agus leis an Fheidhmeannas Tithíochta.

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a timetable for action in relation to the lack of occupational therapy assessments in Northern Ireland, and to make a statement. (AQW 741/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Health and social services boards and trusts are responsible for ensuring that occupational therapy provision is adequate to meet the assessed needs of their populations. My Department has highlighted occupational therapy waiting times as a pressure. The four boards have indicated that additional resources will be allocated to occupational therapy services in the current year. At the same time, the Housing Executive and my Department are undertaking a joint review of the housing adaptations service with a view to reducing waiting times. A preliminary report is expected in the autumn.

Tá Boird agus Iontaobhais Shláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh freagrach as ag cinntiú go bhfuil an teiripe saothair a sholáthraítear sásúil le riachtanais mheasúnaithe a ndaonraí a chomhlíonadh. Chuir an Roinn s'agam béim ar an bhrú a thagann le hamanna feithimh teiripe saothair. Thug na ceithre Bhord le fios go ndáilfí achmhainní breise ar sheirbhísí teiripe saothair an bhliain seo. Ag an am chéanna, tá an Feidhmeannas Tithíochta agus an Roinn s'agam ag glacadh orainn féin comhathbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an tseirbhís oiriúnaithe tithíochta agus an cuspóir atá againn amanna feithimh a laghdú. Táthar ag súil le réamhthuairisc san Fhómhar.

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide information on the difficulties facing disabled residents of Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus and Larne arising from the lack of occupational therapy assessments. (AQW 742/99)

**Ms de Brún:** To minimise the potential difficulties facing disabled people requiring an occupational therapy assessment, priority is given to people coming out of hospital; people living alone and at risk; people living with a carer who is disabled or elderly; and people who are terminally ill. The Northern Health and Social Services Board has provided Homefirst Trust with an extra £115,000 to employ additional occupational therapy and clerical support staff.

Leis na deacrachtaí atá ag daoine míchumasacha measúnú teiripe saothair a fháil a íoslaghdú, tugtar tús áite do dhaoine ag teacht amach as ospidéal; dóibhsean a chónaíonn ina n-aonar agus atá i mbaol; dóibhsean a chónaíonn le feighlí atá míchumasach nó cnagaosta; nó atá ag fáil bháis. Thug Bord Sláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh Thuaisceart Éireann £115,000 don Iontaobhas Baile ar dTús le foireann teiripe saothair agus chléireachais chúnta bhreise a fhostú.

### **Punishment Beatings: Costs of Hospital Treatment**

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will undertake to provide, on a monthly basis, details of costs of hospital treatment of victims of punishment beatings. (AQW 745/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Current systems in hospitals would not readily identify this information, and to establish a dedicated system for the purpose would involve disproportionate cost to the service.

Níorbh fhurasta a d'aithneodh na córais reatha sna hospidéal an t-eolas seo, agus costas díreireach don tseirbhís a bheadh ann dá mbunófaí córas sainiúil leis an chuspóir seo a bhaint amach.

## **HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT**

### **Long-term Unemployment: Effect on Educational Attainment**

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment what assessment has been made of a relationship between low educational attainment and long-term unemployment. (AQW 747/99)

**The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren):** There is a well-established link between low educational attainment and long-term unemployment.

During the Training and Employment Agency's public consultation on long-term unemployment in 1997 it was pointed out that 51% of the long-term unemployed had no qualifications, compared to 22% of those in work.

However, many of the long-term unemployed are well qualified: whilst 51% had no qualifications, 33% were qualified to A level standard or higher.

My Department's interventions are aimed at new entrants to the labour market, to improve their qualification levels (for example, Jobskills), and at those who are unemployed, to help them become better qualified and more job-ready (for example, New Deal).

### **Training and Employment Agency**

**Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment what targets have been set for the Training and Employment Agency for the period 2000-01. (AQW 815/99)

**Dr Farren:** The following targets have been set for the agency:

1. to ensure that those who began Jobskills training in 1998-99 will achieve at least a 68% qualification success rate at NVQ level 2 or above;
2. to increase the number of organisations achieving the Investors in People standard from 329 to 460;
3. to help 15,000 people move from welfare to work;
4. to support 3,000 individual learning accounts;
5. to help 1,500 people with disabilities to gain employment — both directly and from training placements (including New Deal for Disabled People) and 350 people with disabilities to gain places on training schemes;
6. to achieve a score in the range of 350 to 400 points against the business excellence model.

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Paramilitary Flags

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Regional Development what he intends to do to deal with the proliferation of loyalist paramilitary flags on lamp-posts and other public utility posts in the Belfast city area — in particular, Shore Road, York Road, Newtownards Road, Crumlin Road, Ravenhill Road and Donegall Road — and if he will make a statement. (AQW 688/99)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr P Robinson):** I do not condone any unauthorised use of departmental property. My Department's Roads Service will remove any materials, such as flags, that have been erected illegally on its property and are a danger to road users. In other instances, the Roads Service removes such materials only on the advice of the RUC and where there is strong support from local residents. The Roads Service experience has been that to do otherwise is likely to lead to a proliferation of such materials and put at risk the safety of personnel tasked with the removal work.

The flags on street lighting columns on Shore Road, York Road, Newtownards Road, Crumlin Road, Ravenhill Road and Donegall Road are not a danger to road users and, at present, Roads Service has no plans to remove them.

The flying of flags on other public property not belonging to Roads Service is a matter for the public body concerned.

### Minister: Visits to District Councils

**Mr Paisley** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail for the period since devolution (i) the district councils he has visited; (ii) the dates of the visits; (iii) the subjects discussed. (AQW 726/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I detail below the councils visited, the dates and area for discussion at each.

Council	Date of Visit	Subjects Discussed
Derry City Council	16/12/99	Courtesy call with Mayor and chief officers including Presentation by Members of the City Partnership Board
Coleraine Borough Council	07/01/00	Courtesy call with Mayor.
Fermanagh District Council	11/01/00	Roads Issues including Funding for Maintenance and Capital works. The Major Works Programme and Winter Maintenance.
Belfast City Council	12/01/00	Courtesy call with the Lord Mayor and Chief Executive.
Ballymena Borough Council	02/02/00	Roads Issues including Town Centre traffic management and parking, graffiti on roads and road edges and dualling of the A26 Stage 3.
Limavady Borough Council	12/06/00	Roads Issues including the Limavady and Dungiven bypasses.
Carrickfergus Borough Council	29/06/00	Impact and designation of Carrickfergus within 'Shaping our Future'; various transportation issues; and application of New TSN in the Department and its impact on the Borough.

I have also received delegations from Newry and Mourne District Council to discuss the Newry-Dundalk road, on 1 February 2000; representatives from Ballymena, Ballymoney, Limavady, Coleraine and Antrim Borough Councils, Moyle and Strabane District Councils and Derry City Council to discuss the consultation on the task force on 16 June 2000; and representatives from Lisburn Borough Council to discuss the regional development strategy and the regional transportation strategy, on 3 July 2000.

### Water Supply Disconnections

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many disconnections of water supply due to non-payment of water rates accounts took place at domestic holdings during the period 1 January 1999 to 31 December 1999. (AQW 730/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The Water Service does not meter properties where water is supplied exclusively for domestic purposes. However, some domestic properties also have water supplied for non-domestic purposes, and such properties are metered. An allowance of 200 cubic metres per annum is given for water used for domestic purposes, and the customer pays metered water charges on the remainder of the usage.

There were 20 disconnections during 1999 for non-payment of metered water charges in respect of domestic properties which also had water supplied for non-domestic purposes. Seventeen of these were

subsequently reconnected on payment of the metered water account and a reconnection charge.

Prior to carrying out these disconnections, the Water Service will have written to the customers, on at least three occasions, requesting payment and advising them that their supplies would be disconnected if payment were not made.

### Roads (Ards): Expenditure

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount of financial assistance allocated to the Department of the Environment Roads Service for work completed in the Ards Borough area in each of the last 10 years.

(AQW 733/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The table below shows the expenditure incurred by my Department's Road Service in the Ards borough area during the 10-year period 1989-90 to 1998-99.

#### EXPENDITURE ON ROADS (ACTUAL CASH PRICES)

Type of Works	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99
	£K	£K	£K	£K	£K	£K	£K	£K	£K	£K
Capital Works	459	1,101	472	792	612	558	576	598	584	645
Maintenance	2,125	2,197	2,120	1,923	2,447	2,925	2,607	2,530	2,091	2,314

### Translink Bus Fleet

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to upgrade the fleet of Translink buses operated by Ulsterbus.

(AQW 736/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The aim of the Department for Regional Development is that Translink should replace vehicles as they reach their target replacement age — 12 years for coaches, and 18 years for buses. In April of this year the Department agreed to provide Translink with a bus grant of £1.7m in 2000-01 to cover 50% of the cost of new buses. This should help Translink to purchase about 28 new vehicles, which it has advised are likely to be directed towards the Ulsterbus fleet. However, Translink will continue to have to operate buses that have passed their target replacement age even when these new buses have been purchased. I am therefore seeking additional resources in this year's spending review to enable my Department to assist Translink to purchase sufficient new buses to enable it to take out of service all vehicles which have reached their target replacement age.

### Roads Service Performance Targets

**Mr Watson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what targets have been set for the Roads Service in 2000-01.

(AQW 817/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The following performance targets have been set for the Roads Service for 2000-01:

1. to maintain expenditure within cash limits and to approved budgets;
2. to maintain the motorway network so that at least 85% has a residual life of more than five years;
3. to maintain the trunk road network so that at least 75% has a residual life of more than five years;
4. to maintain the condition of other roads so that the overall road condition index does not exceed 85;
5. to reduce by 40% the total number of injury accidents occurring at treated sites over the three years following the works;
6. to achieve 85% of major works schemes milestones;
7. to ensure that at least 97% of street lights are working;
8. to repair 93% of defects over 50 mm deep in urban areas within three working days of detection, and 100% before the next inspection;
9. to repair 93% of defects over 50 mm deep in rural areas within 10 working days of detection and 100% before the next inspection;
10. to respond to 95% of serious traffic signal faults within four hours in Greater Belfast and within one working day elsewhere;
11. to reply to 90% of written enquiries within 15 working days;
12. to deal with 100% of requests for information under the open government code within 20 working days;
13. to deal with 95% of informal complaints about the level of service within one working day;
14. to acknowledge 95% of formal complaints within three working days and provide a response to 95% within 15 working days;
15. the unit cost of managing the road network to be 2% lower, in real terms, than the 1999-2000 out-turn figure;
16. to undertake best-value service reviews of 20% of the services that we provide (100% in five years);
17. to increase EFQM excellence model corporate score to over 400.

The targets are included in the Roads Service's 2000-01 business plan, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

### Water Service Performance Targets

**Mr Watson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what targets have been set for the Water Service in 2000-2001.

(AQW 818/99)



**Mr P Robinson:** The following performance targets have been set for Water Service for 2000-01:

1. to achieve 98.2% compliance with drinking water standards set in the Water Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994;
2. to achieve 80% compliance with the waste-water treatment works discharge standards set by the Environment and Heritage Service;
3. to reduce total losses from the water distribution system by 13 million litres per day;
4. to ensure that fewer than 0.8% of properties experience unplanned interruptions to water supplies lasting more than 12 hours;
5. to issue substantive replies to 90% of written complaints within 15 working days of receipt;
6. to deliver water at a unit cost of 65p per cubic metre;
7. to treat waste-water at a unit cost of 62p per cubic metre;
8. to maintain expenditure within cash limits and to approved budget plans;
9. to achieve efficiency gains of 3% on running costs expenditure.

The above key performance targets include a new target on leakage reduction, which has been added to the framework document.

The targets are included in the Water Service's 2000-01 business plan, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

information, which is collected on a financial year basis, can only be provided as follows:

For part (a), the information is not held by postcode. However, Table 1 provides the information by housing district.

For part (b), for applications for A1(I) status the information is not held by month. Table 2 provides information on an annual basis, except for the current year, which has not yet been collated. For applications for the scheme for the purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED), Table 3 provides the information in the format requested.

For parts (c) and (d) (SPED new applications and SPED applications accepted respectively), the information is not held by postcode, and the information by district office from 1994 to 31 March 1998 is not available. To extract and collate the details in such a format would involve disproportionate cost. Table 4 provides the information in the required format from 1 April 1998.

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Special Purpose Evacuation Dwellings Scheme

**Mr Adams** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) the number of individuals or families on Northern Ireland Housing Executive waiting lists with A1(I) status by housing district and post code for the current year and each of the years from 1994 to 1999; (b) the number of applications for A1(I) status, and new applications to the special purchase evacuation dwellings scheme on a monthly basis from 1994 to the present; (c) the total number of house owners by housing district and post code who have applied to the special purchase evacuation dwellings scheme for the current year and for each of the years from 1994 to 1999; (d) the total number of successful applications to the special purchase evacuation dwellings scheme between 1994 and the present which have qualified (or have been approved) for the special purchase evacuation dwellings scheme, by housing district and post code.

(AQW 718/99)

**The Minister for Social Development (Mr Dodds):** This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and the chief executive has advised me that

**TABLE 1: APPLICATIONS FOR REHOUSING AWARDED A1 PRIORITY STATUS ON GROUNDS OF INTIMIDATION BY HOUSING EXECUTIVE DISTRICT OFFICE**

District Office	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
Belfast1	7	12	14	1	15
Belfast2	18	16	3	2	19
Belfast3	7	18	9	1	9
Belfast4	10	31	33	6	15
Belfast5	15	13	12	0	1
Belfast6	8	53	50	27	16
Belfast7	41	35	36	25	42
<b>Belfast Area</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>117</b>
Bangor	8	5	8	0	3
Newtownards	16	8	8	0	2
Castlereagh	11	11	10	1	6
Lisburn	7	13	9	3	4
Dairyfarm	8	13	6	1	8
Downpatrick	6	4	4	2	1
<b>South-East Area</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>
Banbridge	0	2	3	0	1
Newry	0	0	5	0	2
Armagh	4	4	2	4	3
Brownlow	3	6	2	1	1
Portadown	1	12	2	1	3
Dungannon	1	1	1	0	0
Fermanagh	0	1	3	1	1
<b>South Area</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>
Ballymena	7	10	10	0	8
Antrim	1	4	11	5	5
Newtownabbey1	8	13	13	5	4
Newtownabbey2	3	12	9	5	7
Carrickfergus	4	15	9	4	2
Larne	10	8	2	2	3
Ballycastle	0	0	7	0	1
Ballymoney	1	0	6	1	1
Coleraine	5	5	1	0	4
<b>North-East Area</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>35</b>
Waterloo Place	6	13	4	2	0
Waterside	8	15	21	3	2
Collon Tce	7	5	8	1	0
Limavady	3	2	5	1	0
Magherafelt	0	2	0	0	0
Strabane	8	4	2	1	1
Omagh	3	1	2	0	0
Cookstown	3	2	0	0	0
West Area	38	44	42	8	3
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>190</b>

**TABLE 2: NUMBER OF A1 APPLICATIONS BY YEAR**

Year	Number
1999/2000	877
1998/1999	1,736
1997/1998	1,775
1996/1997	1,647
1995/1996	1,028
1994/1995	1,072

**TABLE 3: SCHEME FOR THE PURCHASE OF EVACUATED DWELLINGS – APPLICATIONS 1994 – TO DATE BY MONTH**

	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01
April	10	7	6	8	10	19	11
May	21	6	5	8	17	14	7
June	19	4	6	13	9	21	15
July	12	12	44	32	76	19	
August	17	10	30	9	24	15	
September	12	8	23	18	34	18	
October	14	4	22	13	24	8	
November	5	7	6	10	13	14	
December	3	3	12	9	9	3	
January	6	2	8	12	4	7	
February	6	10	11	12	16	7	
March	7	11	6	15	17	13	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>158</b>	

**TABLE 4: SCHEME FOR THE PURCHASE OF EVACUATED DWELLINGS BY HOUSING EXECUTIVE DISTRICT OFFICE**

District Office	Applications Received					
	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000 to date			
Belfast 1	2	1	3	2	0	0
Belfast 2	7	5	2	1	0	0
Belfast 4	24	18	16	7	3	2
Belfast 5	2	2	0	0	1	0
Belfast 6	8	6	11	8	1	1
Belfast 7	1	0	5	3	3	2
Bangor	9	7	6	5	2	2
Newtownards	3	2	6	4	0	0
Castlereagh	5	4	5	3	1	1
Lisburn	7	6	3	2	2	1
Banbridge	4	3	1	1	0	0
Armagh	10	10	7	5	0	0
Lurgan/Br	44	34	9	2	3	0
Portadown	27	18	11	5	2	0
Dungannon	3	1	2	1	0	0
Fermanagh	3	3	2	2	0	0
Ballymena	8	8	6	4	1	1
Antrim	19	12	22	15	4	2
N'abbey 1	7	7	5	5	1	0
N'abbey 2	5	3	4	4	2	2
Carrickfergus	26	24	8	8	1	0
Larne	4	3	7	7	3	1
Ballymoney	3	3	2	2	1	0
Coleraine	4	4	2	1	1	0
Derry 1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Derry 2	12	11	1	0	0	0
Limavady	1	1	1	1	0	0
Magherafelt	2	1	3	3	0	0
Strabane	0	0	4	4	0	0
Omagh	1	1	2	2	1	1
Cookstown	1	0	2	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>

## Housing Wait List

**Mr Adams** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the numbers of those on the housing waiting list by homelessness category, housing district and waiting time. (AQW 719/99)

**Mr Dodds:** This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and the chief executive has advised me that it is not possible to list those on the waiting list by homeless category, because once accepted as homeless they are then only categorised as A1 priority. However, most people with A1 priority will have gained that status after being accepted as homeless. Table 1 shows the numbers who presented as homeless according to the reason they gave at that time. Table 2 gives the numbers awarded A1 priority status for each Housing Executive district office.

The number of those on the waiting list with A1 priority status, according to the length of time on the list, cannot be provided at this time. However, the chief executive of the Housing Executive will provide this information directly to Mr Adams when it is available.

**TABLE 1: NUMBERS ON THE WAITING LIST BY REASON OF CLAIMING HOMELESSNESS**

Reasons Given For Presenting as Homeless	Numbers 1999/2000
Sharing Breakdown/family Dispute	2,964
Marital Relationship Breakdown	1,570
Domestic Violence	590
Loss of Rented Accommodation	1,249
No Accommodation in Northern Ireland	1,564
Intimidation	877
Accommodation not Reasonable	230
Release from Hospital/Prison/ Other Institution	268
Fire/flood/Other Emergencies	141
Mortgage Default	179
Other Reasons	434
Bomb/Fire Damage/ Civil Disturbance	59
Neighbourhood Dispute	872
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,997</b>

**TABLE 2: NUMBERS ON THE WAITING LIST BY HOUSING EXECUTIVE DISTRICT OFFICE**

Office Name	Number
Belfast 1	622
Belfast 2	289
Belfast 3	305
Belfast 4	118
Belfast 5	46
Belfast 6	262
Belfast 7	363
<b>Belfast Area</b>	<b>2,005</b>
Bangor	45
Newtownards	54
Castlereagh	149
Lisburn	86
Dairyfarm	377
Downpatrick	188
<b>South-East Area</b>	<b>899</b>
Banbridge	12
Newry	59
Armagh	17
Brownlow	28
Portadown	6
Dungannon	16
Fermanagh	30
<b>South Area</b>	<b>168</b>
Ballymena	76
Antrim	63
Newtownabbey 1	41
Newtownabbey 2	33
Carrickfergus	26
Larne	20
Ballycastle	6
Ballymoney	13
Coleraine	36
<b>North-East Area</b>	<b>314</b>
Waterloo place	264
Waterside	56
Collon terrace	175
Limavady	41
Magherafelt	16
Strabane	36
Omagh	8
Cookstown	5
<b>West Area</b>	<b>601</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,987</b>

**Note:** Table 2 includes both first and second preference choices of areas in which the applicant wishes to live.

### **Sale of Housing Executive Dwellings**

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development if funds generated by the sale of Northern Ireland Housing Executive property will be returned to the budget of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and, if so, when this will happen. (AQW 734/99)

**Mr Dodds:** The Housing Executive has always retained 100% of its estimated receipts from house sales. This year, the figure is almost £60 million. This money will be used for capital improvement works to the executive's own estate. As is required under Government

accounting provisions, receipts over and above the estimated receipts have to be surrendered to the centre, where they are at the disposal of the Executive Committee and the Assembly for addressing emerging pressures, including housing. Over the last five years or so, of the additional housing receipts which have been surrendered to the centre to be redeployed to other priority spending areas, about one third have been returned to the Executive. I will be pursuing this question of additional receipts and arguing for significant additional resources for the housing programme to meet housing need in Northern Ireland.



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Thursday 31 August 2000

## Written Answers to Questions

### OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

#### Economic Disadvantage (West Tyrone)

**Mr Oliver Gibson** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to make it their policy to counter economic disadvantage experienced by the constituency of West Tyrone due to rurality, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 580/99)

**Reply:** In view of the cross-cutting nature of the question, the Executive's response has been co-ordinated by OFMDFM.

The primary responsibility for policies to counter economic disadvantage in rural areas such as West Tyrone lies with those Departments which deliver services relevant to rural and industrial development — DARD and DETI in particular.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will continue to support farmers throughout Northern Ireland. In addition, the new rural development programme (2000-06) is currently being negotiated with the European Commission. The aim of the programme will be "To promote comprehensive and integrated action towards the sustainable and equitable development of disadvantaged rural areas and, in doing so, contribute to the economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being of the rural community for the benefit of the whole community of Northern Ireland."

As part of the wider new Targeting Social Need policy, which is designed to combat deprivation — in particular, targeting disadvantaged areas — the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will continue to give priority to Strabane and Omagh District Councils, which have been designated for New TSN purposes. There are 18 IDB client companies, employing 3,672 people, in the West Tyrone constituency. Since April 1995 IDB has offered client companies in the constituency £9.4 million of selective financial assistance to promote or safeguard 766 jobs. A

high-specification 39,000 sq ft advance unit was completed at Doogary estate in Omagh in July 1999, and a 15,000 sq ft standard advance factory is available at Orchard Road, Strabane. There are currently 681 LEDU-supported businesses trading in the West Tyrone constituency, and over the last three years LEDU has committed over £3 million to the area. LEDU also actively works with the Enterprising West Partnership, the delivery agent for the business start programme in the western region.

#### Assembly Questions (Cost)

**Mr McFarland** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what is the average cost of replying to Assembly questions since devolution. (AQW 779/99)

**Reply:** No information on the cost of replying to an Assembly question is yet available.

An exercise to determine a range of costs incurred in responding to questions for written or oral answer will be undertaken in the autumn. The findings of this exercise will be placed in the Library.

**Mr McFarland** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what is the cost limit above which it is uneconomical to reply to Assembly questions. (AQW 780/99)

**Reply:** An answer may be refused if the information required to provide it is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. There is no cost limit for answers to Assembly questions, although a figure of £550 is used for guidance, based on the equivalent procedure at Westminster.

### AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

#### Nitrate-Vulnerable Zones

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm that the Government's action plan on the designation of future nitrogen-vulnerable zones will include consultation with farmers in those areas. (AQW 750/99)

**The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers):** The Government's action plan on the designation of future nitrate-vulnerable zones has UK-wide application, and I can only respond in respect of Northern Ireland. If the Member has questions relating to England, Wales or Scotland, I suggest that he approach the territorial agriculture and environment Departments directly.

With regard to the designation of nitrate-vulnerable zones in Northern Ireland, I refer the Member to my answer of 29 June to AQW 737/99.

### Nitrogen Levels

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has received research data results which suggest that with the same level of rainfall nitrogen levels are higher in grassland than in intensively cultivated land. (AQW 751/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** Although my Department has not undertaken a comparison of nitrogen losses between arable cropping and grassland, scientists employed by DARD have carried out research on nitrate levels in grazed grassland, and their findings were reported to me.

We are aware that nitrate, ammonium and nitrate levels in drainage water from grazed grassland can be high. Despite those findings, our research has also shown that the EU maximum admissible concentrations of nitrate, ammonium and nitrate for drinking water were not normally exceeded. For these levels to be exceeded in the drainage water, fertiliser had to be applied to the grassland at a rate well above the maximum laid down in my Department's guidelines on the application of fertiliser and in the code of good agricultural practice for the protection of water.

Consequently, we consider that this research has no implications for my Department's policy on nitrate levels in water. It does not provide any reason to further extend the boundaries of the existing nitrate-vulnerable zones or justification to designate new ones.

### Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in pursuance of AQW 571/99, (i) what are the projected income figures derived from licence fees paid to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission for each of the years 1999-2000, 2000-01, 2001-02; (ii) what percentages of the income are paid to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and to the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources in Dublin; (iii) what percentage of the £431,000 running costs is met by the Government of the Republic of Ireland; (iv) what other moneys are paid by the Government of the Republic of Ireland for the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. (AQW 755/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** The estimates of income derived from licence fees paid to the FCILC are as follows:

1999-2000, £140,000; 2000-01, £160,000; 2001-02, £180,000.

None of this income is paid to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development or the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources. As explained in my letter of 21 June 2000 in response to the Member's earlier query, this income is deducted from the Commission's total financial requirements to establish the balance required to be met by both Departments as joint sponsors of the FCILC.

The £431,000 paid to the FCILC is the contribution of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to the running costs of the Loughs Agency of the FCILC for 2000-01. The Department of the Marine and Natural Resources will contribute £800,000 for the same period.

### Rural Development Plan

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has received any indication of European Commission approval for the Northern Ireland rural development plan. (AQW 762/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** We are still in the process of negotiation on the Northern Ireland rural development plan, as are the other countries of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. There have been some difficulties with the UK and Irish plans for compensatory allowances in the less-favoured areas, but once differences over these have been resolved, there should remain no fundamental obstacles to acceptance of the Northern Ireland Plan.

### Agri-Environment Schemes and LFA Compensatory Allowances

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what are the levels of expenditure on agri-environment schemes and less-favoured areas compensatory allowances in each of the 18 constituencies. (AQW 764/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

### Animal Carcasses

**Mr Dalton** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which statutory body has responsibility for removing an animal carcass from a river; what is the extent of this responsibility; and if no

statutory body exists, what steps will be taken to remedy the situation. (AQW 771/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** Under the terms of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973, the Rivers Agency — an executive agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development — is empowered to carry out such drainage works may as be necessary to maintain a free flow in designated watercourses. The works would include the removal of carcasses and other waste material, but only where these were causing a significant obstruction to flows or where the watercourse involved was owned by the Department.

The agency is not empowered to remove carcasses solely for public health or amenity reasons or from watercourses which have not been designated under the terms of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order for maintenance at public expense.

I understand that district councils have discretionary powers under the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 to remove carcasses which pose a public health risk.

### **Sheep Scab (Organophosphates)**

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans exist to deal with a major outbreak of sheep scab during the time farmers are without organophosphates. (AQW 819/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** No plans are considered necessary to deal with a major outbreak of sheep scab during the temporary suspension of OP dips. OP dips are only one method of treatment for sheep scab. Effective alternative treatments are available, including synthetic pyrethroid dips, pour-ons and injectable products. The Government's decision to suspend the marketing of OP sheep dips is to allow companies to improve container design. Advice from the expert scientific Veterinary Products Committee has been received and is under consideration.

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the total cost to farmers of the withdrawal of organophosphate sheep dip. (AQW 820/99)

**Ms Rodgers:** Since the development of alternative products for the treatment of sheep scab, some farmers have chosen not to use organophosphates. There will therefore be farmers whose costs are not affected at all by the withdrawal of these products. Alternative treatments, such as injectables and pour-ons, are more expensive to purchase but are less labour intensive than dipping. As there are a variety of products available from a wide range of distribution outlets in Northern Ireland, no

information is available on any changes in the pattern of sales following the withdrawal of organophosphates.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Ulster-Scots**

**Dr Adamson** asked the Minister of Education what consultations have been held with Ulster-Scots cultural and language groups to implement the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages; what steps have been taken to fulfil commitments to education in Ulster-Scots required by part two of the Charter; and to make a statement. (AQW 695/99)

**The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):** Northern Ireland Departments have responsibility to observe and implement international obligations in carrying out their transferred functions. Work will be needed to promote and monitor activity by Departments, in line with the Charter and to evaluate and report on progress. My Department is committed to doing so.

I would be very happy to hold consultations with Ulster-Scots cultural and language groups on the implications for schools of the Charter, but so far I have not received any requests for such consultations, nor have any representations been made to me concerning a demand for the provision of education in Ulster-Scots.

### **Nursery and Primary School Provision (Burren and Carrick)**

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Education to confirm starting dates for the provision of a purpose-built nursery at Carrick School, Burren and a new Primary School at Carrick. (AQW 753/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Approval has not been given for a new school or a nursery unit for Carrick Primary School.

The need for additional statutory nursery provision in the Burren and Kilbroney ward cannot be determined until the impact of a new statutory nursery school in Warrenpoint on the overall requirement for pre-school places has been assessed.

The need for a new school for Carrick Primary School will be evaluated in a full economic appraisal of the options for meeting the long-term accommodation needs of the pupils. There is a substantial number of high-priority projects in the school planning lists, and at this stage I cannot say when the appraisal for Carrick Primary School will be completed. The Department is liaising with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools on the programme for economic appraisals in the maintained sector.

### Special-Needs Children: Taxi Transport

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the criteria used to ensure the safe transport in taxis of children with special needs; (ii) the procedures for monitoring the application of these criteria in each board area; (iii) the number of children with special needs who have reported injuries while being transported by taxi in each board area in 1999-2000. (AQW 801/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** All taxi firms must comply with the education and library board terms and conditions for taxi operators, which require that all vehicles must be properly licensed, insured and in a roadworthy condition; that drivers must hold the appropriate licence; that only nominated vehicles may be used and these may be manned only by nominated regular or relief drivers and escorts (if provided by the taxi firms since some are employed by the boards). All drivers and escorts must undergo a criminal record disclosure check in order to comply with child protection requirements. No adults other than the driver and escort (where provided) may be carried in taxis. Escorts may be required to undertake board training. Drivers are expected to meet the parents before the service is provided and to familiarise themselves with the child's disability. Wherever possible, taxi firms are expected to inform parents in advance of a change of driver.

Boards carry out random checks on taxi runs throughout the school year in order to verify that taxi firms and drivers are meeting their requirements. Schools are expected to report any concerns about transport arrangements to the board transport sections. I am advised by the boards that no injuries to pupils with statements of special educational needs while being transported to and from school were reported in the 1999-2000 school year, although it was alleged by parents that one pupil had been bullied by other children sharing the same taxi. The relevant Board has made alternative arrangements for the pupil concerned.

In 1999-2000 Boards awarded contracts to 393 taxi firms to carry 2,604 children with statements of special educational needs to and from school. Of these, 2,371 did not have escorts.

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Education how many contracts exist with taxi firms in Northern Ireland to transport children with special educational needs.

(AQW 802/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** All taxi firms must comply with the education and library board terms and conditions for taxi operators, which require that all vehicles must be properly licensed, insured and in a roadworthy condition; that drivers must hold the appropriate licence; that only nominated vehicles may be used and these may be manned only by nominated

regular or relief drivers and escorts (if provided by the taxi firms since some are employed by the boards). All drivers and escorts must undergo a criminal record disclosure check in order to comply with child protection requirements. No adults other than the driver and escort (where provided) may be carried in taxis. Escorts may be required to undertake board training. Drivers are expected to meet the parents before the service is provided and to familiarise themselves with the child's disability. Wherever possible, taxi firms are expected to inform parents in advance of a change of driver.

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### Special Educational Needs

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Education to detail how many children with special educational needs (i) are transported to school by taxi in Northern Ireland; (ii) travel in taxis without attendants.

(AQW 803/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** All taxi firms must comply with the education and library board terms and conditions for taxi operators which require all vehicles to be properly licensed, insured and in a roadworthy condition; that drivers must hold the appropriate licence; that only nominated vehicles may be used and these may be manned only by nominated regular or relief drivers and escorts (if provided by the taxi firms since some are employed by the boards). All drivers and escorts must undergo a criminal record disclosure check in order to comply with child protection requirements. No adults other than the driver and escort (where provided) may be carried in taxis. Escorts may be required to undertake board training. Drivers are expected to meet the parents before the service is provided and to familiarise themselves with the child's disability. Wherever possible, taxi firms are expected to inform parents in advance of a change of driver.

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In 1999-2000 boards awarded contracts to 393 taxi firms to carry 2,604 children with statements of special educational needs to and from school. Of these 2,371 did not have escorts.

### **P1 Children: Baseline Assessment**

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education to indicate if benchmarking, aptitude testing and accepted norms are available to all Primary 1 teachers, and if he will make a statement. (AQW 827/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** Primary 1 teachers have always assessed children on entry to school, but the baseline assessment scheme which is currently being piloted is intended to bring what teachers are already doing here into a standard format. The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which has responsibility for the pilot of baseline assessment has recommended that the baseline assessment system should be subject to a further pilot year. All Primary 1 teachers and classroom assistants from schools which participated in the 1999-2000 pilot received training, which was organised and administered by the education and library boards. This will be extended to any Primary 1 teachers and classroom assistants from schools which decide to participate in the pilot scheme for the first time in 2000-01.

### **Average Class Sizes**

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education to indicate the average class size for primary schools in Northern Ireland in year 1997 and year 2000, and if he will detail the average class size, by A-level subject, for the same years. (AQW 828/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The average class sizes for primary schools were as follows:

1996-97	-	24.0 pupils
1999-2000	-	23.9 pupils

Information on A level class size is not collected by the Department.

## **Irish-Medium Schools**

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education to indicate the criteria used for establishing and funding Irish-Medium schools; at what stage these schools receive Department of Education funding; if this includes funding for staffing, books/materials, maintenance, et cetera; and what is the system of management controls for such schools. (AQW 831/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The Department of Education considers statutory development proposals for grant-aided status for Irish-medium schools against a range of criteria, including the availability of suitable alternative provision, the possible impact on other schools, educational effectiveness, affordability, financial implications, and the potential viability of the school, based on pupil enrolment patterns and projections.

The present viability criteria, which are under review, are a minimum P1 intake of 25 pupils, with a long-term enrolment potential of 150 to 175 pupils for primary schools, and for secondary schools a minimum intake of 80 pupils in Form 1, with a long-term enrolment potential of 400 pupils.

As is the case for other grant-aided schools, Irish-medium schools approved for grant-aided status receive recurrent funding, from the effective date of approval, towards staffing costs, books, materials and maintenance needs, under the terms of the local management of schools scheme prepared by the relevant education and library board. The schools are managed by appointed boards of governors in accordance with schemes of management approved by the Department.

## **THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Nitrate-Vulnerable Zones (NVZs)**

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that the process of designating nitrogen-vulnerable zones is based upon sound scientific evidence. (AQW 749/99)

**The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster):** The decision to designate nitrate-vulnerable zones (NVZs) is taken after consideration of data which are scientifically gathered from surface and ground water monitoring and sampling programmes. In Northern Ireland, this data is gathered and analysed by the Department's Environment and Heritage Service. Its NVZ database includes appropriate inputs from the British Geological Survey and the Industrial Research and Technology Unit.

## FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

### Roads Service (Newry/Armagh): Employees

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the numbers of Roman Catholics and Protestants employed in Roads Service depots in Newry/Armagh. (AQW 758/99)

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):** Community background monitoring information is collected for the specific purpose of addressing the extent to which the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) offers and provides equality of opportunity and fair participation to both sections of the community and, where this is assessed not to be the case, to consider the appropriateness or otherwise of taking lawful affirmative action. This is the basis on which staff have been asked for and have provided the information.

Given the sensitivity of community background information, the NICS has had in place, since the introduction of monitoring in 1985, a code of practice, agreed with trade unions, governing the confidentiality of monitoring information and the categories of statistical analyses to be published.

Information about the composition of the NICS is contained in the regular reports of the Service's Equal Opportunities Unit, the most recent of which — the seventh report — contains an extensive range of analyses and was published in April this year. Copies of the report are available in the Library and on the Internet at [www.dfpni.gov.uk](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk).

Given the purpose for which community background monitoring information has been collected, and the fact that the compositional profile of staff working in a particular office or branch is not relevant in informing the development of policies and practices which promote equality of opportunity and fair participation across the NICS, monitoring information is not maintained at the level requested.

### Land Valuation Order

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to conduct a review of the Land Valuation Order, particularly in regard to compensation for property owners affected by the vesting process. (AQW 765/99)

**Mr Durkan:** The primary legislation governing compensation to property owners is the Land Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 1982. This closely mirrors equivalent legislation in Great Britain.

A review of GB legislation was initiated in 1998 with the aim of establishing a more efficient, effective and fairer system for claimants. The review group engaged in this work has yet to produce its final recommendations.

In the circumstances it would not be appropriate to conduct a separate Northern Ireland review, but developments in GB will be closely monitored, and the applicability to Northern Ireland of any proposed changes in legislation will be considered as a matter of urgency.

## HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Beta Interferon

**Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that the drug Beta Interferon will continue to be made available on the National Health Service to multiple sclerosis patients in Northern Ireland. (AQW 752/99)

**The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):** Beta Interferon is currently available here for patients with multiple sclerosis who, taking into account departmental guidance, have been assessed by a consultant neurologist as likely to benefit from the treatment.

The place of Beta Interferon in the range of interventions and services available for people with multiple sclerosis will be reviewed in the light of the recommendations which the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is expected to make this year.

Tá Beta Interferon ar fáil faoi láthair d'othair a bhfuil scléaróis iolrach orthu más rud é, ag féachaint do threoir na Roinne, go measann néareolaí comhairleach ina leith gur dócha go mbainfeadh siad tairbhe as mar chóireáil.

Déanfar athbhreithniú ar ionad Beta Interferon mar chuid den réimse cóireála agus seirbhísí atá ar fáil do dhaoine a bhfuil scléaróis iolrach orthu, agus na moltaí is dócha a dhéanfaidh an Institiúid Náisiúnta um Fheabhas Cliniciúil níos moille i mbliana san áireamh.

### Artificial Fluoridation

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any research carried out by the British Medical Association, the British Dental Association and the British Government on the effectiveness of artificial fluoridation in reducing the incidence of tooth decay. (AQW 754/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Department of Health (London) has commissioned the NHS Centre for Reviews and

Dissemination, at the University of York, to conduct a systematic review of the evidence on the safety and efficacy of fluoride in drinking water. It is expected to report in September. This is a major review of research. Further information is available from [www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/fluorid](http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/fluorid).

Questions regarding any research carried out by the British Medical Association or the British Dental Association should be referred directly to the organisation concerned.

D'ordaigh an Roinn Sláinte (Londain) athbhreithniú cuimsitheach ar an fhianaise atá leis an éifeacht agus sabháilteacht atá ag baint le fluairít sa ghnáthuisce ar an Ionad Athbhreithnithe agus Craobhscaoilte SSN, in Ollscoil Eabhraigh (York). Táthar ag dúil le tuairisc i Mí Mheán Fómhair. Is athbhreithniú an-mhór é seo ar an taighde agus is féidir tuilleadh eolais a fháil ó [www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/fluorid](http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/fluorid).

Moltar go gcuirtear ceist ar bith a bhaineann le taighde de chuid an British Medical Association nó an British Dental Association ar na heagraíochtaí sin.

### Prescription Fraud

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the detection rate of prescription fraud for each of the 18 constituencies.

(AQW 757/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Current systems within the Central Services Agency would not readily identify this information, and to establish a dedicated system for the purpose would involve disproportionate cost to the service.

Níl sé ar chumas na gcóras reatha taobh istigh de Ghníomhaireacht na Lárseirbhísí an t-eolas seo a aimsiú go réidh agus bheadh sé róchostasach don tseirbhís córas chun na críche áirithe sin a bhunú.

### Occupational Therapy

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action has been taken to reduce waiting times for occupational therapy in the Strangford constituency.

(AQW 761/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Health and social services boards and trusts are responsible for ensuring that occupational therapy provision is adequate to meet the assessed needs of their populations. A number of measures have been taken to reduce waiting times, and boards have indicated that additional resources will be allocated to occupational therapy services in the current year. Meanwhile, the Housing Executive and my Department are undertaking a review of the housing adaptations service. A preliminary report is expected in the autumn.

The Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust has introduced measures to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals for occupational therapy assessment and thereby reduce waiting times. These include a revised process for handling heating referrals to reduce the need for occupational therapy domiciliary visits; a streamlining of the arrangements for handling referrals for housing adaptation assessments enabling a greater number of referrals to be processed; and new arrangements for reducing waiting times for people requiring small items of equipment.

Tá Boird agus Iontaobhais Shláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh freagrach as ag cinntiú go bhfuil an teiripe saothair a sholáthraítear sásúil le riachtanais mheasúnaithe a ndaonraí a chomhlíonadh. Glacadh le moltaí le hamanna feithimh a laghdú agus tá sé curtha in iúl ag na Boird go ndáilfear achmhainní breise ar sheirbhís teiripe saothair sa bhliain seo. Idir an dá linn, tá an Feidhmeannas Tithíochta agus an Roinn s'agamsa ag glacadh orainn féin athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an tseirbhís tithíochta oiriúnaithe. Táthar ag súil le réamhthuairisc san Fhómhar.

Tá Iontaobhas Phobal agus Ospidéal Uladh i ndiaidh dul i mbun beart le líon na ndaoine a chuirtear gan ghá le haghaidh measúnú i leith teiripe ceirde a laghdú ar an dóigh gur féidir na tréimhsí feithimh a laghdú fosta. Seo roinnt díobh: tá próiseas leasaithe ann chun déileáil leis na daoine a chuirtear le haghaidh cóireáil teasa sa dóigh nach gá an oiread sin cuairteanna a thabhairt ar dhaoine sa bhaile chun teiripe cheirde a thabhairt díobh; tá feabhas curtha ar na socrúithe a bhaineann le cásanna a láimhseáil ina bhfuil measúnú le déanamh ar iarratais chun tithe a oiriúnú; dá thairbhe is féidir líon níos mó cásanna den sórt sin a phróiseáil; agus tá socrúithe nua ann a laghdóidh na tréimhsí is gá do dhaoine fanacht nuair atá míreanna beaga trealamh uathu.

### Maternity Services

**Ms McWilliams** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in the provision of the new-build maternity unit which underpinned the recent consultation on maternity services and which was referred to in her letter of 10 February to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee.

(AQW 766/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Royal Group of Hospitals (RGH) is currently working on a business case for the new maternity hospital. The trust hopes to submit the business case to my Department by the end of August. Officials from my Department will meet with RGH officials on 7 August to ensure that the case is being processed in a timely and effective manner.

Tá Grúpa na nOspidéal Ríoga (GOR) ag obair faoi láthair ar chás gnó don Ospidéal Máithreachais nua. Tá

súil ag an Iontaobhas an cás gnó a chur isteach chuig an Roinn s'agam roimh dheireadh Mhí Lúnasa. Buailfidh feidhmeannaigh ón Roinn s'agam le feidhmeannaigh ó GOR ar an 7ú Lúnasa le cinntiú go bhfuil an cás ag dul chun cinn go tráthúil agus go héifeachtúil.

### **Ambulance Service: Attacks on Paramedics**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she is aware of an increase in the number of attacks on paramedics in the course of their duties; if the RUC has been asked to investigate the upsurge of such attacks; and to make representations to make attacks on paramedics a specified criminal offence. (AQW 767/99)

**Ms de Brún:** There has been a marked increase in the number of reported verbal and physical assaults on Ambulance Service staff in general since 1998. The Ambulance Service has revised its guidance to staff, in conjunction with trade unions, on handling violence towards employees. The Ambulance Service treats all incidents of violence seriously and encourages prosecution where appropriate. However, the decision to pursue prosecution rests with the individual employee. There are currently no plans to make attacks on Ambulance Service staff a specified offence.

Ó 1998, bhí méadú suntasach ar líon na n-ionsaithe béil agus fisiciúla ar fhoireann na Seirbhíse Otharcharr go ginearálta a tuairiscíodh. Leasaigh an tSeirbhís Otharcharr i gcomhoibriú leis na Ceardchumainn an chomhairle thugann sí dá cuid foirne maidir le láimhseáil foréigin ar a cuid fostaithe. Déileáilann an tSeirbhís Otharcharr le gach tarlúint fhoréigneach i ndáiríre agus molann sí ionchúiseamh más ceart é. Tá an cinneadh faoin fhostaí indibhidiúil ionchúiseamh a dhéanamh áfach. Faoi láthair, níl sé i gceist coir faoi leith a dhéanamh d'ionsaithe ar fhoireann na Seirbhíse Otharcharr.

### **Departmental Publications (Irish)**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the decision to publish departmental documents in Irish has been raised at Executive Committee meetings, and if she intends to continue this policy. (AQW 768/99)

**Ms de Brún:** It is my intention that the present policy will continue and the matter has not been raised at the Executive Committee.

Tá sé ar intinn agam leanúint leis an pholasáí atá ann faoi láthair agus níor tarraingíodh anuas an cheist seo ag an Choiste Feidhmeannais.

### **Drug-Related Crimes (RUC)**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that the Committee established to co-ordinate an anti-drugs strategy will make direct co-operation with the RUC a priority in the campaign against drug-related crimes.

(AQW 769/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The structures agreed by the Executive Committee will ensure effective co-operation between all those with a role to play in tackling drug misuse. The new ministerial group, which I will chair, will ensure that drug misuse is given appropriate priority at Executive Committee level. It will include the Ministers with responsibility for education, social development, and further and higher education. Adam Ingram MP has also agreed to meet with the group on a regular basis. The Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs, which includes senior representatives from a wide range of Departments and agencies, also continues to meet on a regular basis.

Déanfaidh na struchtúir aonaithe ag an Choiste Feidhmeannach cinnte de chomhoibriú cách a bhfuil ról acu le dul i ngleic le mí-úsáid drugaí. Déanfaidh an Grúpa de chuid Airí, ar a mbeidh mise i mo chathaoirleach, cinnte go dtabharfar tosaíocht chuig do mhí-úsáid drugaí ag leibhéal Coiste Fheidhmeannagh. Beidh airí a bhfuil na cúraim a leanas acu, oideachas; forbairt shóisialta; agus breis agus ard oideachas san áireamh. D'aontaigh Adam Ingram BP go mbuailfeadh sé leis an ghrúpa ar bhonn rialta. Cruinníonn An Grúpa Comhordaithe Lárnach do Ghníomhach in Éadan Drugaí, ar a bhfuil ionadaithe sinsir ó réimse leathan Ranna agus gníomhaireachtaí, le chéile go rialta.

### **Clinical Negligence Compensation**

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the amount paid in settlement of clinical negligence claims by each board and trust in each of the last 10 years; (ii) the amount of outstanding liability for each board and trust; (iii) the number of structured settlements in each board and trust; (iv) the sector in which most claims have been lodged.

(AQW 774/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The information on the amount paid in settlement of clinical negligence claims by each board and trust in each of the last 10 years is not readily available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The amount of the outstanding liability for each board and trust is given in the attached Table 1. This information discloses the amounts for provisions and contingent liabilities in respect of clinical negligence as at 31 March 2000.



Table 1

Board / Trust	Outstanding Liability at 31 March 2000 - £000	
	Provision	Contingent Liability
<b>Boards</b>		
Northern HSS Board	6,411	-
Southern HSS Board	15,165	17,781
Eastern HSS Board	35,999	-
Western HSS Board	15,985	-
<b>Trusts</b>		
Belfast City Hospital	4,453	-
Royal Group of Hospitals	5,458	-
Ulster, North Down & Ards	2,800	-
Down & Lisburn	946	-
South & East Belfast	518	-
North & West Belfast	238	-
Craigavon & Banbridge	77	78
Craigavon Area	1,755	-
Newry & Mourne	1,043	1,109
Green Park	381	-
Mater	2,438	678
Causeway	1,074	384
NI Ambulance Service	-	-
Homefirst	19	20
Foyle	156	-
Sperrin Lakeland	603	579
Armagh & Dungannon	308	413
Altnagelvin	1,406	2,352
United Hospitals	3,078	1,064
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,311</b>	<b>24,458</b>

The above figures have been extracted from the 1999-2000 annual accounts of HSS boards and trusts.

Two structured settlements have been entered into as at 31 March 2000. Both have occurred in the Western Health and Social Services Board area.

The speciality in which most claims have been lodged is obstetrics.

Níl an t-eolas ar an mhéid a íocadh ag gach Bord agus Iontaobhas le 10 mbliana anuas as socrúithe ar éilimh fhaillí chliniciúla ar fáil faoi láthair sa leagan amach a iarradh agus ní rabhthas ábalta iad a fháil ach ar chostas díreireach.

Tá méid an fhiachais gan íoc do gach Bord agus Iontaobhas i Tábla 1 thíos. Tugann an t-eolas seo le fios na suimeanna d' fhorálacha agus d' fhiachais theagmhasacha maidir le faillí cliniciúil ag an 31ú Márta 2000.

Tábla 1

Bord / Iontaobhas	Fiachas gan íoc ag an 31ú Márta 2000 - £000	
	Foráil	Fiachas Teagmhasach
<b>Boird</b>		
Bord SSS Tuaisceartach	6,411	-
Bord SSS Deisceartach	15,165	17,781
Bord SSS Oirthearach	35,999	-
Bord SSS Iartharach	15,985	-
<b>Iontaobhais</b>		
Ospidéal Chathair Bhéal Feirste	4,453	-
Grúpa Ríoga na nOspidéal	5,458	-
Ulaídh, An Dún Thuaidh agus Aird	2,800	-
An Dún agus Lios na gCearrbhach	946	-
Béal Feirste Theas agus Thoir	518	-
Béal Feirste Thuaidh agus Thiar	238	-
Craigavon agus Droichead na Banna	77	78
Ceantar Craigavon	1,755	-
An tIúr agus na Beanna Boirche	1,043	1,109
An Pháirc Ghlas	381	-
An tOspidéal Máithreachais	2,438	678
Ospidéal an Chlocháin	1,074	384
Seirbhís Otharcharr TÉ	-	-
Homefirst	19	20
An Feabhal	156	-
Sliabh Speirín	603	579
Ard Mhacha agus Dún Geanainn	308	413
Alt na nGealbhán	1,406	2,352
Ospidéil Aontaithe	3,078	1,064
<b>Iomlán</b>	<b>100,311</b>	<b>24,458</b>

Glacadh na figiúirí thuasluaite ó chuntais bhliaintiúla 1999/2000 Bhoird agus Iontaobhais SSS.

Rinneadh dhá shocrú struchtútha faoin 31ú Márta 2000. Tharla an dá shocrú i gceantar an Bhoird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta Thiar.

Ba i gCráimhseachas a cuireadh isteach bunús na n-éileamh.

## Incontinence

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent on the management of incontinence by each board in the last year; and if she will undertake to introduce across Northern Ireland the incontinence programme developed in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area. (AQW 775/99)

**Ms de Brún:** It is not possible to detail the amount spent by each health and social services board on the management of incontinence last year. Effective

continence services comprise a broad range of hospital, family practitioner and community-health treatments and prescribing, combined with counselling and aftercare. A combined total of £3.0 million is spent each year, by all boards, on continence products.

I am aware of the Eastern Board's excellent continence initiative to promote a positive profile of continence issues and improve the range of supports for individuals and carers of all ages in the community. There are also excellent examples of good practice by other boards and trusts.

It is for each health and social services board to commission continence services appropriate to the assessed needs of its resident population. In commissioning these services, boards are expected to have regard to the recommendations of the Department's Central Nursing Advisory Committee 1995 report on the review of continence services. I would also expect boards to share their experience of best practice in developing continence services.

Ní féidir mionchuntas a thabhairt ar na suimeanna a chaith gach Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta ar bhainistíocht neamhchoinneálachta anuraidh. Tá seirbhísí coinneálachta éifeachtúla comhdhéanta de réimse leathan cóireálacha ospidéil, lia teaghlaigh agus sláinte pobail agus ordú chomh maith le comhairliú agus le hiarchúram. Caitheann na Boird uilig £3.0 milliún sa chomhiomlán gach bliain ar earraí don choinneálacht.

Is eol domh tionscnamh coinneálachta ar fheabhas an Bhoird Thoir le próifíl dhearfach cúrsaí coinneálachta a chur chun cinn leis an réimse tacaí do dhaoine aonair agus d'fheighlithe de gach aois sa phobal a fheabhsú. Tá éiseamláirí ar fheabhas de chleachtadh maith ag Boird agus ag Iontaobhais eile ann.

Tá sé faoi gach Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta seirbhísí coinneálachta cuí do riachtanais mheasúnaithe a dhaoine cónaithe a choimisiúnú. I gcoimisiúnú na seirbhísí seo táthar ag súil leis na Boird moltaí Thuairisc Choiste Comhairle Bhanaltrachta Láir na Roinne ar Athbhreithniú Seirbhísí Coinneálachta 1995 a ghlacadh san áireamh. Tá mé ag súil leis na Boird a dtaithí ar an chleachtadh is fearr i bhforbairt sheirbhísí coinneálachta a fhoilsiú.

### Occupational Therapy

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the numbers of patients on a waiting list for occupational therapy in the North and West Belfast Trust Board area and the Down Lisburn Trust Board Area. (AQW 781/99)

**Ms de Brún:** There are currently 2,253 people waiting for occupational therapy in the North and West

Belfast Trust area. At the end of May 1,036 people were waiting in the Down Lisburn Trust area.

Faoi láthair, tá 2,253 duine ag fanacht le teiripe saothair i gceantar Iontaobhas Bhéal Feirste Thuaidh agus Thiar. Ag deireadh mí na Bealtaine bhí 1,036 duine ag fanacht i gceantar Iontaobhas an Dúin/Lios na gCearrbhach.

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans exist to reduce waiting lists for occupational therapy assessment.

(AQW 782/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Health and social services boards and trusts are responsible for ensuring that occupational therapy provision is adequate to meet the assessed needs of their populations. A number of measures have been taken to reduce waiting times, and boards have indicated that additional resources will be allocated to occupational therapy services in the current year. Meanwhile, the Housing Executive and my Department are undertaking a review of the housing adaptations service. A preliminary report is expected in the autumn.

Tá Boird agus Iontaobhais Shláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh freagrach as ag cinntiú go bhfuil an teiripe saothair a sholáthraítear sásúil le riachtanais mheasúnaithe a ndaoine a chomhlíonadh. Glacadh le moltaí le hamanna feithimh a laghdú agus tá sé curtha in iúl ag na Boird go ndáilfear achmhainní breise ar sheirbhís teiripe saothair sa bhliain seo. Idir an dá linn, tá an Feidhmeannas Tithíochta agus an Roinn s'agamsa ag glacadh orainn féin athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an tseirbhís tithíochta oiriúnaithe. Táthar ag súil le réamhthuairisc san Fhómhar.

### Children in Residential Care

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been allocated to implement the recommendations of the Department of Health and Social Services report on residential care, 'Children Matter', and how much it would take to implement its recommendations in full.

(AQW 783/99)

**Ms de Brún:** In 2000-01 a total of £8.5 million is being made available to health and social services boards for children's services, including implementing 'Children Matter'.

With regard to the costs of fully implementing 'Children Matter', the best estimate that can be given at this stage is that capital costs would be in the region of £20 million, with ongoing revenue costs of about £9 million. These costs would be spread over a number of years. It should be noted that these are estimates and that actual costs will depend on options decided upon as

the programme of developing children's residential care is carried forward.

Sa tréimhse 2000/01 tá £8.5 milliún san iomlán á chur ar fáil do na Boird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta i leith seirbhísí do leanaí, agus cur i bhfeidhm "Children Matter" san áireamh.

Maidir leis na costais chun "Children Matter" a chur i bhfeidhm go iomlán, de réir an mheastacháin is fearr is féidir a thabhairt ag an pointe seo bheadh tuairim agus £20 milliún i gceist mar chostas caipitiúil agus thart faoi £9 milliún mar chostas reatha ioncaim. Bheadh na costais seo spréite thar roinnt blianta. Ba cheart a thabhairt faoi deara nach bhfuil iontu seo ach meastacháin agus go mbeidh na costais fein ag brath ar na roghanna a ghlacfar de réir mar a chuirfear an clár i bhfeidhm a bhaineann le forbairt a dhéanamh ar chúram cónaithe do leanaí.

### Children in Residential or Foster Care

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail for each Health Trust the numbers of children in (i) residential care (ii) foster care. (AQW 784/99)

**Ms de Brún:** At 31 March 2000 — the latest date for which such figures are available — the numbers of children in each trust area in residential care and in foster care are as shown in the following table:

Trust	No of Children in Residential Care at 31 March 2000	No of Children in Foster Care at 31 March 2000
Armagh and Dungannon HSS Trust	7	60
Causeway HSS Trust	11	98
Craigavon and Banbridge HSS Trust	9	80
Down Lisburn HSS Trust	22	123
Foyle HSS Trust	48	242
Homefirst HSS Trust	32	283
Newry and Mourne HSS Trust	9	38
North and West Belfast HSS Trust	42	276
South and East Belfast HSS Trust	40	174
Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust	15	103
Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust	29	119
<b>Total</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>1,596</b>

Sa tábla thíos seo a leanas léirítear líon na bpáistí i ngach Iontaobhas atá faoi chúram cónaithe agus altrama

ag an 31 Márta 2000, an dáta is déanaí atá figiúirí mar seo ar fáil:

Iontaobhas	Líon na bPáistí faoi chúram cónaithe ag an 31 Márta 2000	Líon na bPáistí faoi chúram altrama ag an 31 Márta 2000
Iontaobhas SLS Ard Mhacha agus Dhún Geanainn	7	60
Iontaobhas SLS an Chlocháin	11	98
Iontaobhas SLS Chraigavon & Dhroichead na Banna	9	80
Iontaobhas SLS an Dúin/Lios na gCearrbhach	22	123
Iontaobhas SLS an Fheabhail	48	242
Iontaobhas SLS Homefirst	32	283
Iontaobhas SLS an Iúir agus na mBeann Boirche	9	38
Iontaobhas SLS Bhéal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	42	276
Iontaobhas SLS Bhéal Feirste Theas & Thoir	40	174
Iontaobhas SLS Shliabh Speirín	15	103
Iontaobhas SLS Ospidéal & Phobal Uladh	29	119
<b>Iomlán</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>1,596</b>

### Children Order 1995

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Children Order 1995 will be fully implemented. (AQW 785/99)

**Ms de Brún:** All of the substantive provisions of the Children Order 1995 are in force. The Order deals with a very wide range of issues regarding the welfare of children, including the provision of social services and wider court-related matters. With regard to the social services aspects of the Order, it has always been accepted that the legislation provides a broad framework and that implementation is a continuous process.

The term "implementation of the Children Order" is widely used with regard to the funds for the four health and social services boards to enable them to meet the additional demands of the Children Order within the child care system. In the current financial year a further £8.5 million is being made available to the boards for children's services, which will include continuing to implement the Children Order in key areas such as residential and foster care.

Tá forálacha substaintiúla uile an Oird Páistí 1995 curtha i bhfeidhm anois. Déileálann an tOrd le réimse leathan ceisteanna maidir le leas páistí mar aon le soláthar seirbhísí sóisialta agus cúrsaí cúirte coitianta. Maidir le seirbhísí sóisialta an Oird, glactar i gcónaí go soláthraíonn an reachtaíocht creatphlean leathan agus gur próiseas leanúnach atá ann.

Úsáidtear an téarma “cur i bhfeidhm an Oird Páistí” go forleathan i dtaca le maoinithe do na ceithre Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta chun cuidiú leo éilimh bhreise an Oird Páistí a chomhlíonadh sa chóras cúraim páistí. Sa bhliain airgeadais seo tá £8.5 milliún breise á chur ar fáil do na Boird do sheirbhísí páistí ina leanfar ar aghaidh le cur i bhfeidhm an Oird Páistí i limistéir thábhachtacha cósuil le cúram cónaitheach agus altrama.

### Mental Health

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans exist to review the working of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and the functions of the Mental Health Tribunal and the Mental Health Commission.

(AQW 786/99)

**Ms de Brún:** A review of the Mental Health Commission is to be undertaken this year. While there are no immediate plans to review the Mental Health (NI) Order 1986 or the Mental Health Review Tribunal, my Department is monitoring closely developments on proposals for changes to the mental health legislation in England, Scotland and Wales, which will better inform a future review of the Order.

Beimid ag glacadh orainn féin athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an Choimisiún Sláinte Meabhrach an bhliain seo. Cé nach bhfuil sé ar intinn agam athbhreithniú láithreach a dhéanamh ar an Ord Sláinte Meabhrach (TÉ) nó ar an Bhinse Athbhreithnithe Sláinte Meabhrach, tá an Roinn s’agam ag coinneáil súile géire ar an chor nua sna moltaí d’athruithe ar reachtaíocht na sláinte meabhrach i Sasana, in Albain, agus sa Bhreatain Bheag a chuirfidh ar an eolas muid agus athbhreithniú eile ar an Ord á dhéanamh againn sa todhchaí.

### Radon Gas

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the level of radon gas in each of the 18 constituencies, and if any deaths attributable to this gas have been recorded.

(AQW 787/99)

**Ms de Brún:** In May 1999 the Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment published a report showing the risk from radon gas in

private dwellings here. The report, based on some 16,000 measurements in private dwellings, shows the level of risk in each 5 km square in the Province. Information is also provided by postcode and by district council area, but is not available by constituency boundary.

It is not possible to identify precise numbers of deaths attributable specifically and solely to radon gas. In the report of the Cancer Registry 1993-95 it is stated that over 90% of all lung cancers are caused by tobacco smoking but that exposure to radon must also be considered a risk factor.

The report on radon in dwellings includes an estimated value for the number of deaths caused by exposure to radon in dwellings, calculated by the National Radiological Protection Board. This figure is 60 deaths per year — about 7% of the total lung cancer deaths here annually.

Foilsíodh tuairisc ag Seirbhísí Timpeallachta agus Oidhreacht de chuid Roinn na Timpeallachta i Mí na Bealtaine 1999 a léirigh baol an Radóin i gcónaithe príobháideacha sa Tuaisceart. Rinneadh tomhais ar 16,000 cónaí príobháideach agus léirítear leibhéil an bhaoil in achan 5km cearnach sna Sé Chondae. Tugtar an t-eolas de réir Cheantair Chomhairle agus chód poist ach níl sé ar fáil de réir na dteorainneacha dailcheantar.

Ní féidir a rá go cruinn cá mhéad bás a thug an Radón féin. De réir Chlárlann na hAilse 1993-95 is é an caitheamh tobac ba chúis le 90% d’ailse na scamhán ach go gcaithfear tionchar an Radóin bheith san áireamh againn nuair a thráchtar ar ábhair bhaoil.

Mar chuid den tuairisc ar Radón in Áiteanna Cónaithe tugtar meastachán ar an bhás a thugann tionchar an Radóin i gcónaithe príobháideacha a áiríodh ag an National Radiological Protection Board. Deirtear gur 60 bás in aghaidh na bliana atá ann – thart faoi 7% d’iomlán na mbás a thugann ailse na scamhán anseo gach bliain.

### Children in Residential Care

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in view of the additional 110 residential care places recommended in the DHSS report ‘Children Matter’, to detail (i) the total number of places now required; (ii) how many are required in each trust area; (iii) how much funding has been allocated in each trust area.

(AQW 790/99)

**Ms de Brún:** In ‘Implementing “Children Matter”’ — a joint plan drawn up by the four health and social services boards — the estimated total number of required residential child care places was 453. This includes differentiated and specialised provision and



facilities which may be run by voluntary or private bodies. The joint plan was drawn up at board level, and it is not possible to break the figure down into requirements for each trust area. Revenue funds are not allocated by the Department to trusts, which earn all their income through contracts with commissioners of care, including health and social services boards. Capital funds for new homes are allocated as and when business cases for the investment are cleared.

Sa chomhphlean “Ag Cur Tábhacht Páistí i bhFeidhm”, a dréachtaíodh ag na ceithre Bhord Sláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh, measadh gurbh é 453 an líon iomlán d’áiteanna cónaitheacha do pháistí faoi chúram a bhí a dhíth. Cuireann sé seo soláthar áiseanna idirdhealaithe agus sainiúla san áireamh maille le háiseanna a d’fhéadfadh a bheith á reachtáil ag comhlachtaí deonacha nó príobháideacha. Dréachtaíodh an comhphlean seo ag leibhéal Boird agus ní féidir an figiúr seo a bhriseadh síos ina riachtanais do gach cheantar Iontaobhais faoi leith. Ní dháileann an Roinn cistí ioncaim ar Iontaobhais a shaothraíonn a gcuid ioncaim trí chonarthaí le coimisinéirí cúraim, na Boird Shláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh san áireamh. Dáiltear maoiniú caipitil do thithe nua a luaithe is a ghactar leis na cásanna gnó don infheistíocht.

### Secure Accommodation for Children

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many secure accommodation beds there are in each board area. (AQW 791/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Secure accommodation for children who are looked after by HSS trusts is provided in one regional facility. This is located at the Lakewood Centre in Bangor and provides eight secure places for young people. The four health and social services boards each contract with Lakewood for a share of the places. Under these arrangements, the Eastern Board has three places, the Western Board two, the Northern Board two, and the Southern Board one. The Department has provided the capital resources for the provision of a second secure unit at the Lakewood site. Boards have agreed to purchase up to eight places in the new secure unit which is due to come into operation in the next few months.

Tá an chóiríocht dhaingean do leanaí atá faoi chúram na nIontaobhas SSS á chur ar fáil in aon áit réigiúnach amháin. Tá sí suite in Ionad Lakewood i mBeannchar agus tá cóiríocht dhaingean ar fáil d’ochtar daoine óga ann. Déanann gach ceann de na ceithre Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta conradh le Lakewood le sciar den chóiríocht don ochtar a fháil. Faoi na socrúithe seo tá trí áit chóiríochta ag Bord an Oirthir, dhá áit ag Bord an Iarthair, dhá áit ag Bord an Tuaiscirt agus áit amháin

ag Bord an Deiscirt. Tá an Roinn i ndiaidh acmhainní caipitiúla a chur ar fáil chun an dara haonad daingean a sholáthar ag Lakewood. Tá na Boird i ndiaidh aontú go gceannóidh siad suas le 8 n-áit chóiríochta san aonad daingean nua seo a bheas in úsáid i gceann cúpla mí.

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children are currently waiting for secure accommodation places in each board area. (AQW 792/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The number of children waiting for a secure accommodation place in each health and social services board area will vary from time to time. At 14 July, there were approximately 15 children for whom secure accommodation would be the preferred placement option — seven in the Eastern Board area; four in the Northern Board area; two in the Western Board area; and two in the Southern Board area.

Athróidh líon na bpáistí a bheas ag fanacht ar áiteanna cóiríochta daingne i ngach Bord Sláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh ó am go ham. Ag an 14 Iúil, bhí thart fá 15 pháiste ann arbh í cóiríocht daingean an rogha áite ab’fhearr dóibh lena chur ann; 7 sa Bhord Oirthearach, 4 sa Bhord Tuaisceartach, 2 sa Bhord Iartharach agus 2 sa Bhord Deisceartach.

### Children in Care

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children are currently in care in each board area. (AQW 793/99)

**Ms de Brún:** At 31 March 2000 — the latest date for which such figures are available — the numbers of children in care, according to type of care, in each board area are as shown in the following table:

	Eastern Board	Northern Board	Southern Board	Western Board	Total
In residential care	133	43	25	63	264
In foster care	692	381	178	345	1,596
Placed with family	208	118	57	88	471
Other	43	14	15	11	83
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,076</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>2,414</b>

Ag an 31ú Márta 2000, an dáta is déanaí lena bhfuil figiúirí mar seo ar fáil, léirítear sa tábla seo thíos líon na bpáistí atá faoi chúram, de réir an tsóirt chúraim, i ngach ceantar Boird.

	Bord Oirthearach	Bord Tuaisceartach	Bord Deisceartach	Bord Iartharach	Iomlán
Faoi chúram cónaitheach	133	43	25	63	264
Faoi chúram altrama	692	381	178	345	1,596
Curtha le teaghlach	208	118	57	88	471
Eile	43	14	15	11	83
<b>IOMLÁN</b>	<b>1,076</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>2,414</b>

### Children in Residential Care

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children are waiting for residential care beds in each board area.

(AQW 794/99)

**Ms de Brún:** At 12 May 2000 — the latest date for which such figures are available — the numbers of children awaiting placement in residential children's homes in each health and social services board area are shown in the following table:

Eastern Board	Northern Board	Southern Board	Western Board	Total
24	15	8	30	77

Ag an 12ú Bealtaine 2000, an dáta is déanaí lena bhfuil figiúirí mar seo ar fáil, léirítear sa tábla seo a leanas líon na bpáistí atá ag fanacht ar chóiríocht i dtithe cónaitheacha do pháistí i ngach cheantar Bhord Sláinte agus Leasa Shóisialaigh faoi leith.

Bord Oirthearach	Bord Tuaisceartach	Bord Deisceartach	Bord Iartharach	Iomlán
24	15	8	30	77

### Sunbeds

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how many sunbeds are in use in Northern Ireland; (ii) the current regulations governing their use; (iii) whether evidence exists to link an increase in skin cancer in Northern Ireland with their widespread use. (AQW 800/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Owing to the fragmented nature of the industry, the large number of small operators and the fact that individuals have them in their own homes, it is not possible to detail how many sunbeds are in use here.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has advised that there are no regulations specific to sunbeds. However, anyone who operates a sunbed on a commercial basis here must do so in accordance with the general duty of care imposed by the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978.

There is no evidence available which directly links an increase in skin cancer with the use of sunbeds. However, in 1997 the Department issued a strategy for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of malignant melanoma and other skin cancers here. The strategy recommended that district councils should work for the eventual elimination of artificial tanning equipment and, in the meantime, perform a monitoring role to ensure that operators have appropriate training.

Ó tharla gur tionscnamh é atá scaipthe go maith ina chodanna agus go bhfuil oiread áirithe gnó beag ann agus go bhfuil oiread leapacha gréine sa bhaile ag daoine, ní féidir a rá go beacht cá mhéad acu atá in úsáid ag daoine.

Tá tugtha le fios ag an Aire Fiontair, Trádála agus Infheistíochta, nach ann do rialacha ar leith do na leapacha gréine. Ina dhiaidh sin, más ag úsáid leapa gréine ina ghnó atá duine caithfear a dhéanamh de réir na ndualgas cúraim atá san Acht Sláinte agus Sabháilteachta (TÉ) 1978.

Níl fianaise ar bith ann a thaispeánann cónasc díreach idir méadú ailse craicinn agus úsáid leapa gréine. I 1997 ámh, d'eisigh an Roinn Straitéis um Chosc, Dhiagnóis agus Chóireáil Mheileanóma Urchóidigh chomh maith le hailsí craicinn eile. Mhol an straitéis gur chóir do na comhairlí dúiche obair chun deireadh a chur le trealamh saorga grianga agus idir an dá linn ról monatóireachta a chur i bhfeidhm le cinntiú go mbíonn an traenáil chuí ag úsáideoirí.

### Air Ambulance Service

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if an assessment has been undertaken of the feasibility of an air ambulance service. (AQW 807/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The issue of an air ambulance service is addressed in the report of the strategic review of the Ambulance Service. I also understand that Ards Borough Council, along with other parties, is taking steps to establish a charitable trust to fund the provision of an air ambulance service. Consultation on the strategic review report ended on 30 June, and I will wish to carefully consider the responses made before taking any decisions on how ambulance services can be improved.

Tá ceist na seirbhíse aer-otharcharranna á plé i dTuarascáil ar Athbhreithniú Straitéiseach na Seirbhíse Otharcharranna. Tuigim fosta go bhfuil Comhairle Bhuir na hArda i mbun oibre i gcomhar le dreamanna eile chun iontaobhas carthanais a bhunú le seirbhís aer-otharcharranna a mhaoiniú. Bhí deireadh leis an phróiseas comhairliúcháin faoin Tuarascáil ar an Athbhreithniú Straitéiseach ar an 30 Meitheamh agus beidh mé ag scrúdú na bhfreagraí a fuarthas sula

ndéanfaidh mé cinneadh ar bith faoin dóigh ab fhearr leis na seirbhísí otharcharranna a fheabhsú.

### Alternative Medicine

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policy she intends to pursue in relation to alternative medicines, particularly homeopathy, herbal medicine and Chinese medicine.

(AQW 810/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Science and Technology Committee of the House of Lords has established a subcommittee to produce by autumn 2000 a report on complementary and alternative medicine in the NHS. This report will help inform the wider debate on the use of complementary therapies, and I shall consider the applicability of any recommendations for the health and personal social services.

At present, alternative medicine, including homeopathy, may be provided under the Health Service if doctors consider this to be the most appropriate form of treatment in an individual case.

Tá Coiste Eolaíochta agus Teicneolaíochta Theach na dTiarnaí i ndiaidh fochoiste a bhínnú chun tuarascáil a ullmhú faoi fhómhar 2000 ar an leigheas comhlánach agus ar an leigheas malartach sa SNS. Beidh an tuarascáil seo ina cuidiú chun eolas a chur ar fáil le linn na díospóireachta ginearálta faoi úsáid teiripí comhlánacha agus déanfaidh mé breithniú ar aon mholadh do na Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsanta le fáil amach an mbeidh siad infheidhmithe.

Faoi láthair féadfar leigheas malartach, agus hoiméapaite san áireamh, a chur ar fáil mar chuid den tseirbhís sláinte má tá dochtúirí den bharúil gurb é sin an chóireáil is oiriúnaí i ngach cás aonair.

### Cardiac Surgery

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether she has met with the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association regarding concerns about the lengthy waiting list for cardiac surgery and, if not, to indicate when a meeting will take place.

(AQW 811/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I intend to meet representatives of the organisation in the very near future. I will welcome the opportunity to hear the organisation's views on how waiting times for cardiac surgery can be reduced.

Tá sé de rún agam bualadh le hionadaithe na heagraíochta ar ball. Cuirfidh mé fáilte roimh an deis dearcadh na heagraíochta a chluinstin faoin dóigh ar féidir uaireanta feithimh do mháinliacht chroí a laghdú.

### Health Service Users

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will initiate a survey of health service users in order to ascertain their views on priorities for the delivery of health services.

(AQW 812/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I will be seeking the views of a wide range of health and social services users and staff in determining the way forward for the HPSS. I am currently considering options as to the most effective means of consulting service users. In doing so, I want to ensure broad community participation in shaping our services.

Rachaidh mé i gcomhairle le réimse leathan de lucht úsáidte seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta agus leis na baill foirne le linn domh teacht ar chinneadh faoin dóigh a rachaidh na SSSP chun tosaigh. Faoi láthair tá mé ag cuimhneamh ar na roghanna maidir leis an dóigh is éifeachtaí le dul i gcomhairle le lucht úsáidte na seirbhísí. Agus mé ina cheann, ba mhaith liom a chinntiú go mbeidh réimse leathan den phobal rannpháirteach linn agus muid ag forbairt na seirbhísí.

### SHSSB: Equality Obligations

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps will be taken to ensure that the Southern Health and Social Services Board complies with equality obligations set out in section 75 of and schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, especially with regard to consultation periods, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 813/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The Southern Health and Social Services Board, like other public authorities, is obliged to comply with the Equality Commission's guidelines, which set out consultation requirements.

The board has set out how it will consult in its equality scheme submitted to the Equality Commission, and it will be required to report annually to the commission on the actions taken.

Amhail údaráis phoiblí eile tá iallach ar Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Deiscirt cloí le treoirilnte an Choimisiúin Comhionannais a leagann amach riachtanais chomhairleacha.

Leagtha an Bhord amach an dóigh a rachfaidh sé i mbun comhairle ina Scéim Chomhionannais atá curtha isteach chuig an Choimisiún Comhionannais agus beidh gá air tuairisciú don Choimisiún ar na bearta a rinneadh.

## Cardiac Surgery

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cardiac patients died while waiting for surgery in the year 1999-2000.

(AQW 814/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The information requested is not readily available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil gan stró.

## Neonatal Deafness

**Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if plans exist to introduce a screening programme for neonatal deafness, and, if so, when such a programme will be implemented.

(AQW 816/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The National Screening Committee recently recommended the introduction of a programme for universal neonatal hearing screening. A pilot programme is currently being developed in order to establish the most effective way of putting this recommendation into practice. The results from the pilots, which will run for at least a year, starting this winter, will determine the roll-out of the next stages of the programme.

Mhol an Coiste Náisiúnta Scagtha ar na mallaibh tús a chur le clár scagadh éisteachta nua-naíoch uilíoch. Tá clár píolóta á fhorbairt faoi láthair chun an bealach is éifeachtaí leis an mholadh seo a chur i bhfeidhm a fháil amach. Socróidh toradh na gcláranna píolóta, a bheidh ar siúl go gceann bliana ar a laghad ón gheimhreadh seo, leagan amach céimeanna eile an chláir.

## Hospital Waiting Lists

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how she proposes to reduce the waiting lists for inpatients and outpatients.

(AQW 822/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I issued a framework for action on waiting lists earlier this month. It set out a comprehensive programme of action for the health and social services. Boards and trusts have been asked to bring forward action plans to tackle waiting lists in their areas. To support the implementation of these plans, additional resources of £5 million have been allocated.

D'fhoilsigh mé plean do thabhairt faoi liostaí feithimh níos luaithe sa mhí seo. Leag sé amach clár cuimsitheach gníomhartha do na Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta. Iarradh ar Bhoird agus ar Iontaobhais pleananna gníomhartha le dul i ngleic leis na liostaí feithimh ina gceantair féin a thabhairt chun tosaigh. Le

thacú le cur i gcrích na bpleananna seo, dáileadh £5 mhilliún d'acmhainní breise orthu.

## South Tyrone and Craigavon Area Hospitals

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will consider utilising bed spaces in South Tyrone in a bid to reduce the pressure on bed spaces in Craigavon Area Hospital.

(AQW 823/99)

**Ms de Brún:** On 10 July I announced that I had accepted the Southern Board's decision to temporarily transfer acute in-patient medical services and related services from South Tyrone Hospital to Craigavon Area Hospital. An additional 92 beds will be provided at Craigavon Area Hospital. This includes provision for the services to be transferred and a small additional increase to cope with winter pressures and waiting lists at Craigavon Area Hospital.

I have made it clear that I want to see the remaining services at South Tyrone stabilised and enhanced. I have asked for early progress on the rebalancing of elective day surgery from Craigavon Area Hospital to South Tyrone Hospital, followed by the further development of other clinical services at South Tyrone Hospital.

Ar 10 Iúil d'fhogair mé gur ghlac mé le cinneadh an Bhoird Theas le haistriú sealadach géarsheirbhísí liachta na n-othar seachtrach agus seirbhísí bainteach leo ó Otharlann Thír Eoghain go dtí Otharlann Cheantar Chraigavon. Chomh maith leis seo soláthrófar 92 leaba bhreise ag Otharlann Cheantar Chraigavon. Clúdaíonn seo foráil leis na seirbhísí a aistriú, agus méadú beag le cuidiú le brú an gheimhridh agus liostaí feithimh ag Otharlann Cheantar Chraigavon.

Ta sé ráite go sóiléir agam gur mhaith liom cur leis na seirbhísí i dTír Eoghain Theas agus iad sin atá ann faoi láthair a bhuanú. D'iarr mé tús luath leis an dul chun cinn le hathchothromú leathanta roghnacha le máinliacht lae ó Otharlann Cheantar Chraigavon go dtí Otharlann Thír Eoghain Theas, agus go leanfar le forbairt bhreise ar sheirbhísí cliniciúla ag Otharlann Thír Eoghain Theas.

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what she intends to do to reinstate the services temporarily transferred from South Tyrone Hospital to Craigavon Area Hospital, and if she will make a statement.

(AQW 824/99)

**Ms de Brún:** On 10 July I announced that I had accepted the Southern Board's decision to temporarily transfer acute in-patient medical services and related services from South Tyrone Hospital to Craigavon Area Hospital.



This will be re-examined in the light of strategic decisions on the long-term future of South Tyrone Hospital. Meanwhile, I have taken steps to ensure that the remaining services at South Tyrone Hospital are stabilised and to begin a process of bringing new and sustainable services to the hospital site.

Ar 10 Iúil d'fhogair mé gur ghlac mé le cinneadh an Bhoird Theas le haistriú sealadach géarsheirbhísí liachta na n-othar seachtrach agus seirbhísí bainteach leo ó Otharlann Thír Eoghain go dtí Otharlann Cheantar Chraigavon.

Déanfar athscrúdú air seo ag glacadh san áireamh cinnidh straitéiseacha a rinneadh ar thodhchaí fadtréimhseach d'Otharlann Thír Eoghain Theas. Idir an dá linn, tá gníomhartha déanta agam le cinntiú go ndéantar buan na seirbhísí atá fágtha ag Otharlann Thír Eoghain Theas, agus go gcuirfear tús le próiseas a thabharfaidh seirbhísí nua inbhuanaithe go suíomh na hotharlainne.

## HIV/AIDS

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will outline and list what up-to-date statistics are available with regard to the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 825/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The latest available information on HIV and AIDS by exposure category relates to the period ending 31 March 2000 and is set out in the tables below. The figures exclude those first diagnosed elsewhere but who may now reside here and attend specialist clinics.

Total HIV cases by exposure category to 31 March 2000

Exposure Category	Male	Female	Total
<b>Sexual intercourse</b>			
Between: men	117	-	117
Between: men and women	19	26	45
Injecting drug use	4	3	7
Blood tissue factor or blood factor	19	1	20
Other undetermined	3	-	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>192</b>

Total AIDS cases by exposure category to 31 March 2000

Exposure Category	Male	Female	Total
<b>Sexual intercourse</b>			
Between: men	51	-	51
Between: men and women	6	8	14
Injecting drug use	1	2	3
Blood tissue factor or blood factor	12	1	13
Other undetermined	2	-	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>83</b>

Source: Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre

Baineann an t-eolas is déanaí ata ar fáil ar VED agus ar SEIF de réir catagóra tolgtha leis an tréimhse a chríochnaíonn ar an 31ú Márta 2000 agus é arna leagan amach sna táblaí thíos. Ní chuireann na figiúirí sa áireamh iad siúd a fáthmheasadh in áit eile, a chónaíonn anseo anois agus a fhreastalaíonn ar shainchlinicí.

Iomlán na gcásanna VED de réir catagóra tolgtha go dtí 31ú Márta 2000

Catagóir Tolgtha	Fir	Mná	Iomlán
<b>Caidreamh collaí</b>			
Idir: fir	117	-	117
Idir: fir agus mná	19	26	45
Mí-úsáid instealladh drugaí	4	3	7
Factóir fhíocháin fola nó factóir fola	19	1	20
Eile	3	-	3
<b>Iomlán</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>192</b>

Iomlán na gcásanna SEIF de réir catagóra tolgtha go dtí 31ú Márta 2000

Catagóir Tolgtha	Fir	Mná	Iomlán
<b>Caidreamh collaí</b>			
Idir: fir	51	-	51
Idir: fir agus mná	6	8	14
Mí-úsáid instealladh drugaí	1	2	3
Factóir fhíocháin fola nó factóir fola	12	1	13
Eile	2	-	2
<b>Iomlán</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>83</b>

Foinse: Ionad Faire um Ghalair Thógálacha

## Abortion

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will provide up-to-date statistics on abortion rates in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 826/99)

**Ms de Brún:** I can confirm that for the financial year 1998-99 — the latest complete year for which data is available — a total of 1,602 abortions (spontaneous, medical and other/unspecified) were recorded in hospitals here. This equates to 63.2 recorded abortions per 1,000 live births, still births and recorded abortions.

The latest figures available for the year 1999-2000 show that 1,416 abortions (spontaneous, medical and other/unspecified) were recorded in hospitals here. This figure is provisional and is likely to be an underestimate of the total for the year. It will probably rise as coding is completed in advance of the file being closed in September/October 2000.

Is féidir liom cinntiú don bhliain airgeadais 1998/99, an bhliain is moille ar a bhfuil eolas ar fáil, go raibh 1,602 ginmhilleadh san iomlán (spontáineach, liachta

agus eile/neamhshonraithe) taifeadta in ospidéal anseo. Is ionann seo agus 63.2 ginnhilleadh taifeadta an 1,000 breith bheo, breith mharbh agus ginnhilleadh taifeadta.

Taispeánann na figiúir is déanaí don bhliain 1999/2000 go raibh 1,416 ginnhilleadh (spontáineach, liachta agus eile/neamhshonraithe) taifeadta in ospidéal anseo. Is figiúr sealadach seo agus is dócha gur measúnú róghearr é ar uimhir iomlán na bliana agus go méadóidh sé de réir mar a chríochnaíonn códú sula ndruidfear an comhad i Meán Fómhair/Deireadh Fómhair 2000.

### Hospital Referrals: Guidance for GPs

**Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is guidance available to general practitioners on referring patients to whichever hospital is most convenient. (AQW 832/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The referral of a patient to hospital by a general practitioner is influenced by a number of factors, including the patient's circumstances and condition, as well as the availability and accessibility of services and whether the patient has any preference for a particular hospital, if there is a choice. GPs discuss these issues with patients before making referrals and make use of a number of sources of information, including information on waiting times issued by individual hospitals.

Téann roinnt fachtóirí i bhfeidhm ar sheoladh othair chuig ospidéal ag Lia Ginearálta (LG), ina measc, cúrsaí agus tosca an othair aonair, chomh maith le hinfhaighteacht agus so-aimsiú seirbhísí mar aon le rogha an othair indibhidiúil d'ospidéal ar leith, má tá rogha ann. Pléann LGanna na ceisteanna seo le hothair roimh sheoltaí agus baineann siad úsáid as roinnt foinsí eolais, eolas ar amanna feithimh foilsithe ag ospidéal indibhidiúla san áireamh.

### Hospital Facilities: North/South Agreement

**Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is an intergovernmental agreement in place by which hospitals in Newry and Mourne and North Louth are accredited as places for treatment to encourage residents to access their most convenient hospital. (AQW 833/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Under the Co-operating and Working Together (CAWT) initiative, hospitals north and south of the border already co-operate closely on the provision of some services. Current practical examples of this include formal co-operation between the Ambulance Services north and south of the border and arrangements by which a number of residents in the

North Eastern Health Board area with end-stage renal failure have regular renal dialysis at Daisy Hill Hospital. I can confirm also that Daisy Hill is approved by voluntary health insurance for treating patients from the South of Ireland.

The North/South Ministerial Council established under the Good Friday Agreement has already met on a number of occasions to explore the capacity for cross-border working. The possibility of more structured arrangements being developed to support existing good practice on the ground is being explored.

Faoi scáth an tionscnaimh CAOC (Comhoibriú agus ag Obair le Chéile), atá ospidéal ó thuaidh agus ó dheas ag comhoibriú go dlúth cheana féin ar sholáthar roinnt seirbhísí. I measc na samplaí praiticiúla láithreacha de seo tá comhoibriú foirmiúil idir seirbhísí otharcharr thuaidh agus theas, agus socruithe inar féidir le cónaitheoirí le cliseadh duánach rialta i gceantar Bhord Sláinte an Oirthuaiscirt scagdealú duánach rialta a bheith acu in Ospidéal Daisy Hill. Tig liom a dhearbhu fosta go bhfuil Ospidéal Daisy Hill ceadaithe ag Árachas Sláinte Deonach othair ón Deisceart a chóireáil.

Bhuail an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas a bunaíodh faoi Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta le chéile roinnt uaireanta cheana féin leis na hacmhainní do chomhbair thrasteorann a scrúdú. Tá an fhéidearthacht d'fhorbairt socruithe níos struchtúrtha le tacú le cleachtadh maith ag an bhunleibhéal á scrúdú.

### Hospital Waiting Lists

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps will be taken to reduce hospital waiting lists to at least the United Kingdom national average, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 834/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Our waiting lists are a matter of serious concern to me. I issued a framework for action on waiting lists this month. It set out a comprehensive programme of action for the health and social services. Boards and trusts have been asked to bring forward action plans to tackle waiting lists in their areas. To support the implementation of these plans, additional resources of £5 million have been allocated.

I am also now studying 'The NHS Plan', which was launched in England on 27 July and which includes proposals to reduce waiting times for inpatient and outpatient treatment. I want to establish the extent to which those proposals are applicable to the waiting list problem in the HPSS.

Is ábhar mór imní domhsa iad ár liostaí feithimh. D'fhoilsigh mé plean do thabhairt faoi liostaí feithimh níos luaithe sa mhí seo. Leag sé amach clár

cuimsitheach gníomhartha do na Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta. Iarradh ar Bhoird agus ar Iontaobhais pleananna gníomhartha le dul i ngleic leis na liostaí feithimh ina gceantair féin a thabhairt chun tosaigh. Le cur i gcrích na bpleananna seo a thacú, dáileadh £5 mhilliún d'acmhainní breise orthu.

Tá mé ag scrúdú anois *The NHS Plan* a lainseáladh i Sasana ar an 27ú Iúil agus a chuimsíonn moltaí le hamanna feithimh do chóireáil othar cónaitheach agus othar seachtrach a ísliú. Ba mhian liom fáil amach a mhéad agus is féidir na moltaí sin a chur i bhfeidhm ar fhadhb an liosta fheithimh sa SSSP.

### Hospital Waiting Lists

**Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the number of patients on hospital waiting lists increased by some 2,500 to 47,000 in the three-month period from January to March 2000. (AQW 835/99)

**Ms de Brún:** Under the Co-operating and Working Together (CAWT) initiative, hospitals north and south of the border already co-operate closely on the provision of some services. Current practical examples of this include formal co-operation between the Ambulance Services north and south of the border and arrangements by which a number of residents in the North Eastern Health Board area with end-stage renal failure have regular renal dialysis at Daisy Hill Hospital. I can confirm also that Daisy Hill is approved by voluntary health insurance for treating patients from the South of Ireland.

The North/South Ministerial Council established under the Good Friday Agreement has already met on a number of occasions to explore the capacity for cross-border working. The possibility of more structured arrangements being developed to support existing good practice on the ground is being explored.

Faoi scáth an tionscnaimh CAOC (Comhoibriú agus ag Obair le Chéile), atá ospidéal ó thuaidh agus ó dheas ag comhoibriú go dlúth cheana féin ar sholáthar roinnt seirbhísí. I measc na samplaí praiticiúla láithreacha de seo tá comhoibriú foirmiúil idir seirbhísí otharcharr thuaidh agus theas, agus socruithe inar féidir le cónaitheoirí le cliseadh duánach rialta i gceantar Bhord Sláinte an Oirthuaiscirt scagdhéalú duánach rialta a bheith acu in Ospidéal Daisy Hill. Tig liom a dhearbhu fosta go bhfuil Ospidéal Daisy Hill ceadaithe ag Árachas Sláinte Deonach othair ón Deisceart a chóireáil.

Bhuail an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas a bunaíodh faoi Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta le chéile roinnt uaireanta cheana féin leis na hacmhainní do chomhobair thrasteorann a scrúdú. Tá an fhéidearthacht

d'fhorbairt socruithe níos struchtúrtha le tacú le cleachtadh maith ag an bhunleibhéal á scrúdú.

### Foster Carers: Allowances

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the amount of allowance paid to foster parents for each child fostered in each trust area.

(AQW 838/99)

**Ms de Brún:** It is not possible to provide information on the amount of allowance paid to individual foster carers in respect of each child fostered. All health and social services trusts use a standard scale of rates to determine the amount of allowance. The basic allowances are as follows:

Weekly rate from 1st April 2000

Age Group	Per Week
0 - 4	£60.34
5 - 10	£73.50
11 - 15	£88.20
16 +	£118.02

Extra allowances are payable in addition to the basic rates. Some of these are paid automatically — for example, for birthdays, holidays and Christmas. Other allowances must be applied for by the foster carers. Enhanced allowances are paid for children with special needs — for example, children who are emotionally disturbed or children with a physical or learning disability. Such enhancements are assessed on an individual basis.

Ní féidir eolas a sholáthar ar an méid liúntas a dhíoltar do gach feighlí altrama aonair maidir le gach páiste atá faoina gcúram. Baineann gach Iontaobhas Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta úsáid as scála gnáthrata leis an méid liúntais a dhíoltar d'fheighlithe altrama a shocrú. Seo a leanas na bunliúntais:

Ráta seachtainiúil ón 1ú Aibreán 2000

Aoisghrúpa	An tSeachtain
0 - 4	£60.34
5 - 10	£73.50
11 - 15	£88.20
16 +	£118.02

Díoltar liúntais bhreise le cois na mbunrátaí. Díoltar cuid díobh go huathoibríoch, mar shampla, do bhreithlaethanta, do shaoirí agus don Nollaig. Caithfidh feighlithe altrama iarratas a chur isteach do liúntais eile. Díoltar liúntais mhéadaithe do pháistí le riachtanais speisialta, mar shampla, do pháistí atá suaite go mothúchánach nó do pháistí le míchumas fisiciúil nó

foghlamtha. Measúnaítear liúntais mhéadaithe mar seo ar bhonn indibhidiúil.

**Ms de Brún:** The North and West Belfast HSS Trust does not have a vacant principal social worker post.

Níl folúntas poist do Phríomhoibrí Sóisialta ag Iontaobhas SLS Bhéal Feirste Thuaidh agus Theas.

### Social Worker Post

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if and when the vacant post

### Fostering and Residential Care

(1) HSS Trust	(2) No of Children Waiting to be Fostered	(3) Children Judged to be in Need of Residential Care(1)	(4) Children in Need of Care who have not yet been placed in Residential Care
Armagh & Dungannon	19	9	1
Causeway	10	11	4
Craigavon & Banbridge	14	19	6
Down Lisburn	22	42	15
Foyle	34	58	13
Homefirst	44	42	11
Newry & Mourne	6	11	3
North & West Belfast	14	59	16
South & East Belfast	86	43	8
Sperrin Lakeland	31	22	6
Ulster Community & Hospital	35	30	4

<sup>(1)</sup>The figures in column (3) comprises the numbers of children who are in residential care at present and the figures in column (4) of principal social worker of the North and West Trust will be filled.

(AQW 839/99)

**Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail for each trust the number of (i) children waiting to be fostered; (ii) children judged in need of residential care; (iii) children

Soláthraíodh an t-eolas sa tábla seo a leanas ag Boird Sheirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta le linn na seachtaine a thosaigh Dé Luain 17ú Iúil 2000.

(1) Iontaobhas SSS	(2) Líon na bPáistí atá ag fanacht le haltramú	(3) Páistí a meastar Cúram Cónaithe le bheith de dhíth orthu <sup>(1)</sup>	(4) Páistí a bhfuil Cúram de dhíth orthu ach nár cuireadh faoi Chúram Cónaithe go fóill
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	19	9	1
An Clochán	10	11	4
Craigavon & Droichead na Banna	14	19	6
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	22	42	15
An Feabhal	34	58	13
Homefirst	44	42	11
An tIúr agus na Beanna Boirche	6	11	3
Béal Feirste Thuaidh agus Thiar	14	59	16
Béal Feirste Theas agus Thoir	86	43	8
Sliabh Speirín	31	22	6
Pobal agus Ospidéal Uladh	35	30	4

<sup>(1)</sup>Cuireann na figiúirí i gcolún (3) san áireamh líon na bpáistí atá faoi chúram cónaithe faoi láthair agus cuireann na figiúirí i gcolún (4)



in need of care who have not yet been placed in residential care. (AQW 840/99)

**Ms de Brún:** The information in the following table was provided by health and social services boards during week commencing Monday 17 July 2000:

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Sewerage (Tullyroan)

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans exist to improve the sewerage works at Tullyroan in County Armagh. (AQW 756/99)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr P Robinson):** The need to replace or upgrade the Tullyroan waste-water treatment works is accepted, and a scheme has been included in the Water Service's capital works programme. An appraisal of options is being carried out. This includes the possibility of a new site for the works.

Work on site is programmed to commence in 2001, subject to the availability of funding and the acquisition of any land that may be required.

### Road Schemes (Newry/Armagh)

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the current capital allocation for road schemes in Newry/Armagh. (AQW 759/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The capital resources available to my Department's Roads Service include funds for major and minor capital works. These funds are not allocated on a constituency basis.

In the case of major capital works, funds are not apportioned on an area basis, and schemes included in the Roads Service major works preparation pool have been prioritised following their assessment against a broad range of criteria, such as strategic planning policy, traffic flows, number of accidents, potential travel save times, environmental impact and value for money. In the current year the Roads Service has some £11·5 million available for major capital works.

In the case of minor capital works, funds are apportioned to each of the four Roads Service divisions, which, in turn, suballocate across district council areas. The allocation process is carried out with a needs-based priority approach, using criteria which take account of the length of roads, traffic flows, number of accidents et cetera. Of the £10 million that is available for minor capital works (excluding street lighting and car parks) in the current year, a total of some £820,000 has been allocated to the district council areas of Newry and Mourne, and Armagh.

### Road Safety (Portadown-Armagh Road)

**Mr Berry** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many accidents on the main Portadown to Armagh Road have been recorded for each of the last 10 years

and what steps have been taken to improve safety on this road. (AQW 760/99)

**The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell):** The provision of information in relation to road accidents is a reserved matter. I have therefore asked the Northern Ireland Office to respond directly on this issue.

As regards the steps that have been taken to improve safety on this road, my Department's Roads Service has:

1. completed an accident remedial scheme at the Artabrackagh Road junction in 1996 (this scheme involved the widening of the Portadown to Armagh road to provide facilities for right-turning traffic and the provision of new and improved street lighting);
2. constructed a roundabout at the Legacorry Road junction (Stonebridge) near Richhill in 1996 to regulate traffic movements at this busy junction;
3. completed an improvement scheme at the Sandymount junction earlier this year to improve visibility; and
4. carried out a number of traffic management measures along the route over a number of years, including the provision of edge-of-carriageway road studs to improve visibility for drivers at night, warning signs on the dual section of road near Armagh and bend warning signs near the Cloghan Road junction.

In addition the Roads Service has carried out regular routine maintenance along the route, including resurfacing, winter gritting and the maintenance of signs, verge marker posts, street lighting and roadmarkings, and has engaged consultants to carry out a study of the road to identify the need for further improvements.

### Road Schemes (Capital Allocation)

**Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the current allocation of capital for road schemes in each of the 18 constituencies.

(AQW 763/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** The capital resources available to my Department's Roads Service include funds for major and minor capital works. These funds are not allocated on a constituency basis.

In the case of major capital works, funds are not apportioned on an area basis, and schemes included in the Roads Service major works preparation pool have been prioritised following their assessment against a broad range of criteria, such as strategic planning policy, traffic flows, number of accidents, potential travel save times, environmental impact and value for money. In the current year the Roads Service has some £11·5 million available for major capital works.

In the case of minor capital works, funds are apportioned to each of the four Roads Service divisions, which, in turn, suballocate across district council areas. The allocation process is carried out with a needs-based priority approach, using criteria which take account of the length of roads, traffic flows, number of accidents, et cetera. The table below shows the Roads Service allocation for minor capital works (excluding street lighting and car parks) in the current year across district council areas.

Roads Service Minor Capital Works Allocation 2000-01 (£,000)

DISTRICT COUNCIL	ALLOCATION	DISTRICT COUNCIL	ALLOCATION
Ards	349	Down	412
Armagh	367	Dungannon	426
Antrim	212	Fermanagh	353
Ballymena	283	Larne	125
Ballymoney	181	Limavady	185
Banbridge	297	Lisburn	490
Belfast	1,690	Magherafelt	289
Carrickfergus	78	Moyle	123
Castlereagh	454	Newry and Mourne	455
Coleraine	455	Newtownabbey	566
Cookstown	246	North Down	307
Craigavon	433	Omagh	387
Derry	619	Strabane	234

### Roads Service Property: Flags

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many flags have been removed by the Roads Service from public property under its responsibility in each of the last five years. (AQW 795/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** My Department's Roads Service does not maintain records of the numbers of flags removed from its property. A small number of flags and banners have, however, been removed in recent years. The former where there was strong support from local residents and following advice from the RUC and the latter where they were deemed to be a danger to road users.

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Regional Development what policy he will pursue in relation to paramilitary flags on Roads Service property; and if he will make a statement. (AQW 797/99)

**Mr P Robinson:** I refer the Member for South Antrim to the answer I gave to the Member for North Down, Mrs E Bell, in response to oral question 278/99.

My answer is detailed on pages 181 and 182 of the Hansard for 19 June 2000.

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Suffolk/Black's Road Estate

**Mr Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, in relation to housing in the Suffolk/Black's Road estate, Belfast, (i) how many dwellings have been demolished, (ii) how many dwellings remain; (iii) how many dwellings are unoccupied; (iv) how much has been spent on refurbishment of housing stock, associated landscaping and groundworks.

(AQW 772/99)

**The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow):** When the Housing Executive took over responsibility for Suffolk/Black's Road estate in 1973 there were 544 properties, of which 151 have since been demolished. Currently 393 properties remain in the estate, and 14 of these are unoccupied. Since the 1980s, a total of £2.542 million has been spent on refurbishment of dwellings, and £161,000 on associated landscaping and ground work.

### Disability Living Allowance/Incapacity Benefit

**Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has plans to introduce legislation to enable those who have been refused disability living allowance or incapacity benefit to continue receiving full benefit until the appeal process is concluded.

(AQW 789/99)

**Mr Morrow:** The legislation relating to payment of benefit and appeals in Northern Ireland is identical with that in Great Britain.

There are no plans to introduce legislation to enable those people who have failed to satisfy the conditions of entitlement for receipt of either disability living allowance or incapacity benefit to continue to receive benefit paid in full until the result of the appeal is known. It would be an inappropriate use of public funds to continue to pay benefit once a decision had been made that entitlement should stop.

People appealing against a decision to disallow incapacity benefit may register as available for work, and can qualify for jobseeker's allowance pending the outcome of the appeal. Doing so would not prejudice their appeal.

People who do not make themselves available for work pending the appeal may claim income support, but a reduced personal rate is payable. Income support is made available in these cases in recognition that claimants who do not agree that they are capable of work would not necessarily wish to work, or present themselves as well enough to work, until their appeal had been decided.

### **Housing Executive Property: Paramilitary Murals**

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Social Development what policy he will pursue in relation to paramilitary murals on Housing Executive property. (AQW 836/99)

**Mr Morrow:** I will continue with the current policy whereby the Housing Executive undertakes the removal of these murals.

The Housing Executive's consultation paper 'Towards a Community Relations Strategy' will, in addition, put in place new procedural arrangements to ensure effective delivery of a community relations/community safety plan. The plan stresses the need for inter-agency working when tackling the issue of sectarianism on an incremental basis and always with community support. A number of local inter-agency partnerships have been set up to co-ordinate their efforts and to strategically target resources on given estates. The plan also includes provision for the removal of graffiti and symbols, by providing assistance to the local community, and for action to be monitored and reported on by April 2001.

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Social Development how many paramilitary murals have been removed by the Housing Executive from public property under its responsibility in each of the last five years.

(AQW 837/99)

**Mr Morrow:** This is a matter for the chief executive of the Housing Executive, who has advised me that murals have been removed as follows:

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
3	0	2	2	0

While the number of sectarian murals removed is small, districts are continually working with community

groups in cleaning up sectarian graffiti on estates. Districts either arrange for graffiti removal through measured term contracts or provide paint and brushes to communities that will do the work themselves. Community endorsement and a desire to remove sectarian graffiti from estates underpin all this ongoing work. No record of this type of activity is maintained.

### **ASSEMBLY COMMISSION**

#### **Assembly Computer Systems**

**Mr Gibson** asked the Assembly Commission if failures have occurred in Assembly computer systems since devolution and to confirm that systems to be installed for the use of Members of the Assembly will be secure.

(AQW 808/99)

**Reply:** The computer systems used by Members within Parliament Buildings are secured against unauthorised use by the application of a number of security countermeasures, which afford varying degrees of protection depending on their adoption by the Members and their staff.

The Assembly's computer network is protected against unauthorised access and use from within and outside the network by a number of sophisticated security systems. These systems also monitor attempted breaches of security. We are aware that there has been one unsuccessful attempt to breach security.

The Member may be interested to know that we are currently implementing a new user accreditation process (using an electronic identification system) and data encryption services which will provide even stronger defence against unauthorised access to information processed, communicated and stored by the Assembly's network.

The computer systems to be supplied to Members for use in constituency offices will be equipped with security systems similar to those employed within Parliament Buildings. They will offer protection of the computer systems and the telecommunication links with the Assembly's network.



# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 1 September 2000

## Written Answers to Questions

### EDUCATION

#### **Irish Language: Department Press Notices**

**Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education to list the media outlets which receive from the Department press notices published in the Irish language and to confirm that, to date, the Department has spent £3,312 on Irish language promotional activities. (AQW 773/99)

**The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):** At present, Irish language versions of departmental press notices are provided, at their request, to the following media outlets: 'The Irish News', RTE, 'The Irish Times', 'La', 'Andersonstown News', Tele Na Gaelige, BBC News.

Should any other media outlet request such press notices in Irish I will arrange for these to be provided?

Since the response to the Member's question on 12 June (AQW 479) a further £552 has been spent on press notices, bringing the total expenditure to £3864.

#### **Standards of Literacy and Numeracy**

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education what action will be taken to improve standards of literacy and numeracy. (AQW 804/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** My Department has developed, with its education partners, a wide-ranging strategy for the promotion of literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools, which is in the second year of its implementation. I have arranged for the Member to receive a copy of the strategy document and for a copy to be placed in the Assembly Library.

#### **Special Schools Programme**

**Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education what plans exist to extend the special schools programme.

(AQW 805/99)

**Mr M McGuinness:** While it is the responsibility of each education and library board to bring forward schemes in respect of special schools in its area, the Department is aware of the accommodation needs of the special-school sector and is taking steps to have Boards accelerate the planning for those schools most urgently in need. These include the nine remaining former special care schools which have still to be replaced.



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